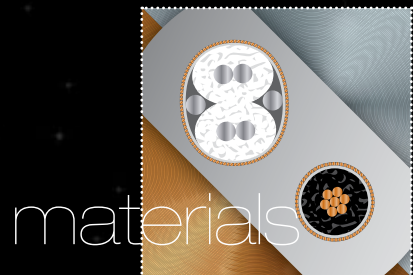


CAUSE & EFFECT



The unique conductor geometry of the patented DNA Helix design creates a more efficient, smoother transfer of energy which sharpens waveform fidelity.



Premium grade conductor materials and custom blended Composites 2 insulation preserve purity of signal by smoothing current flow and minimizing noise.



Each cable is scientifically tested during development against a direct connection, refining design and materials to achieve detail and openness that most closely matches the reference.



“Wireworld has developed a superior USB cable that not only competes with the best USB cables I have heard, but can do some things better than all of the rest. The Platinum Starlight 7 USB 2.0 cable excels at just about every characteristic that audiophiles listen to when sonically judging a USB cable. This is one cable that I strongly recommend computer audiophiles audition when seeking the ultimate USB cable.”

STEVEN PLASKIN | audiostream.com



All Wireworld cables are designed, built and tested to the same exacting standards as our flagship Platinum cables, regardless of price. Guaranteed for life.

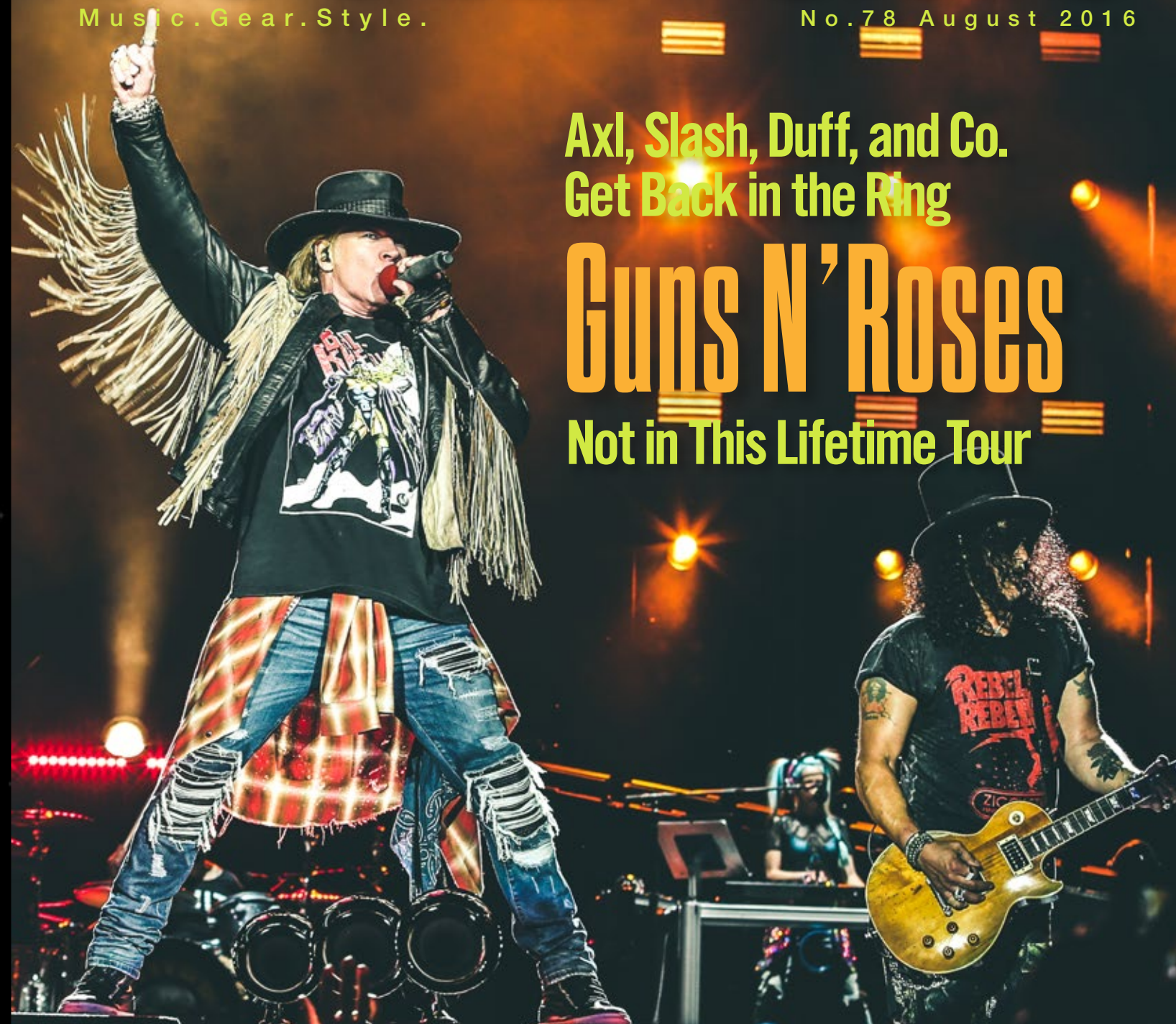
TONEAudio

Music. Gear. Style.

No. 78 August 2016

Axl, Slash, Duff, and Co.
Get Back in the Ring

Guns N' Roses
Not in This Lifetime Tour



Spin the Black Circles: In-Depth Reviews of New LPs from Bat for Lashes, Dinosaur Jr., Neil Young, Steve Gunn, Lucy Dacus, Sarah Jarosz, Colvin & Earle, Jack DeJohnette, Pat Metheny, Brad Mehldau, and More

Who Needs Normalcy? An Interview With the Melvins

Audio Prizes from Audioengine and Quad • **Mini Miracle:** Totem Acoustics Minis

Pure Power: Torus AVR 15 Plus • **Solid-State Spectacular:** Conrad-Johnson CA150SE

Audio Classics Resurrects a Jewel: The Classic 9b Amp • **Pass Labs Redefines Mini Might:** The XA30.8 Amp



Other cables filter your music.
Wireworld cables let the most music through.

Technology that channels musical expression.

© 2016 Wireworld, Inc. DNA Helix U.S. Patent #8,569,627

www.wireworldcable.com

WIREWORLD
CABLE TECHNOLOGY

Engineered for Reality™

Listen to Your Speakers In A New Way

Don't let your existing wired loudspeakers miss out on high-resolution streaming audio. Paradigm's new PW AMP delivers 200-Watts of Ultra Class-D power and lets you wirelessly stream high-resolution audio to existing loudspeakers over your home Wi-Fi network. Set-up is simple, app control is easy, and your options are unlimited. Go wireless, with Paradigm-level performance.

Exclusive **Anthem Room Correction (ARC™)** technology uses a digital microphone with advanced DSP algorithms to correct for room distortions in any space.

You'll actually hear the difference ARC makes.



Wireless Freedom. Paradigm Performance. A Better Audio Experience.

Stream music to any **Paradigm Premium Wireless Series** product using your Android, PC or iOS device. Only Paradigm delivers wireless performance that is truly on par with traditional non-streaming audio systems.

PREMIUM
WIRELESS series



ANTHEM
ARC Room Correction Technology

Paradigm
Visit paradigm.com for more info.

CONTENTS



74

features

- 11. PUBLISHER’S LETTER
- 13. TONE TOON
By Liza Donnelly



108

- 16 Old School:
Recapping the HH Scott 357
By Erik Owen
- 74 Interview: **Todd Martens Talks with the Melvins**
- 82 Journeyman Audiophile:
The Wharfedale Diamond 250 Speakers
By Jeff Dorgay
- 108 Personal Fidelity:
Quad PA-One Headphone Amplifier
By Rob Johnson
Audioengine HD6
By Rob Johnson
- 138 995: **Sounds That Won’t Break The Bank**
A Mini Miracle from Totem Acoustics
By Mark Marcantonio

CONTENTS



96

tone style

- 90 Anker SoundCore Bluetooth Speaker
Satisfy a Musical Craving No Matter Where
- 93 Bald Eagle Skull Shaver LCD
Highly Recommended for Smooth Head Maintenance
- 94 Eunique Jean’ster and Ride’ster Jeans
Cover Your Butt with Armalith
- 95 DJ Pillows
Graphic Pillows with Hifi Personality
- 96 Hot Wheels Yellow Submarine
Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Song
- 98 Muzo Cobblestone
Stream with These for Multi-Zone Wireless Audio
- 101 Star Trek Communicator Net Phone
Great Gifting or Nerd Play



98

CONTENTS



music

14. SNAPSHOT:

Iron Maiden plays to another massive crowd as part of its Book of Souls World Tour

22. LIVE MUSIC:

Guns N' Roses: Not in This Lifetime Tour at Chicago's Soldier Field
by Bob Gendron

36. SPIN THE BLACK CIRCLE:

Reviews of New Pop/Rock and Country Albums *by Chrissie Dickinson, Bob Gendron, Lindsey Havens, and Todd Martens*

102. AUDIOPHILE PRESSINGS:

Adam and the Ants, Joe Jackson, and Carly Simon *by Jeff Dorgay*

122. JAZZ & BLUES:

Jack DeJohnette/Ravi Coltrane/Matthew Garrison, George Coleman, Pat Metheny, Brad Mehldau Trio, and Brooklyn Blowhards *by Jim Macnie and Kevin Whitehead*



53. Sarah Jarosz *Undercurrent*

CONTENTS

gear previews

- 146.** Audio Research PH-9 Phono, DAC9 Digital to Analog Converter and LS-O28 Linestage

gear reviews

- 148.** Audio Classics 9b Amplifier
By Richard H. Mak
- 158.** System Audio Pandion 30 Speakers
By Jeff Dorgay
- 166.** Conrad-Johnson CA150 SE
By Jeff Zaret
- 174.** Torus AVR15 Plus Isolation
By Rob Johnson
- 182.** Pass Labs XA30.8 Stereo Amplifier
By Rob Johnson



182



from the web

- 195.** Larsen 6 Speakers
196. Torus TOT Isolation Transformer
- 198.** Slummin'
200. Music Links
203. Manufacturer Links



WELCOME N°3 TO THE ACCLAIMED SOPRA FAMILY



SOPRA N°1

SOPRA N°2

SOPRA N°3



www.focal.com

USA • Distribution by Audio Plus Services — CANADA • Distribution by Plurison

PUBLISHER'S LETTER

As you may or may not know, I have always rejected measurements as a way to buy hifi gear; it's way too subjective and taste oriented for me. I've read all the other magazines that hang their hats on measurements for years, and have never been able to find a universal measurement for good sound or tonality. Yes, we can measure distortion, wow & flutter, jitter and the like, but what about the gear that sounds great but measures awful? Think almost every single ended triode amplifier you've ever heard and go from there.

Not being an engineer or product designer who builds gear that goes to market on a daily, I question the measurement thing by the armchair engineer crowd because I don't feel they even know what to do with the data. Nor do I for that matter. As my web guy Nate said the other day, "That's why I don't work on my own car anymore." I watch friends struggle with torque wrenches and the sliders in Photoshop with equal surprise. I'm certainly all for anyone having a hobby, but oftentimes working out of your league, like I do when convinced that I can do that brake job or tile the bathroom; I get your enthusiasm. And I do understand the feeling of a job that you know you've done with your own hands – that's totally cool and does appeal to my inner caveman.

However, I am introducing a new measurement to all *TONEAudio* reviews effective immediately:



Enjoyment Per Hour. I've applied for a trademark, so don't try stealing it. Much as I'd like to take credit for this bit of genius, I can't. I tip my hat to Peter Soderberg of MartinLogan. He mentioned how he used it in his retail days, when trying to convince a potential customer what a great investment audio was compared to other things. I couldn't agree with his logic more. There are so many things all of us enjoy and it's your personal decision whether any of this stuff makes sense, because it's your money after all.

Having just moved into smaller quarters, everything in my life is in question right now, and I'm trying to live a bit more Japanese, if you will. Everything nonessential, or at least not being used on a regular, is going. Cars, cameras, that big pile of vintage receivers and *all* those tape decks are out of here now. I want to dramatically increase the EPH on the stuff I really love.

I know that so many of you are crunched for time these days, so I hope that *TONE* provides you with a bit of EPH too. I can't thank you enough for reading. Drop me a note at jeff@tonepublications.com and tell me what you think of this concept. I'd love to hear your thoughts.

PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay

MUSIC EDITOR Bob Gendron
GEAR/WEB EDITOR Ellen Green

ART DIRECTOR Jean LaCrosse

MEDIA SUPPORT Terry Currier
Tom Caselli

RESEARCH Earl Blanton
Ken Mercereau

AUDIO HISTORIAN Ken Kessler

SENIOR Jaan Uhelszki
CONTRIBUTOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Bailey S. Barnard
Aaron Cohen
John Darko
Paul DeMara
Lawrence Devoe
Chrissie Dickinson
Andrea Domanick
Andy Downing
Rob Johnson
Jim Macnie
Richard Mak
Andre Marc
Mark Marcantonio
Todd Martens
Monique Meadows
Jerold O'Brien
Kevin Whitehead
Annie Zalewski
Jeff Zaret

CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

WEBSITE bloodymonster.com

Editor Questions and
Comments:
tonepub@yahoo.com

©2016 TONE AUDIO MAGAZINE
All rights reserved.

Follow us on Facebook.

(You never know what we'll get into next.)



www.facebook.com/tonepub2



"Have you tried avoiding audio forums?"

Bruce Dickinson, Steve Harris, and the lads in Iron Maiden play to another massive crowd as part of the band's Book of Souls World Tour. Since February, the English group has performed before more than 1.5 million fans and touched down in 36 countries across six continents. Up the irons!



FEATURE



FEATURE

Recapping the HH Scott 357

By Erik Owen

Publisher's Intro: As many of our readers know, I'm a big lover of vintage hifi and I've dedicated the past 11 years to finding cool vintage gear to report on. I'm passing the torch to my friend Erik Owen, proprietor of Gig Harbor Audio in Gig Harbor, Washington, about 100 miles north of the TONE office. Their shop offers a great mix of new gear, gently used gear and stellar vintage gear.

But the real key to buying vintage audio gear is having a great tech to keep it up and running properly, which Erik also has. They've done a couple of units for me and the work has been beyond reproach. Best of all, they've got a steady stream of great gear always at their disposal, so Erik is going to be writing this column going forward. Readers, meet Erik!

There is an old Russian saying that drinking beer without vodka is like throwing your money to the wind. When it comes to restoring vintage hifi, this translates as: *make sure your unit is in great cosmetic shape before investing in a bunch of new capacitors*. Replacing caps and transistors are as important as enjoying a tall crisp beer after a hard day of work, but if the tuner glass is cracked, your good intentions and cash are about to fly out the window.



Last month our friend Mike rolled into Gig Harbor Audio carrying a bubble wrapped HH Scott 357 solid state receiver. This receiver was a great example of a unit in excellent cosmetic shape, like it had just been removed from Don Draper's Manhattan office. Mike's father had played it gently for over 25 years until moving it to storage in a dry, clean box for another 2 decades.

The HH Scott 357 is a compact, smart-looking receiver with an FM display that turns from green to warm red when the station locks in! Unlike the rat's nest of wires hiding in an earlier HH Scott 222 tube integrated, the 357 is a neat and tidy 25 watt per channel receiver with a punch. Mike was willing to sink in some cash to get it sounding close to what it did when his dad purchased it in 1971. This unit was special because Mike had spent his wonder years enjoying it with

his dad, and since it was in great cosmetic shape, he could probably get his money out of it if he had to. Now he can pour a couple of icy shots of Grey Goose.

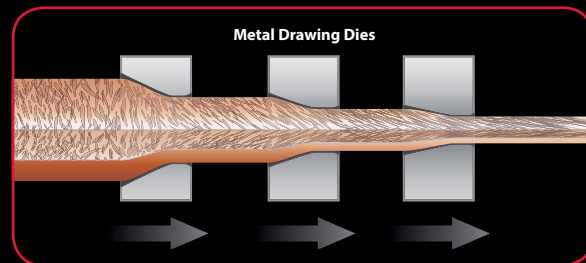
Restored, this mini powerhouse came in at \$275 and with all new caps. Our goal with re-capping is to get as close as possible to what something sounded like when it first came out *within reason*. We don't hot rod units but instead restore them as best we can to deliver happiness. On this 357 we overhauled the power supply and changed all power supply caps, recapped the tone board and tuner using Nichicon capacitors, re-lamped and cleaned the display, and cleaned all controls and switches with contact cleaner and *DeOx-It*.

Before giving a unit back to a customer we break it in for at least 4 or 5 days. There are parts in a restored unit, like Mike's 357, that

were *not* replaced because we considered them still good. These parts have not experienced a signal passing through them for 25 years and need to get a thorough stress test. Plus the new parts need to break in. Imagine a pair of shoes. They aren't comfy until they contour to one's feet over 1 to 2 weeks. Capacitors, speaker drivers, and even turntable cartridges are the same. They break in over periods of months, even years.

This brings up some of the choices of a tech. Recap every single section in the unit? What if the phonostage still sounds quite nice and strong? If you recap it you might gain 20 more years of play, but you'll lose the benefit of break-in courtesy of 25 years of Mantovani and Martin Denny LPs. We shoot for the best bang for the buck to enjoy a unit again. *(continued)*

Directionality: It's All About Noise



If you've ever wondered about the arrows on AudioQuest cables, read any of our educational materials, or merely followed any of the online chatter regarding our products, perhaps you've wondered what this "directionality" thing is all about. Maybe you've even made the incorrect assumption that it's the analog or digital signal that's directional.

There is the widely accepted version of directionality: In most audio-grade shielded interconnects, as compared to standard coax, negative has its own internal conductor and the metal shield is attached to ground at only one end, thus defining the cable's directionality. Many cable manufacturers end their exploration of directionality there, going only as far as to mark their cables for directionality based on the relationship of shield to ground, but altogether neglecting conductor directionality. Because we believe in directing noise to where it can do the least harm, we, too, believe in the advantages of controlling for the attachment of the shield. In fact, long before we controlled for conductor directionality, AudioQuest interconnects were also controlled for direction based on the relationship of shield to ground.

Over the years, our understanding of conductor directionality and its effect on audio performance has steadily evolved, growing stronger and more complete. While we've always been keenly aware that directionality plays a significant role in the overall sound of any hi-fi system, we couldn't completely explain it. This was okay: We trust our own ears and encourage listeners to do the same. The test is easy enough: Simply listen, then reverse the direction of the cable, and listen again.

In one direction, music will sound relatively flat and a little grainy, as though being forced through a screen door. In the opposite direction, the obstruction is removed and music will be communicated with a natural ease, depth, and an open invitation to pleasure. When presented with a cable whose conductors have been controlled for the correct low-noise directionality, a listener feels a sense of comfort and relief: *Ahh...Music!*

But the definitive empirical evidence of directionality demands seeking a scientific explanation. What is the *technical* explanation for directionality?

In order to fabricate copper or silver into a strand or conductor, it must first be cast and then drawn through a die—a process

that inevitably creates a directional, chevron-like pattern in the conductor's internal grain structure and a non-symmetrical overlay of grains at the conductor's surface.

While most are either unaware of conductor directionality or have chosen to ignore it, we have learned to use conductor directionality to our advantage.

A conductor's asymmetrical surface structure causes a directional difference in impedance at noise frequencies and very high interference frequencies. Due to skin-effect, such high-frequency energy travels almost exclusively on the surface of a conductor, giving significance to the directional difference in impedance at these frequencies. Because all energy will *always* take the path of least resistance, when a cable is oriented so that the high-frequency noise—whether from a computer, radio station, cell tower, etc.—is "directed" to ground, or to the end of the cable attached to less vulnerable equipment, the dynamic intermodulation and associated ringing generated in the active electronics will be greatly reduced.



Noise-Dissipation System, Dielectric-Bias System, JitterBug USB filter, Niagara 1000, and Niagara 7000—all work toward the proper dissipation of noise to enable cleaner, clearer, more naturally beautiful music.

Our efforts toward the proper dissipation of noise are not limited to our analog and digital cables, but extend to other AudioQuest products, as well—most recently evidenced in our Niagara 1000 and 7000 Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation Systems, in which every single link in the conducting path has been properly controlled for low-noise directionality.

As always, the proof is in the listening.

The unpleasant, strained sound that occurs when conductors have the wrong orientation is the result of noise entering and causing misbehavior and intermodulation in an active circuit. The more relaxed, full-bodied sound of correctly oriented conductors is the product of less high-frequency interference—conductor directionality fully acknowledged and put to its best use!

Ahh...Music!

audioquest

FEATURE



This success story of Mike's HH Scott 357 is in contrast to the many people who bring in similar units and ask why they should pay \$275 to restore a receiver that they picked up at a thrift shop for 25 bucks. Great question. If the unit holds no sentimental value of evenings with Mom and Dad, then the receiver might just not be *that into you*. A good tech will lay out what you're getting into. And a good tech will dissuade you from dropping a chunk of change into a unit that will be hard to resell. The *best* tech will try his or her utmost to give you the context of a piece no matter what you paid for it and hopefully help you understand and give the proper respect to a piece of audio history no matter what shape it is in. Amplifiers and receivers found on the shelves of thrift stores, relatives' attics, and estate sales

are pieces of art, and before the world of 24-hour Twitter feeds, FM tuners were portals from the outside world into a family's living room.

This Scott 357 receiver now resides safely at Mike's home. His Acoustic Research EB-101 turntable is plugged into the moving magnet phono input. Simple tinned speaker wire goes from the receiver to his Klipsch 1.5 speakers which are actually on a bookshelf between Hemingway and Salinger. He uses the warm metal knob to go between Mozart on 98.1 FM and the new Denon DL110 stylus hovering above his turntable platter. A simple, stylish setup that allows Patsy Cline to come to life. Now he can pour whatever drink he pleases, even if it is just a nice cup of Earl Grey. ●

Guns N' Roses

July 1 and 3, 2016
Soldier Field
Chicago, Illinois

By Bob Gendron



A concert shirt sold at merchandise booths inside Chicago's Soldier Field immediately signaled Guns N' Roses' first tour in 23 years with original members Axl Rose, Slash, and Duff McKagan wouldn't be a facsimile of its record-setting-long trek in the early 90s. With "NOT IN THIS LIFETIME MTHRFKR!" emblazoned on the back, the souvenir channeled a similar design available during the group's 1991-1993 Get in the Ring excursion—a shirt that printed the vulgarity out in uncensored fashion. The (slightly) more political correct offering wasn't the only aspect around the band reflecting change.





More than two decades have passed since everyone but Rose and keyboardist Dizzy Reed departed peak-era Guns N' Roses for one reason or another. The stretch witnessed the continually reconfigured ensemble release just one studio album, a Rose-led cast chew through rotating lineups loaded with hired hands, and unsubstantiated rumors supply enough fodder to fill several books. Earlier this year, the core of the group responsible for its greatest successes and juiciest controversies set aside its acrimonious feelings and reunited without making any promises of recording together. Nobody can truly say they saw the moment coming.

Guns N' Roses began promptly at 9:15 p.m. both evenings at Soldier Field, putting to rest punctuality problems for which they became infamous. In good spirits, Rose demonstrated the good behavior he's embraced for a majority of the last decade. No rants, no soapbox commentaries, no diva-like episodes. Presumably free of chemical dependencies and the distractions they breed, the group performed with a tightness, focus, and power that occasionally eluded it during its heyday. Credit for the streamlined sonic heft, too, goes to the pared-down lineup, free of the background singers and multi-instrumentalists onboard in 1992-1993. And while the stadium-tailored spectacle—concussion bombs, flames, fireworks, and fancy lighting acted in harmony with a multi-tiered stage—largely prohibited variations to the setlist, the professionalism spurred a sharper attack and fed into a fluid organization that prevented the 2-hour, 40-minute performances from suffering any prolonged drag. *(continued)*



CELEBRATING
25
YEARS

OF AMERICAN INNOVATION

NORDOST
EST. 1991

NORDOST
MAKING THE CONNECTION

Not that Guns N' Roses didn't entertain arena-size inhibitions. Even as he kept a flannel shirt tied around his waist, Rose swapped out graphic t-shirts, leather jackets, bandanas, and wide-brim hats with regularity. Necklaces appointed with diamond-encrusted crucifixes, massive bejeweled rings on Rose's fingers, and high-end watches served as additional reminders that the septet long ago shed its street-bred roots for high-roller glitz. Musically, a handful of instrumentals and covers, including a version of Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here," emphasized the scope of the undertaking and indulged in healthy 70s-era excess.

No wonder Rose issued a snarky comment on the second night, informing the crowd it

was witnessing a lost art known as guitar-driven rock. Guns N' Roses doesn't really fit into today's niche-targeted, on-demand music scene. While it matters not, and might actually work in their favor, the chasm is nonetheless the result of Rose, Slash, and McKagan spending so long apart.

As much as the lure of big money usually alleviates bitterness, the hurt and afflictions plaguing Guns N' Roses ran deeper than most. Rose and company ignored lucrative prior offers to get back together. The singer even skipped the collective's induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in April 2012. His absence simultaneously dashed hopes the event would lead to a long-anticipated reunion

and upped the when-hell-freezes-over quotient of any possible truce. A month later, when asked about ever reconciling with Slash and other former mates, Rose bluntly stated, "Not in this lifetime," unknowingly giving birth to the name of the current tour.

Forever enigmatic and frequently mercurial, Rose takes to heart the messages celebrated in Frank Sinatra's "My Way" more seriously than any superstar in rock history. Subject to constant barbs, Rose has been assailed for everything from his weight to his allegedly fading range. Adding to the drama, at Guns N' Roses' first show with the reunited lineup in April, he suffered a leg injury that forced him to play Coachella and a few other shows seated in a throne. *(continued)*





But to the surprise of many, the 54-year-old sounded renewed and strong on the initial dates. He also became the frontman for AC/DC after hearing issues sidelined Brian Johnson, a role that further revitalized his passion and sharpened his skills. In the only interview Rose granted since Guns N' Roses' "reformation," he admitted returning to his vocal coach for the first time in 20 years.

The Indiana native isn't the only participant that seems to be using the venture as an opportunity to prove naysayers wrong. In fighting shape, bassist McKagan, grotesquely swollen from alcohol and drug addiction during his first tenure with the band, has transformed into a lean mass of sinewy tissue and chiseled muscle. Slash, no longer smoking or burning himself with ashes that once fell from cigarettes wedged in the necks of his guitars, looks as if he spent considerable hours bulking up at the gym. Guns N' Roses a picture of fitness? Again, 1991 this ain't.

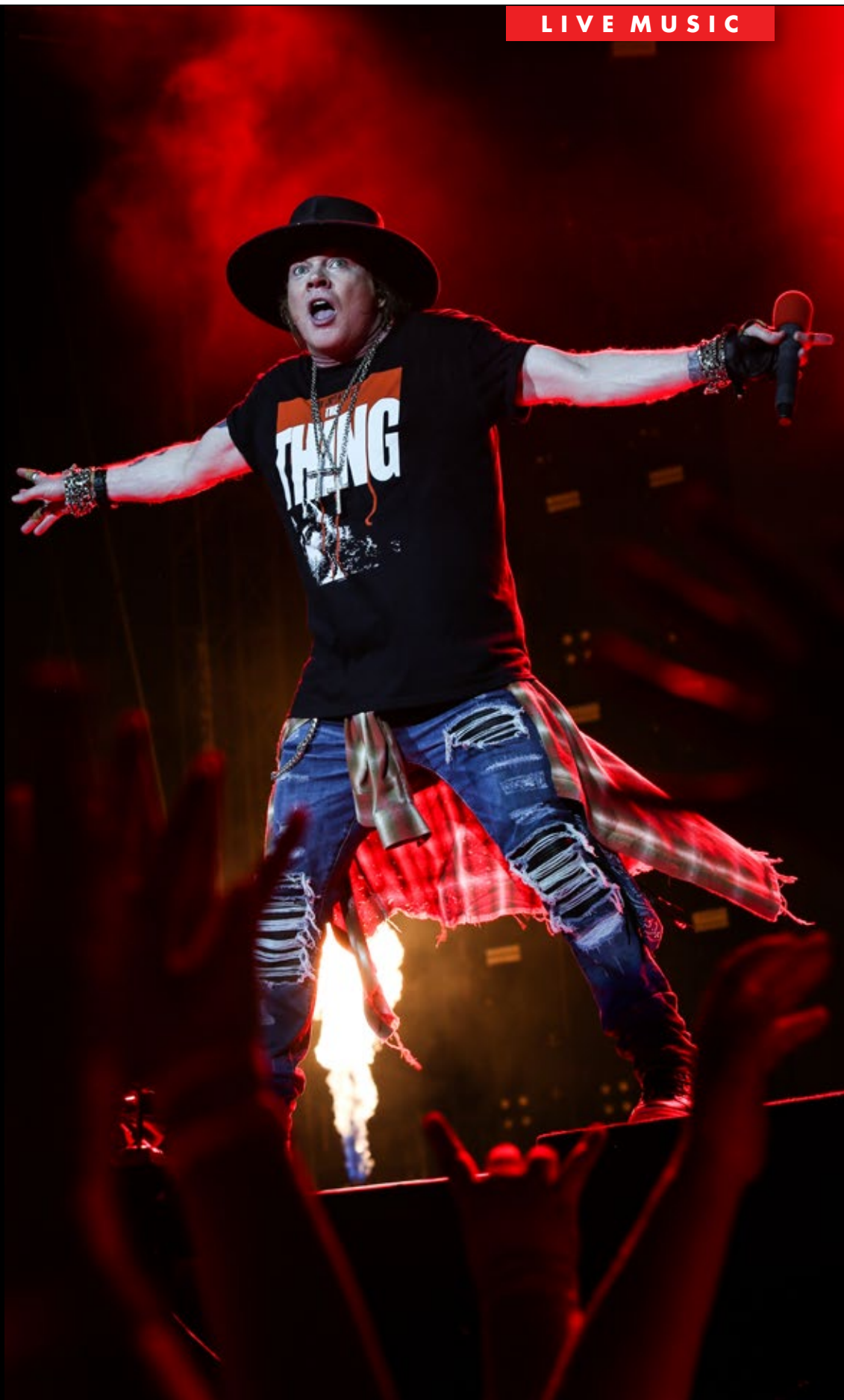
The remainder of the band—rounded out by a new addition, keyboardist Melissa Reese, and Reed, who along with drummer Frank Ferrer and guitarist Richard Fortus, transfers over from Rose's previous incarnation of the group—provides further notice that time travel remains impossible. Two of the faces sketched on the iconic *Appetite for Destruction* cross aren't involved in any full-time capacity.



Original, reclusive rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin allegedly chose to sit on the sidelines. Drummer Steven Adler, fired for substance abuse issues in 1990, and his replacement, Matt Sorum, lost out to the more versatile Ferrer.

Also missing in action in Chicago? The anything-can-happen spontaneity, riot-sparking mayhem, and hyper, walls-closing-in dangerousness of early 90s Guns N' Roses shows that on the most explosive nights resulted in against-all-odds triumphs and, on lesser occasions—as when the band cut a concert short or allowed anger to dictate the outcome—led to dire consequences and mass disappointment. (Full disclosure: I still have a Ticketmaster receipt for my third-row tickets to the July 4, 1991 show scrapped after the St. Louis melee erupted two nights before. Ditto a pair of tickets to an April 10, 1992 date at Rosemont Horizon, axed after the first show of the two-night stand as Rose fled the country that morning to avoid an arrest warrant.) Sentimentality for past glories and myths aside, the way the band played and the energy it produced transcended mere nostalgia.

Doubts as to whether Guns N' Roses could summon up long-dormant chemistry and resurrect the menacing snarl were soothed before the show-opening brashness of "It's So Easy" even finished. *(continued)*





Adorned in his signature top hat, with the outlines of his face concealed by a smear of curly hair and pilot sunglasses, Slash brought a natural looseness, soulfulness, and depth none of his replacements managed to fully replicate. He cooed songs in mammoth tones that seemed to carry for miles, balanced sensual smoothness with bluesy grit, and bundled an agitator's rebellious edge with the authoritative command of a strict disciplinarian.

With McKagan and Ferrer supplying double-barreled rhythms, Slash shredded during the first half of "Double Talking Jive" before upping the pace, mashing together arpeggios with hurricane-flurry urgency, and finishing with a romantic Spanish-styled coda. The 51-year-old underlined the serpentine movements of "Mr. Brownstone" with slouch-and-swagger grooves and enhanced the cheap, sleazy grind of "Rocket Queen" with talk-box innuendo that wouldn't have been out of place in a low-rent strip club. Slash even improved three songs from "Chinese Democracy" on which he didn't play in the studio, bestowing the title track with strident acidity and shaping the balladic "This I Love" with sleeker contours.

Despite all the bad blood between he and Slash, Rose appeared to draw inspiration from having his old right-hand man back at his side. He pranced, marched, and kicked about the stage with assertive confidence and often sang with piercing intensity. The vocalist also still hit most of the mountain-peak-scraping highs. *(continued)*

Studio quality for your living room



VOLTAIR
120V DC Audio Rail

DIRECTOR — DA Converter and Preamplifier

PHONITOR X — Headphone and Preamplifier

PHONITOR E — Headphone Amplifier

PHONOS — RIAA Phono Preamplifier

PERFORMER S800 — Stereo Power Amplifier

Professional Fidelity

Sound Performance Lab (SPL) has been designing and manufacturing professional audio equipment in Germany for more than 30 years for some of the world's top studios.

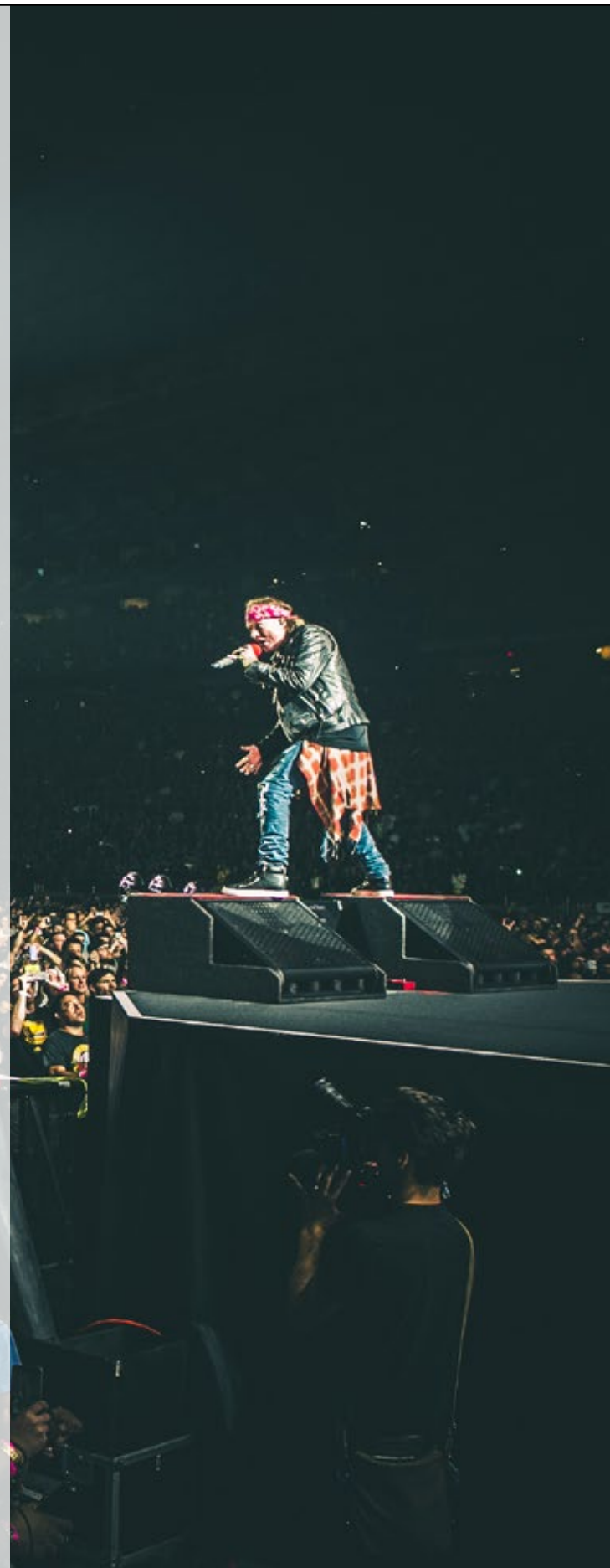


PRO-FI SERIES

USA • Distribution by Audio Plus Services — CANADA • Distribution by Plurison

He adjusted his pitch for “Don’t Cry,” and the rasp remains, albeit in slightly diminished form, and it’s now kept reserve for moments calling for maximum impact. The only obvious loss pertains to Rose’s ability to hold notes for an eternity. It’s not a question of his range, but his expanse. On a ferocious “Welcome to the Jungle,” the singer nailed the staccato rat-a-tat-tat deliveries of the chorus. For larynx-demanding turns, be they the protracted air-raid yowls punctuating “Live and Let Die” or body-bent-backward wails steering a vigorous “Night-rain,” he emitted lacerating shrieks that belied his age.

Physically, Rose’s line-backer-thick girth rearranged the slender slither of his snake-like dance moves into shuffling patterns. The era of spotting the singer running around in nothing else than revealing exercise shorts has definitely passed. But to claim he’s fat or unfit would be highly inaccurate. For starters, Rose found the endurance to make it through both concerts without ever sounding winded. And he still scampers around as if trying to dodge an enemy’s bullets. Whether effortlessly tossing the microphone between hands, standing legs-splayed atop of two monitors positioned at the center of the stage, twirling the micro-

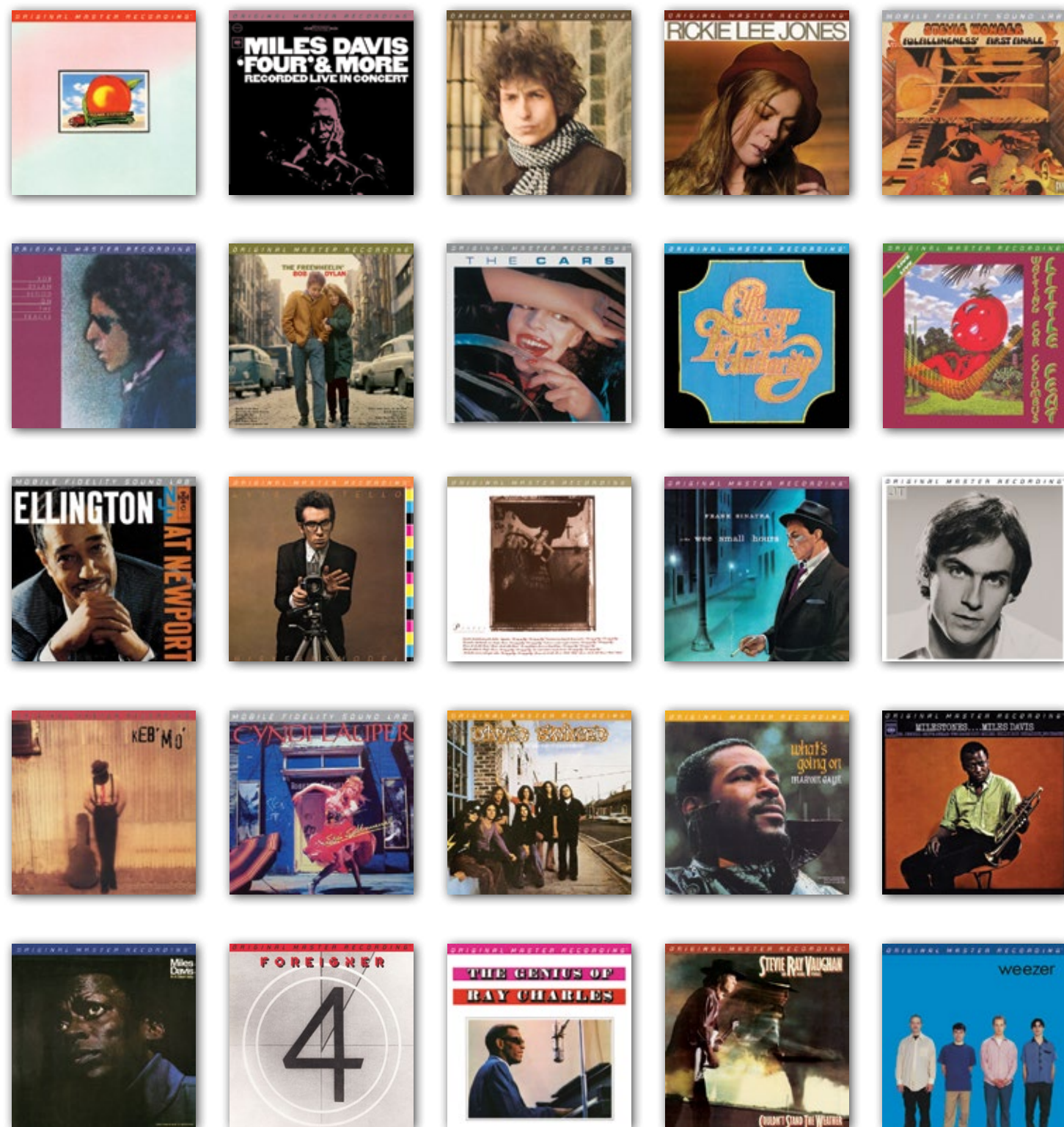


phone stand with the cool panache of an untouchable hustler, or complementing the lyrics with evocative hand gestures, Rose held court with a combination of adrenaline-stoked bravado and sincere gratitude. At 54, he remains the kid in the back of class you love because his antics lead to fun, interesting situations—as well as the kid you know not to mess with for fear of retribution. His curious, ornery grins and sinister sneers intimidated as much.

Guns N’ Roses’ billboard-size personalities, shared trauma, dynamic contrasts sensitivity/toughness contrasts, and delicate trigger-finger rapport fueled the paranoid fury of songs like “Out Ta Get Me” as well as the vitriolic spite of “You Could Be Mine,” which Rose sang as if his words doubled as freshly whetted daggers. McKagan, his bass sporting a Prince symbol, laid the foundations for the build-and-release climaxes of “Sweet Child O’ Mine.” Along with his trademark “Speak Softly, Love” solo from *The Godfather*, the anthem vividly illustrated Slash’s inimitable blend of nimbleness, brawn, creaminess, and rawness. Just as majestic, a rendition of “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door” expressed poignant spirituality in line with Bob Dylan’s foreboding narrative. *(continued)*

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

www.mofi.com



For all the familiar hits and favorites, including an aptly grand “November Rain” presaged with the instrumental conclusion of Derek and the Dominos’ “Layla,” Guns N’ Roses’ choice to play three of its most ambitious epics from their twin *Use Your Illusion* albums spoke in uniformly loud volumes. Addressing alienation (“Estranged”), conflict (“Civil War”), and psychological struggle (“Coma”) with equal parts tension, risk, and intelligence, the emotionally potent songs took on new meaning in light of the band’s contentious past and reunited present. In several regards,

the diverse tunes functioned as subtle commentary on Guns N’ Roses’ history together.

“Oh won’t you please take me home,” Rose cried during the set-closing “Paradise City,” seeking blissful sanctuary while stuffing yearning, apprehension, and hope into a densely packed cluster bomb that burst into euphoric catharsis during the final minutes. Whether the jubilation continues beyond the tour remains anyone’s guess. But with the performances much more than a wished-for illusion, it would seem a shame for Guns N’ Roses not to try. ●

NEW RELEASES

**Bat for Lashes***The Bride*

Warner Bros., 2LP or CD

The first song on *The Bride* is named “I Do.” The tone, however, is more “till death do us part.” Happily-ever-after fairy tales turn to tragedy on *The Bride*, Natasha Khan’s latest work under the Bat for Lashes moniker. “I’ve waited my whole life for this night,” she sings four songs into the dreamy albeit gothic effort, her dusky, smoky vibes making it clear that what lies ahead is no rom-com. Her voice slightly quivers as she delivers the line, channeling the mixture of excitement and anxiety that accompanies a bride-to-be. It creates a sensation that’s equal parts tender embrace and deadeye stare. The combination keeps the listener on edge. Is she angelic or icy? All the aforementioned emotional conditions apply to *The Bride*, where a wedding leads to new beginnings. Only here, the journey doesn’t apply to a life together but instead concerns lessons on love, solitude, and desire.

The Bride, Khan has described, is something of a soundtrack to a film that does not yet exist. The tale: A bride, on her wedding day, gets left at the altar after her fiancé perishes in a car accident. Without her lover, she opts to go on the honeymoon alone.



©Photo by Eliot Lee Hazel

On the surface, Khan has crafted a dreary, minimalistic character study. Violins creak like door hinges in the wind, ghostly laments unfold on pianos, and nervous, synthetic beats skitter like a racing heart. Fun stuff? Maybe not, but *The Bride* is powerful—a lights-down-low road album about the path to self-discovery. Khan’s first album in four years, it also stands as her most focused, intermixing the fantastical theatricality of her early works with the piercing rawness of her more recent compositions.

Rather than center on the heartbreak, Khan asks ques-

tions about what it means to love, what it means to lose, and if a storybook ending is even a possibility—or should be. “I don’t want to waste my time putting on dresses and drinking wine,” she sings amid starlight strings and spacious handclaps on “In Your Bed.” Who needs love, it seems to say, when we have tonight? Like this year’s *Savages Adore Life* album, Khan has crafted a set that centers on guilt and passion. In contrast to the former record’s clenched-fist approach, Khan aims for something more spiritual and otherworldly.

The chirpiness of “I Do”

feels built around the plucking of a forest harp. It’s as beautiful and naïve as the opening of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.” At the other extreme, the soft pulse of “Joe’s Dream” burns beneath a stark bluesy guitar, its view of love more damning. Songs contradict, as Khan seems to grapple with the idea of hopeless romanticism in our cynical times. While “Honeymooning Alone” could probably do without the car-crash sounds in its opening moments, the song’s stutter-stop rhythm brings it into “Twin Peaks” territory while a backing choir passes judgment first and harmonizes second. *(continued)*

MUSIC

"I'll always be the girl who was denied," Khan sings. She sounds at peace as she comes to terms with her forced independence, and she approaches the track's openness as if embracing a lushly orchestrated ballad.

As the highest-energy moment on the record, "Sunday Love" lightly toys with electronics and races around Khan's falsetto. It's the sound of dance-floor lights spinning wildly. Thematically, the tense song grapples with feelings of lust in times of disaster. A lonesome Western tone permeates "Never Forgive the Angels" and then Khan sings "Close Encounters" as if it was a church hymn. Things briefly become drastically dark on "Widow's Peak," a work of tortured demonic folk on which Khan exorcizes pain and regains control. The bride has transformed. "You're my blood, you're my wine," she sing-speaks to an assumed lover. But is freedom attained? The calming bass-driven melody of "I Will Love Again" hints as much. Only there's no idealism. Love instead is framed a choice.

So no, *The Bride* isn't a fairy tale. It's a cautionary narrative about the joys of falling in love, and it lets a question linger: Are you ready for something potentially terrifying?

—**Todd Martens**

©Photo by Eliot Lee Hazel



The new 800 Series Diamond didn't get better by chance. It got better by change. 868 changes to be precise.

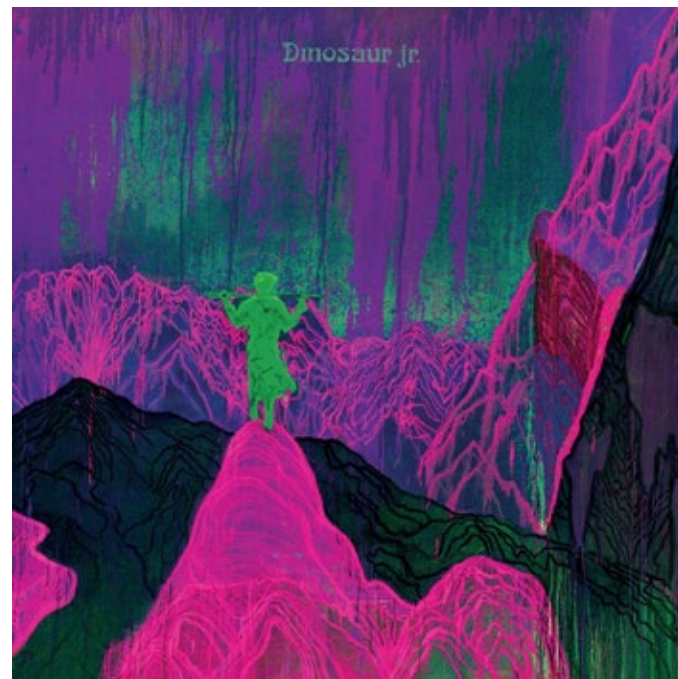
Bowers & Wilkins

bowers-wilkins.com



W

ith the release of *Give a Glimpse of What Yer Not*, Dinosaur Jr.'s original lineup is now responsible for more music since its 2005 reformation than during its original 1984-1989 tenure. While leader J. Mascis went on to craft four more albums during the 1990s under the Dinosaur Jr. moniker before pulling the plug, the significance and irony of the band's second act cannot be underestimated during an era in which most of its reunited peers—ranging from the Pixies to Jane's Addiction—coast on nostalgia, devoting a majority of time to touring and little, if any, to new albums.



Dinosaur Jr.

Give a Glimpse of What Yer Not
Jagjaguwar, LP or CD

Regularly labeled slackers by critics and fans, Dinosaur Jr. has since proven its anything but creative loafers. The group's latest powder keg of a record arrives as the latest evidence in a series of post-reunion releases that includes 2007's *Beyond*, 2009's *Farm*, and 2012's *I Bet on Sky*—records that not only justify the ensemble's decision to get back together, but also attest to its vitality. Particularly when the current state of guitar rock is considered. Their status as senior emissaries aside, Mascis and his mates still make the style feel distinctive and dynamic, an eclectic link between classic rock, mid-period punk, and haphazard indie.

Akin to the trio of albums that precede it, *Give a Glimpse of What Yer Not* values songwriting and chemistry. Mascis, bassist/vocalist Lou Barlow, and drummer Murph establish a cohesiveness that reflects in the performances. Songs benefit from openness and interplay. There's a sense that every sound on the record belongs to the band, and not just an individual. Mascis' high-decibel, tree-limb-downing solos command plenty of attention but don't stand alone or apart from the overall mix.



©Photo by Levi Walton

Such codependency and trust are still relatively new concepts for Dinosaur Jr. They also account for why a majority of tunes here come across not as attempts to recreate the past, but as music that builds on established sonic traits and expands outward.

As expected, Mascis' guitar work doubles as the equivalent of a wide-mouth river that cuts across canyons, zips through valleys, careens down mountainsides, and empties out into vast bodies of water. Hovering close to the pocket, he never loses control, even when unfurling fuzz-laden psychedelic runs or heaping thick, sludge-coated distortion atop pop-based melodies—the likes of which cause the catchy, liberating, hook-enriched “Tiny” to take up residence in listeners' heads and stay for hours on end.

Mascis' signature crunch blends with sitar-like effects on the coda of “Goin Down,” the combination opening the album with a magnetic edge that goes hand-in-glove with the invitational “are you with me?” refrain. On the ambling “Good to Know,” he resurrects the Neanderthal metal stomp of his side project, Witch, and tempers the heaviness with an extended nasal phrasing and staggered chords. Black-hole-bound wah-wah effects mesh with quick, chopping riffs and ripcord fills on “Good to Know,” during which it seems a dozen different patterns unfold behind the scenes. The latter is a credit to Mascis' multi-faceted abilities as well as Barlow and Murph, who shape solid rhythmic foundations and etch their own signatures into songs.

mu-sic mil-len-ni-um

a place where the music & people still matter



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



One of America's Best Record Stores

www.musicmillennium.com

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

MUSIC

©Photo by Levi Walton



A false ending on the jangling “I Told Everyone” doubles as a trap door leading to a cellar, Dinosaur Jr. pulling everyone in a different direction when they least expect it. Barlow’s distinct low-end notes on “Mirror” hold everything together and generate a taffy-pull groove. For “Be a Part,” the group employs restraint, highlighting gauzy tones and analog synthesizer lines central to maintaining a contemplative vibe. “Love Is...,” one of two tracks on which Barlow assumes lead vocal duties, could pass as a lost 5th Dimension outtake from the late 1960s. Its folksy thrum, country-feedback midsection, and forgiveness themes point to a

maturity and depth unimaginable on early Dinosaur Jr. albums. “Knocked Around” engages with similar intricacy. After initially wobbling about to Mascis’ shaky falsetto and brushed chords, the tempo and narration shift, with the band pounding, rattling, and shaking floorboards via a rugged spree that recalls the noisy charge of its early SST albums.

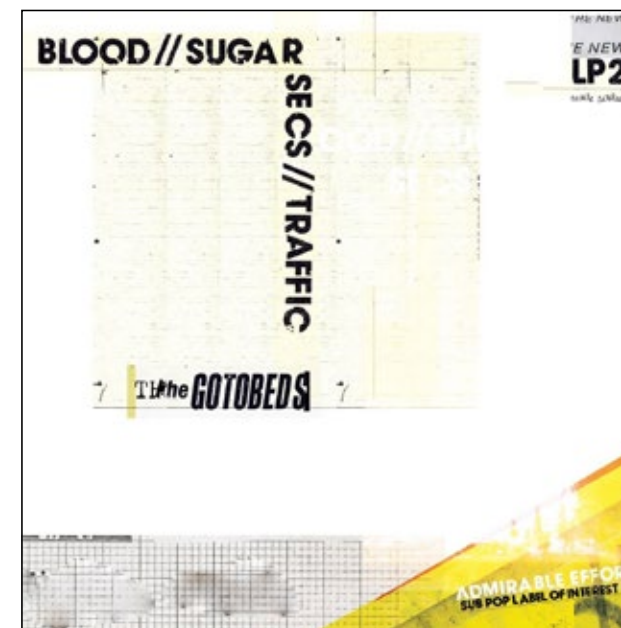
“I got more to say,” Mascis drawls early on the album, the truthful declaration less of a protest and more a state-of-the-union address from a trio making a case for the best second-act run of its generation. —**Bob Gendron**



©Photo by Shawn Brackbill

P

ractitioners of pop music in 2016 largely all play nice with one another. The ascension of destination festivals—the Coachellas, Lollapaloozas, and Bonnaroods of the world—has broken down genre walls. Acts that were once polar opposites—with punk, indie, and alternative on one side, and mainstream, chart-toppers, and bubblegum on the other—now share bills. Today, Guns N’ Roses, Rancid, and Calvin Harris can all appear on the same poster, like dogs, cats, and birds living harmoniously in a single home. Pittsburgh’s Gotobeds, however, don’t seem keen on joining the we’re-all-happy-together vibe. Choppy, abrasive, and sarcastic, they recall an era when punk rock zines like *Maximum Rockroll* weren’t simply reading material but a way of life.



The Gotobeds

Blood // Sugar // Secs // Traffic
Sub Pop, LP or CD

“Commercial bands make songs for commercial use,” singer-guitarist Eli Kasan snarls amid the stop-and-start stomp of “Crisis Time,” a song that slams Taylor Swift, praises feminist music writers, and briefly references the Clash’s “White Man (In Hammer-smith Palais).” Guitars run in multiple directions—imagine the sound of emergency-vehicle sirens blaring from every path of traffic—and rhythms are borderline militaristic. All of it coalesces into a formidable, locked-in melody near song’s end before dissolving again.

The track even takes swipes at indie fans. Indeed, the Gotobeds don’t appear too interested in making friends. Further evidence of the confrontational approach: The band goes by such monikers as “Hazy” and “Depressed Adult Male” in the album credits. But anger can be power, and if one doesn’t mind some out-of-date jabs at mass media

like *Rolling Stone*, the Gotobeds show there’s plenty of fury left in the guitar-bass-drums formula, especially in the guitars of Kasan and Tom Payne.

Wiry, serrated, and distorted, the two instruments engage in call-and-response taunting on “Real Maths / Too Much” while a kiss-off becomes celebratory on “Bodies,” on which a high-pitched solo counters Kasan’s snarl. The latter stands as the most melodic work on the record, yet for the most part, the Gotobeds opt for constrained recklessness over hooks. Reference points sit comfortably in the late 70s and early 80s. Post-punk bands like Wire, whose drummer Robert “Gotobed” Grey inspired the group’s name, stand as ground zero for the quartet. And even as the band remains at the ready to take swings at others, new ground isn’t the priority as much as genre mastery.

On this, the band’s debut for Seattle indie Sub Pop, there’s also some kinship with more contemporary rock acts such as Protomartyr, an aggressive Detroit outfit with a gloomier worldview. Protomartyr’s gruff-voiced singer Joe Casey even guests on “Why’d You?” “Style isn’t style if what you’re buying is style,” Kasan barks on the track, on which the vocalists circle around each other and drummer Cary Belback keeps the momentum moving forward. Things slow down on “Red Alphabet,” letting Gavin Jensen’s predatory bass build the tension, and “Glass House” becomes a glimmering, patiently building sing-along. A keyboard makes an appearance, but something slightly sinister lurks in its single-punched notes.

“What do you do for fun?” the band shouts, less a question and more a challenge. The group isn’t looking for an answer as much as it is a fight. —**Todd Martens**



Neil Young

Earth

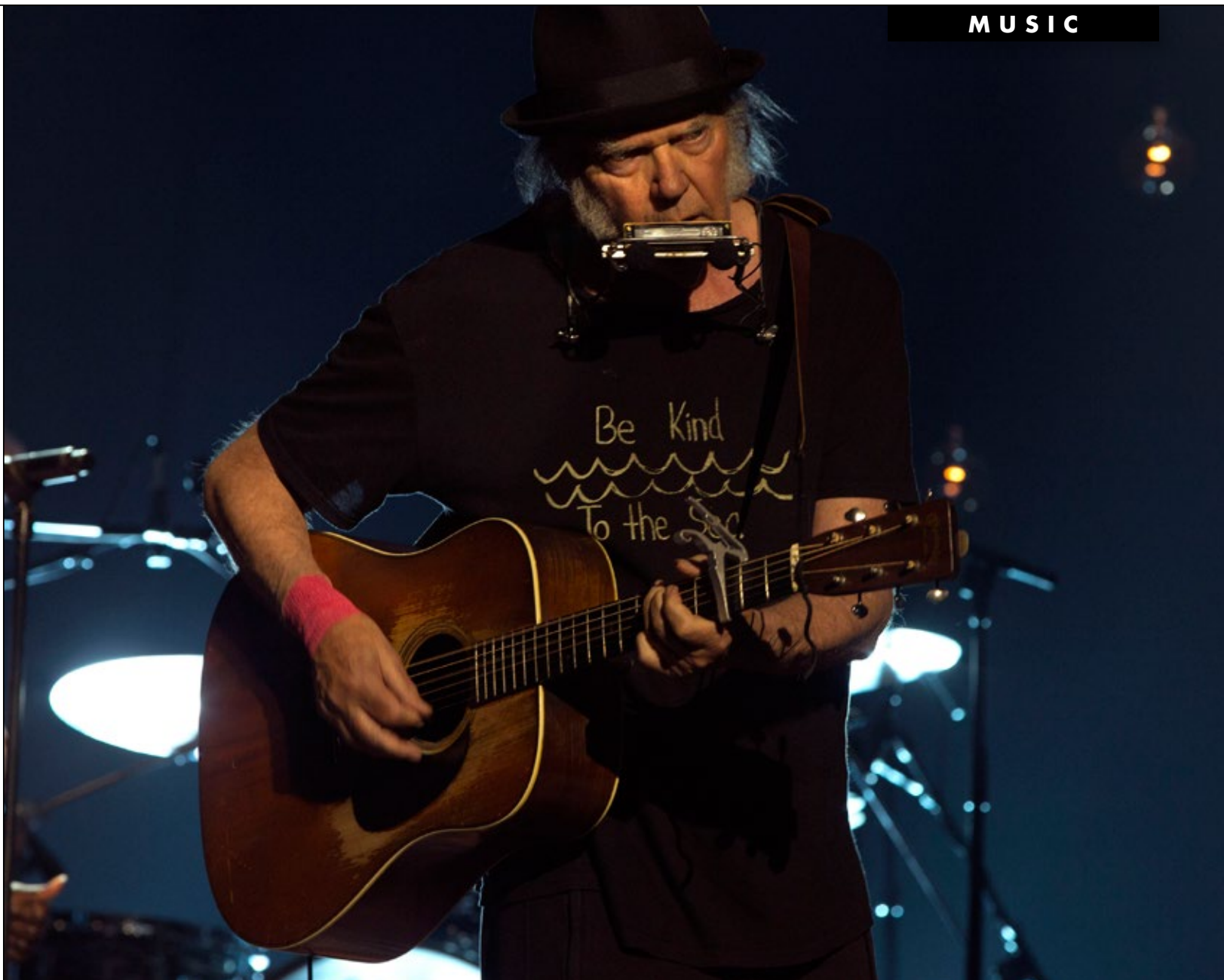
Reprise, 3LP or 2CD

The crackling thunder heard at the onset of Neil Young's *Earth* evokes the similar effects captured at Woodstock and utilized on the eccentric artist's now-legendary live album *Rust Never Sleeps*. But whereas the latter uses the din to fill set changes and facilitate a theatrical aesthetic, Young's latest hybrid concert record employs rain—and a host of animal, bird, and insect noises as well as back-up vocals added in the studio—to underscore sociopolitical points and accentuate songs whose themes pertain to the planet we call home, a place increasingly in jeopardy of witnessing wholesale species and habitat loss.

On the surface, the concept could appear as a humorous ploy—an inside joke, or Young's attempt to generate laughter while making grand statements about unchecked corporations and consumer culture. Indeed, the manners in which the buzzing of swarming bees or chirping of crickets pop into the soundscapes conjures the behavior of a toddler that pulls the string on a vintage Fischer Price See n' Say toy and listens to the random array of sounds uttered by ducks, sheep, and other farm life. But there's a method to Young's approach on *Earth*, as well as a blue spark to his playing, that dismisses any notion of the nearly 98-minute set serving as any sort of gag.

Designed to be experienced as one uninterrupted track, and envisioned as performances on which the wildlife occasionally takes over, the effort turns Young's otherwise bizarre concept into a poignant, provocative arc of commentary and dialog. As he did on last year's *The Monsanto Years*, Young again pairs with the Promise of the Real, which spell Crazy Horse. The live audio stems from the ensemble's 2015 tour, with the overdubs from a nine-piece choir and added interjections from bears, horses, and such creating a multi-layered canvas.

Young's riled-up mood and right-versus-wrong stubbornness allow *Earth* to transcend novelty status. It also presents several of his finest works in fresher, more revealing light. His intentions are spelled out from the very beginning via a solemn rendition of "Mother Earth" rendered on pump organ. Having often played the spiritual piece at Farm Aid events, Young here has the backing chorus echo his lead vocals, generating call-and-response patterns and highlighting words central to the concept of respect.



©Photo by Julie Gardner

The latter motif reoccurs throughout a majority of the set—be it on the tranquil country trot of "Western Hero" (a deep cut from 1996's inspired *Sleeps With Angels*) or slash-and-burn pulse of "Seed Justice," a previously unreleased track that finds the singer remaining firm in his resolve and using his distorted guitar as a razor-sharp sickle to cut through double-talk.

Contributions from the animal menagerie serve as bridges

between songs, emerge during codas, and/or coincide with key moments in the midst of performances. On "The Monsanto Years," bumblebee drone immediately precedes a mention of pesticides and the screech of a hawk heralds a reference to poison. The live take further improves on the studio version by way of a tolling church bell that prefaces Young alluding to god and the Bible. By contrast, a

peaceful atmosphere—complete with pastoral sounds of nature—frames the gentle croon and twilight harmonies of "Wolf Moon." Similarly, the crow of a rooster underlines the relaxed simplicity channeled in the rollicking, sea-saw grooves and rustic sentiments of "Country Home." To forcibly convey the intersection of personal freedom, wage equality, and business welfare on a stomping "Big Box," *(continued)*

IL CREMONESE

Ant. Ferdinandi



History, remade.

Sonus faber

WOM

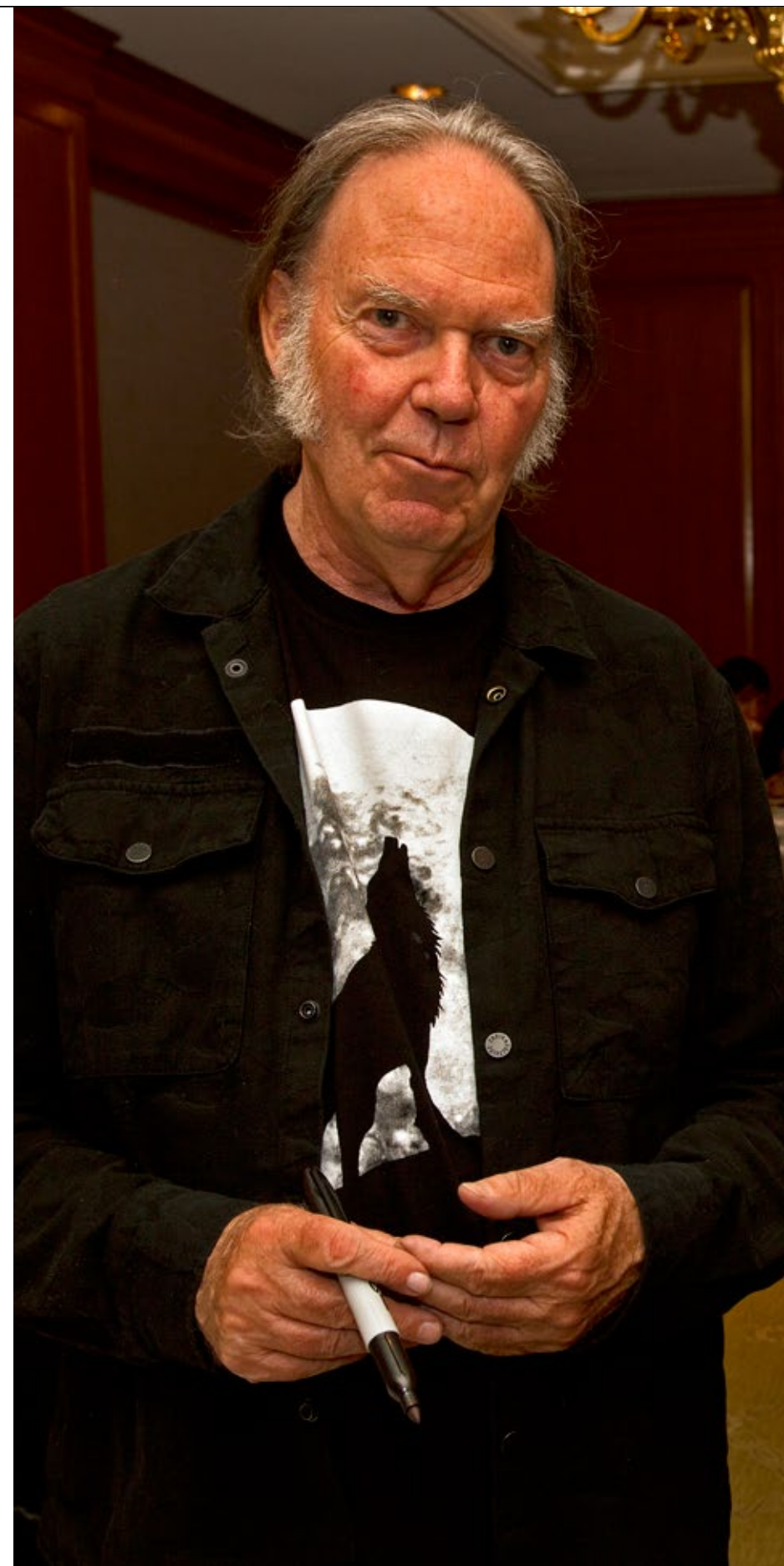
sonusfaber.com

MUSIC

Young employs megaphone echoes and leans on the backing vocalists to pile on sarcasm via soulful chants of company names. “Get in line,” he repeatedly yells at the close amidst a commotion of mooing cows, completing a pull-no-punches metaphor that equates mindless shoppers with herded cattle.

On other occasions, Young’s lyrics and his group’s responses channel all that needs to be expressed. Paying close attention to phrasing, the bandleader inserts Chevron as the subject of the dark, merciless “Vampire Blues”—Young’s studio support cast whispering the conglomerate’s name and leaving no doubt about the identity of the blood the narrator greedily sucks from the earth. “After the Gold Rush” also receives a minor update with choral arrangements, yet it’s a line Young wrote decades ago and updated for modern times—“Look at mother nature on the run/In the 21st century”—that lingers both as a cautionary eulogy and last-ditch protest.

Ever the eternal optimist and dream-prone hippie, Young knows the way out of the mess, even if the solution requires a collective effort that seems more unlikely with each passing day. The answer: “Love and Only Love,” a credo he and the Promise of the Real embrace and reiterate, refusing to stop for a half hour as they spread the message and play like the future of every living organism depends on it. —**Bob Gendron**



©Photo by Julie Gardner


Steve Gunn

Eyes on the Lines
Matador, LP or CD

We are all now surrounded by notifications, messages, alerts—beeps and vibrations constantly tugging for our attention. Go here. Read this. Respond to that. Modern music isn't immune to the barrage. The high-gloss, computer sheen of today's dance music, for instance, or the influx of twitchy patterns and stylish synthesizers on contemporary pop and indie fare.

What a joy, then, to discover Steve Gunn's *Eyes on the Lines*. Here is a rock n' roll record, one with good ol' fashioned riffs and solos—the kind you should find on jukeboxes everywhere—but one that also possess a sort of calming whisper. *Slow down, man*, these easy-rolling songs seem to say. *Stay a while, and unplug while you're at it.*

Eyes on the Lines isn't so much about tuning out modern connivances as it learning to be unaffected by them. How else to explain "The Drop," in which Gunn realizes mid-song that he missed his flight? He greets the bad news with a shrug. "Looks like I'll spend the night," he sings, nonchalantly. The cruise-control feel of the beat pushes the song forward with an anything-goes attitude, and the guitars answer his vocals as if they're old friends nodding along.

It's all T-shirt-and-jeans casual, albeit with a bit of hippy mysticism. Gunn longs for a "field guide to the other side" on "Conditions Wild," a track that crests to an upbeat, handclap-worthy moment. But even here, the feel is less about injecting energy and more concerned with creating a sense of community.

Modern accouterments surface here and there—a spacey streak amid the curly notes of "Ancient Jules," for example—that lend an ever-so-slight gauze of trippiness to the whole. While Gunn has often worked with fellow low-key guitar whiz Kurt Vile, *Eyes on the Lines*, his first for Matador Records, places him more in the tradition of a young Robyn Hitchcock. Equally economical and cosmic, picture Gunn as the kid weaned evenly on Grateful Dead and *The Big Lebowski*.

But it's important to note just how meticulous the musicianship remains throughout *Eyes on the Lines*. Gunn strikes a tricky balance to be so casually offhanded and yet note-for-note precise. An urban cowboy strut informs the brushed rhythms and tick-tock verses of "Park Bench Smile," while the slow-dance "Ark" uses guitars as if they're violins, which is to say the song sways with an orchestral bent. "Heavy Sails" takes the guitar ensemble idea even further, as multiple layers glimmer one moment and twirl like they're caught on a spindle the next. The instruments get loud, too. Solos emerge and disappear like bright sunlight finding a crevice in the living-room drapes.



©Photo by Constance Mensh

The record is contemplative, but also one about getting away—or maybe disappearing, even if just for a little while. "He likes to wonder and lose direction and go back home," Gunn sings on "Night Wander," a reminder that sometimes a destination or an objective isn't as important as the desire to escape. —**Todd Martens**



©Photo by Scott Simontacchi

With *Undercurrent*, singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist Sarah Jarosz continues to build an enviable career with progressive and beautiful roots music. Her 2013 breakthrough *Build Me Up from Bones* earned her rave reviews and guest appearances on “Conan” and “A Prairie Home Companion.” Her new release should take her even further.

This is the sound of a young woman truly coming of age. Love, lust, loss—they’re all here in a batch of honestly expressed songs that mine the heart of the human experience.

Sultry vocals and a swampy slide guitar mark “House of Mercy,” a humid blues about the irresistible pull of bad love. But that’s just a warm-up to the steamy confessional “Everything to Hide.” Longing for a would-be lover, the narrator expresses her innermost fantasies: “I wanna tell you that I’m thankful for your fingers on those strings/Wanna whisper low into your ear all these forbidden things.” It mutates into a fearless erotic expression when the singer admits, “Well I never really thought that I could be a child of sin/ Now here I come confessing of these childish hopes within.”

Sadnesses inevitably stack up in the pursuit of love. A relationship ends but the memory remains in “Back of My Mind,” a slow-burner filled with pedal-steel cries and mournful wisps of electric guitar. Even when Jarosz sounds down and out, the effect feels entrancing. Filled with a trembling sense of loss, “Early Morning Light” is a sparse and tender tune stripped down to guitar and vocal. She sings: “The wall of early morning light/Creeps into my bedroom quiet/I’ll close the blinds to keep it out/My whole world is darker now.”



Sarah Jarosz

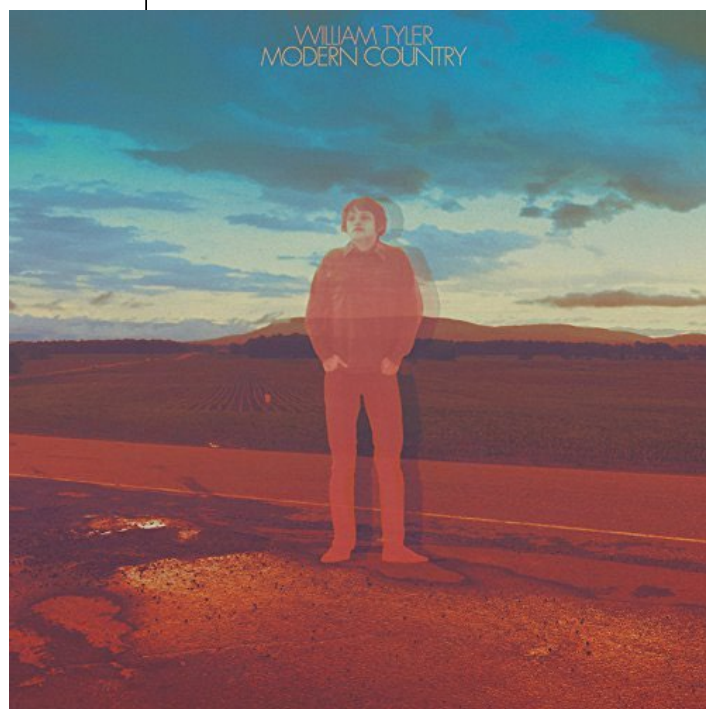
Undercurrent

Sugar Hill Records, LP or CD

On “Take Another Turn,” Jarosz openly frets about being lost on the map, taking wrong turns, and realizing “there ain’t no going back.” With her voice ringing like a melancholy bell against a simply picked guitar, the unvarnished admission draws the listener close. Similarly entrancing, a shivering “Lost Dog” finds Jarosz at her best. The minimalist production places her sparse banjo and wistful vocals front and center. Whether it’s a man or a mutt she sings about, the effect is the same. The narrator remains both enchanted by and wary of the stray in her yard: “If I open my door/Make you my friend/Are you gonna run out and get lost again?”

It’s a question everyone asks when they take a chance on love. Kudos to Jarosz for asking it out loud on this striking album.

—**Chrissie Dickinson**



William Tyler
Modern Country
 Merge, LP or CD

D

on't let the title fool you. William Tyler's latest all-instrumental effort, *Modern Country*, is not a modern country record. Rather, it sonically illustrates Tyler's perception of our modern country. And in his eyes, America lingers in despair.

"*Modern Country* is a love letter to what we are losing in America, to what we've already lost," Tyler says in the album trailer. The seven-track record chronicles his cross-country experience, which culminated with him "falling back in love with the vast and jarring expanse of America."

The opening "Highway Anxiety" highlights this contrasting notion, toying with the balance between love and distress. The nine-minute track showcases what Tyler does best: Invoking emotion through nothing more than sound.

$$\Sigma \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{future proof +} \\ \text{benchmark performance +} \\ \text{superlative sound} \end{array} \right) = \text{Rossini}$$



Future Proof

We are pioneers who are constantly developing new technologies to improve the quality of reproduced sound. Our unique approach to product design means that Rossini can anticipate and support new formats and innovations in audio.



Benchmark Performance

Every dCS product must meet the extraordinarily exacting standards demanded by our military heritage. As a result Rossini delivers levels of consistency and reliability like no other.



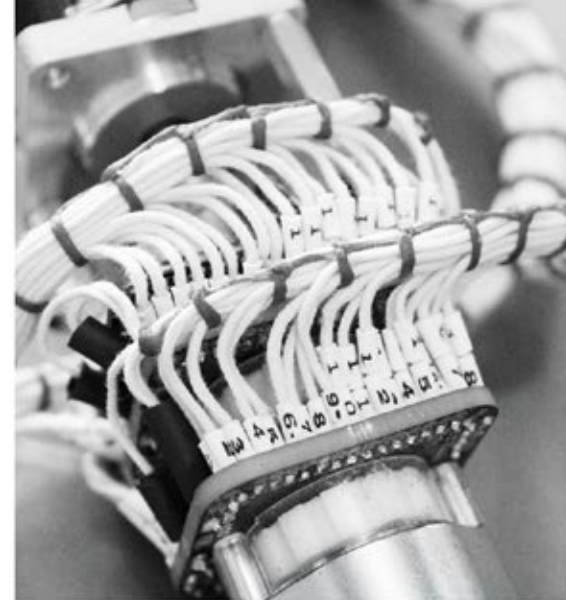
Superlative Sound

When you listen to Rossini our state of the art technology, manufacturing effort and rigorous testing combine to create a magical experience that perfectly recreates every last emotional nuance of whatever music you choose to listen to.

When you listen to Rossini from dCS you will believe that the world has stopped and there is...

ONLY THE MUSIC

dCS
 ONLY THE MUSIC



"...build quality is unsurpassed in my experience of all things audio."
 "...the Bespoke sang more sweetly, more colorfully,
 and, above all, more forcefully."

- Art Dudley, *Stereophile*, October 2015.

"...simply a case of visual perfection."
 "A mighty, potent musical box without a signature of its own."

- Matej Isak, *Mono & Stereo*

Exceptional audio products, where luxurious experience meets flawless performance. Every product that leaves our hands is crafted in collaboration between our skilled engineers and our customers. Made by hand, in England, to your specification, delivered to you for your pleasure and guaranteed for life.

The Bespoke Audio Company, we suit you.

thebespokeaudiocompany.com



- THE -
BESPOKE AUDIO CO



©Photo by Angelina Castillo



He starts off soft and slow, with repetitive and simple strumming that carries an entrancing element. But near the three-minute mark, the arrangement picks up in pace, volume, and depth—the sound of anxiety creeping in. What follows is the soundtrack to an ever-present battle between a state of chaos and contentment. It sets the tone for an album that will likely rile you up and ease you back down, all without saying a word. In the absence of having to analyze lyrics or interpret vocal inflections, Tyler allows for the rare opportunity to just listen. *Modern Country* dispenses a dose of something so many of us need—relief from all the noise.

The Nashville native got his start as a band member in Lambchop and Silver Jews before moving forward as a solo artist, a decision affirmed when his 2010 debut, *Behold The Spirit*, received rave reviews and established Tyler as a guitar virtuoso. In the six years that followed, Tyler has continued to innovate and create songs as deep as they are dynamic. For *Modern Country*, his fourth full-length, he headed north to Wisconsin at Justin Vernon's April Base Studios in Eau Claire—the first time Tyler recorded outside of his hometown. With each release, he seemingly competes against himself to redefine what instrumental guitar music is and can be.

MUSIC

"Kingdom of Jones" exemplifies what the form currently represents, and revisits Tyler's whimsical roots. The song shows off his quick and intricate picking abilities. Each chord finds its rightful place among a delicate and lush melody. The tune stands out for its purity, and juxtaposes other tracks that explore where instrumental guitar is headed. For Tyler, the future appears to be going in an electric direction.

On *Modern Country*, Tyler experiments more with electric guitar than in the past, particularly on the twangy "Albion Moonlight" and the overdriven closer "The Great Unwind." Appropriately titled and rightfully placed, the latter serves as the equivalent to a big sigh, the kind that follows a long day—or in Tyler's case, a trip through broken America. Drums beat, birds chirp, and halfway through, when everything appears to have reached an end, Tyler returns with a revitalized rhythm that boasts an optimism unheard elsewhere.

Taken as a whole, "The Great Unwind" seems to call into question the divided America Tyler often portrays. Yet it also brings attention to the country's inherent beauty and wonder—characteristics that may be scarce and scattered into hard-to-find pieces but, even in this modern country, still remain. —**Lyndsey Havens**

Lucy Dacus' debut begins with one of the nicest, most conversational middle-finger salutes in pop music in 2016. "I Don't Wanna Be Funny Anymore" takes on gender roles and the male gaze with a relaxed, whip-smart attitude, digging into perceived notions of femininity as well as dude-driven pop-culture boundaries. Like characters in a rom-com, in Dacus' song there's the cute one, the funny one, and the book-smart one. But real lives—and good tunes—are more complex than any age-old stereotypes. And in one verse after another, Dacus disregards all of them. Musically, she approaches her vocals as if she's chatting with you at happy hour, and the guitar gradually revs up until it just stops.



Lucy Dacus

No Burden
EggHunt/Matador, LP or CD

In short, Dacus leaves you wanting more.

Throughout the nine songs of *No Burden*, the 21-year-old approaches songwriting as if she's creating a dialogue with the listener, her subjects, and her three-piece band. "I got a too-short skirt, maybe I can be the cute one" she wonders on the opening track. "I see the seat next to yours is unoccupied," she observes on "Green Eyes, Red Face." "Oh please, don't make fun of me," she pleads on "Map on a Wall." It's not clever turns of phrase in which Dacus specializes; it's everyday honesty. No wonder the

Richmond, Virginia-based artist caught the attention of acclaimed New York indie Matador, the label now re-releasing *No Burden*, initially issued on her tiny hometown label EggHunt.

The work immediately vaunts Dacus to the major leagues, giving her a voice, if not a catalog, that feels as important as other ace female singer-songwriters such as Sharon Van Etten, Angel Olsen, Jenny Lewis, and Courtney Barnett. "I don't believe in love at first sight," she sings on "Direct Address," then adding, with a bit of bite, "maybe I would if you looked at me right." Cyni-

cal, calmly sarcastic, and casually rock n' roll, *No Burden* plays it cool even when matters turn to heartbreak. Recorded in a day, the album goes by fast, but the craftsmanship lingers. Hayden Cotcher's drums add aggression to "I Don't Wanna Be Funny Anymore," Jacob Blizard's guitar pulls the melody out of a haze of noise on "Strange Torpedo," and Dacus leads the briskly melancholic "Dream State" into an universe of alien sounds and lost-at-sea distress signals.

Songs such as "Map on a Wall" and "Familiar Place" bring the music into more folksy

territory, and Dacus' vocals carry just enough smoky heft to handle the slower arrangements. She's never forceful—she takes a more diplomatic approach—and that holds true even when she drifts into tragic terrain. "Troublemaker, Dopplenganger," with its booming rhythms and bluesy licks, documents tails of borderline abuse: guys who look up skirts, women afraid to keep the doors unlocked. "Thirsty for love, eager for attention," she sings. It becomes clear, if it wasn't from the get-go, Dacus isn't joking around. —**Todd Martens**

©Photo by Dusdin Condren



©Photo by Jillian Clark

**BJ Barham***Rockingham*

At the Helm, LP or CD

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the *New York Times* ran short individual biographies of all the people that died in the World Trade Center. Every story was a snapshot of a life, focusing on the person's dreams, jobs and hobbies. Filled with quotidian detail, each landed with a strong blow to the heart. They served as small totems of our shared humanity as well as devastating reminders of just how fragile a life can be.

I thought about the impact of those bios as I listened to BJ Barham's deeply moving *Rockingham*. The singer-songwriter wrote his debut solo album in the days immediately following another tragic event. Last November, Barham was on tour in Europe with his alt-country band American Aquarium. Two hours away, coordinated terrorist attacks took the lives of 130 people in Paris.

Forefront Audio

THE FINEST AUDIO AVAILABLE IN WESTERN NEW YORK

PLINIUS HAUTONGA 200WPC
INTEGRATED WITH PHONO**PLINIUS***The heart of music*
www.pliniusaudio.comPLINIUS, VPI, SOTA, PRIMALUNA, BALANCED AUDIO TECHNOLOGY,
SPENDOR, VANDERSTEEN, QUESTYLE, SILTECH, TORUS POWER3255 Brighton Henrietta Town Line Rd, Suite 202, Rochester, NY 14623
Ph (585) 216-5881 www.forefront-audio.com



"In the end, everything is subjective, but in my humble opinion there is no better brand out there for innovative design, military spec like build quality and outstanding sound performance. In this case, if you also consider the astonishing value realized when compared to the best, we have something very very special."

Robert S. Youman

INT-60 Review
Positive-Feedback Issue 79

Pass Laboratories
13395 New Airport Rd. Ste G., Auburn, CA 95602
(530) 878-5350 - www.passlabs.com



©Photo by Alysse Gafkjen

On its surface, *Rockingham* has nothing to do with that terrible occurrence. Barham sets his largely fictional songs in his hometown of Reidsville, North Carolina. Yet it's easy to see why Barham looked homeward in the face of the Paris attacks. Tragedy has a habit of throwing our own lives into stark relief, forcing us to consider the people and places that matter the most to us.

Barham's songs resonate with illuminating detail. The narrators are working-class southerners—among them farmers and factory workers—that struggle in the face of diminishing opportunities. They are men that once believed in a dream but have long been left behind by forces beyond their control. As such, akin to an

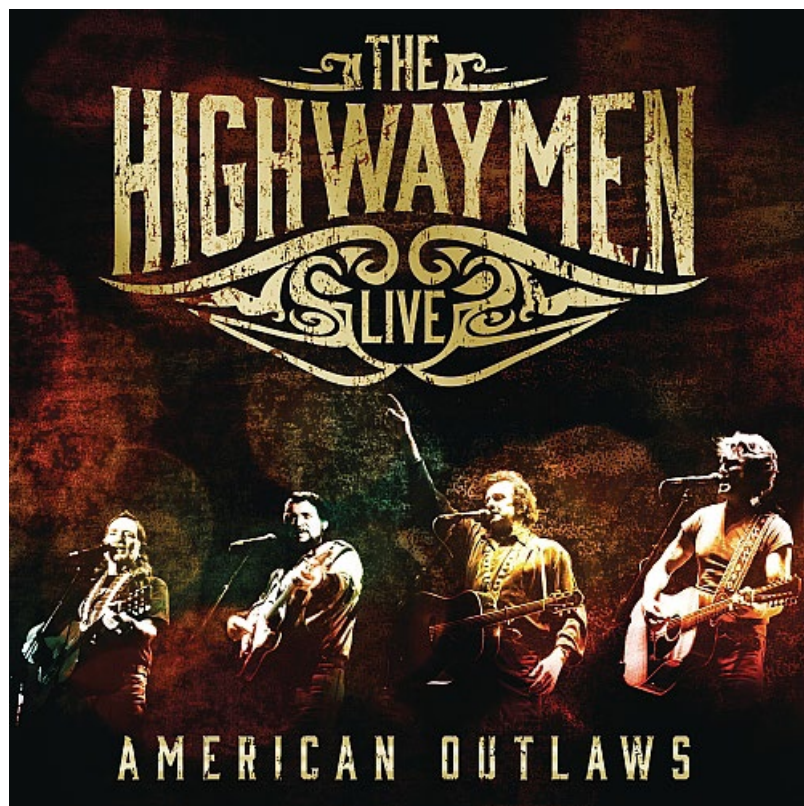
alt-country version of Kenny Chesney's tearjerker "The Good Stuff," the unadorned "The Unfortunate Kind" features Barham's cracked, plainspoken voice and simple folk guitar. It's the intimate story of a man that recalls his lucky marriage and his wife's painful death. In the end, the narrator is alone on his couch, accompanied only by grief and a haunted dream of what used to be.

The lovely build of plucked banjo, accordion, and piano almost obscure the quiet horror that resides within the beautifully written lines of "O' Lover," a disturbing tale of a panicked farmer that makes a deadly gambit. In the stripped-down gospel plea "Water In the Well," another bereft farmer

loses his land and asks the plaintive universal question: "What will I do when all else fails?" "Madeline" serves as the lone autobiographical tune and doubles as Barham's advice letter to his young daughter. It's slyly funny ("Hearing your own voice is the hardest part of singing") and informed by the hard-won wisdom of a now-sober hipster ("Never trust a man who does hard drugs in his thirties").

Throughout, Barham proves a fine songwriter that treats his troubled characters with nuance and sympathy. On this quietly powerful album, he gives us a wounding elegy about our own uncertain and fleeting lives.

—**Chrissie Dickinson**



The Highwaymen

The Highwaymen Live - American Outlaws
Sony Legacy, 3CD + DVD

Listen to the music made more than 25 years ago on *The Highwaymen Live - American Outlaws* and parallels to today's contemporary country scene surface. The pop-minded dreck coming of modern Nashville hit factories largely rules the radio and charts, yet enterprising artists such as Chris Stapleton have recently given audiences a needed reminder of the style's hardscrabble roots and literary directness. Cross-over sensations Jason Isbell and Sturgill Simpson are further broadening the scope while remaining faithful to the genre's classic sounds and soulful authenticity. Considered against the period backdrop of the Highwaymen, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

More than three decades have passed since Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, and Waylon Jennings teamed up to form a supergroup true to the term in every sense. None of the four iconic singer-songwriters fit in with the increasingly preprocessed fare courted by major labels—or slick, arena-bound approach spearheaded by Garth Brooks. Already well into their 50s, they were deemed too old to matter anyway. For the first time in his career, Cash would soon be without a label. His mates struggled to maintain relevancy on solo records that seemingly disappeared from view the day after they were released.

Still, on this enjoyable collection that documents the entirety of a two-hour concert staged in Uniondale, New York in March 1990—as well two Farm Aid appearances—the legends achieve a chemistry, commonality, charm, and conscientiousness that towers above nearly everything else that dates from an era that soon gave rise to line dancing. Onstage, the foursome's outlaw songs and presence stand out as much for what they

are as much as for what they never would be. Their professional backing band supplies requisite accompaniment without getting in the way.

To be certain, *The Highwaymen Live - American Outlaws* doesn't tell us much we don't already know. A few arrangements ("Ring of Fire," "Ragged Old Flag") skew toward the showmanship expected from such an act during a period in which Las Vegas productions came into fashion. None of the versions of classics—such as a bounding, ornery "A Boy Named Sue" or stripped-back "Night Life"—tops the originals. And while the Telecaster-picking Jennings and company remain in great voice, they make no effort to disguise the fact the lines on their faces also crept into their ranges.

But that's the appeal—the genuineness, the authenticity, the refusal to bow to trends. No disguises, no fakery, no glitz, unless the latter falls into the category of patriotic comments or quick jokes. Seemingly free of any individualistic ego, the

Highwaymen often step up to the microphone to share lines or duet on each other's recognizable songs. They do so with an earnestness, modesty, laughter, and love that breathe deeper perspectives into tunes that have long since become standards. Whether the matter-of-fact deliveries on "They Killed Him," harmonizing on a harmonica-driven "City of New Orleans," or winking playfulness during "The King Is Gone (So Are You)," the longtime friends find kernels of truths in every performance and seemingly know the likes of such a gathering won't again happen for decades—if ever.

No moment showcases this spirit more than "Desperados Waiting for a Train," penned by the recently late Guy Clark. A moving tribute to the working-class heroes in plain sight albeit yet continually overlooked by society, the Western song sounds here like a theme for these four giants—two of which have left the train station, and two of which know the train is coming e'er nearer. —**Bob Gendron**

Reference

Reorchestrated



THERE IS ONLY ONE REFERENCE®

Audio Research introduced its first Reference Series components in 1995 with the intent of elevating the state-of-the-art to a new plateau, providing the most realistic and engaging musical experience possible. Those Reference products became iconic. Now, more than twenty years later, our singular goal remains.

The new **Reference 6** line-stage and the **Reference Phono 3** phono preamp are the latest products that advance the art of music playback.

Here are just some of the latest advancements:

- Reengineered analog stage featuring six 6H30 tubes
- Larger power transformers and power supply
- Proprietary coupling capacitors designed specifically for each product
- Rigid, mass-loaded chassis for superior mechanical and electrical isolation

Everything we have done is simply a means to an end, to provide an unparalleled listening experience so real and engaging that you won't want it to end.

Visit your Audio Research dealer to understand - There is only One Reference®

audio research
HIGH DEFINITION®

www.audioresearch.com

MUSIC



Shawn Colvin & Steve Earle

Colvin & Earle
Fantasy, LP or CD

Roots-music veterans and longtime friends Steve Earle and Shawn Colvin mix newly written songs with classic covers on a debut collaboration that, predictably, comes across as a smart, solid affair. But two spectacular, spine-tingling performances stand heads above the rest—and indicate the namesake artists still have plenty to say as they past the midpoint of their careers.

The first highlight arrives with a cover of “You Were On My Mind.” Best known as a 1965 hit for the pop group We Five, the song was written in 1962 by the young Sylvia Fricker of the Canadian folk duo Ian & Sylvia. Fricker was a struggling and hopeful young bohemian when she penned the tune in Greenwich Village. Because of the dazzling and upbeat melody, you could almost miss the terrified pathos percolating beneath its sparkling surface. Within a few tightly scripted verses, it becomes clear the song’s narrator is a mess—drunk, sick, drowning in the blues and lost in memory. Despite these crippling emotions, it becomes equally clear that this is also a person trying to battle past the demons and move forward.

It’s the perfect vehicle for the ragged-but-right Earle, a man who has overcome substance abuse and an early life routinely spent going off the rails. Colvin serves as his angelic foil, her harmonies darting like a seagull in the sky, a heavenly counterpoint to Earle’s earthbound voice. In their hands, the classic bristles with defiance against the vagaries of life, an artistic fist punched into the air.
(continued)

MUSIC



©Photo by Alexandra Valenti

Authentic, majestic, and deeply emotional, the interpretation does Fricker proud.

The quietly exquisite “You’re Still Gone” is the other track Colvin and Earle hit out of the park. The two co-wrote it with Julie Miller. As the wife and artistic partner of the album’s producer Buddy Miller, she is an idiosyncratic singer-songwriter that always stamps her work with a vulnerable and breathtaking touch. The song is a delicately rendered portrait of abject heartache. The message is stark—a loved one has gone and isn’t coming back. It’s music so bald in its loss, it could easily bog down in sentimentalism. But Colvin and Earle wisely underplay it, singing softly in unison and giving the words room to breathe.

Yes, other songs on this rootsy album are well worth the listener’s time, including the blues stew “You’re Right, I’m Wrong” and gospel outing “Tell Moses.” But Colvin and Earle conjure serious magic on “You Were On My Mind” and “You’re Still Gone.” And that sort of alchemy is alone worth the price of admission.
—**Chrissie Dickinson**

SONIC PRECISION & SOPHISTICATED STYLING



Motion® 60XT / 50XT / 35XT

XT stands for *extreme*, and for good reason. Our new Motion® XT speakers play louder, lower, and with unflinching accuracy. Larger woofers and cabinets, paired with our most accurate Folded Motion™ XT driver, deliver an engaging and encompassing experience that cuts straight to the emotion locked inside your favorite recordings.

www.martinlogan.com

MARTIN LOGAN®
Truth in Sound

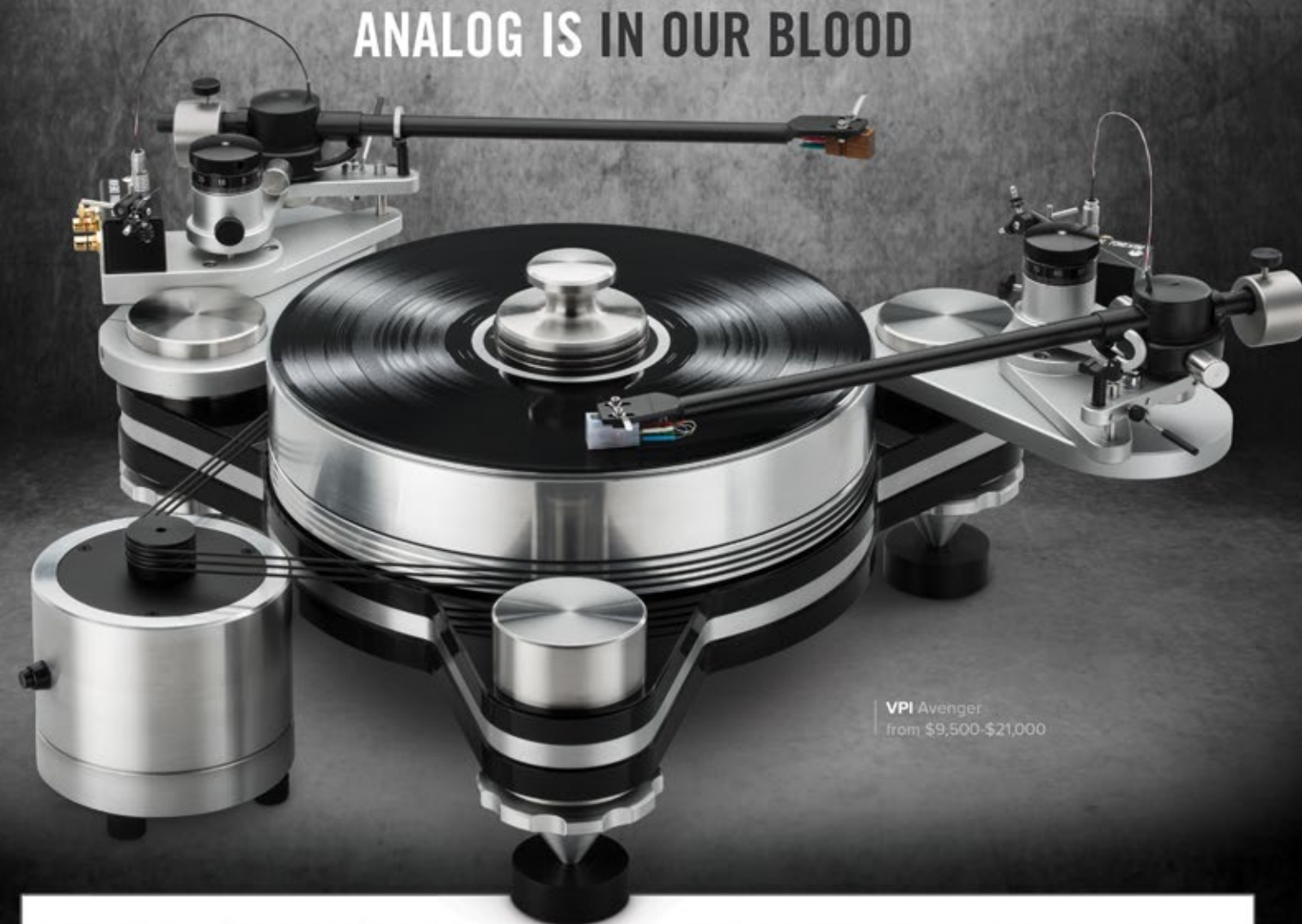

Beth Orton
Kidsticks

Anti-, LP or CD

When an artist is said to return back to his or her roots, the description typically implies a stripped-down, back-to-basics approach. With *Kidsticks*, U.K.-bred singer/songwriter Beth Orton has returned to her roots even as the record marks the most divergent, abstract work of her solo career.

Here, Orton once again re-embraces mellowed-out electronics, a tactic that won her a critical and cult following in the late 90s when she embraced digital sounds from the point of view of a folksy balladeer. Once the record opens with the frisky, sexy "Snow," it appears Orton—after more recent, acoustic-based works—is again ready to dance. That premonition turns out to be half right.

ANALOG IS IN OUR BLOOD


 VPI Avenger
from \$9,500-\$21,000

 CLEARAUDIO Concept
\$1,599

 MUSIC HALL MMF-2.2
\$299

 AVID Acutus Reference SP
\$26,995

 VPI Prime
\$3,799

 REGA RP10
\$5,495

 PRO-JECT Debut Carbon DC
\$399

musicdirect

800-449-8333 | MUSICDIRECT.COM

The next classic.



Impressive performance capabilities, highlighted by its detailed high frequency resolution, incredible transparency, powerful dynamics and remarkably deep bass extension make the X18 ideal for small to medium sized rooms and simply one of the finest compact loudspeakers Dynaudio has ever developed.

The new **Excite X18.**

DYNAUDIO



©Photo by Tierney Gearon

Said to have been written in Los Angeles almost entirely on synthesizers, *Kidsticks* feels odd. At times, songs prove to be charmingly beat-driven. They're light, bright, weightless—a concession, perhaps, to Orton's airy voice. In other places, *Kidsticks* becomes distantly meditative, appearing more in tune with crafting headphone-worthy experiments rather than creating a showcase for the singer's contemplative lyrics.

It can be slow, coming across as the sound of a vintage Nintendo GameBoy attempting to deal with a broken heart. A number of songs have crevices and angles rather than a direct route. Any joy in listening takes a back seat to the sense that being made to plot a roadmap. Primarily working with Andrew Hung, a producer/musician best-known for his left-of-center electronic-based work in the duo Fuck Buttons, Orton has

concocted an effort that is nonetheless far from entirely synthetic. Arrangements are regularly embellished with guitars, strings, and live drumming.

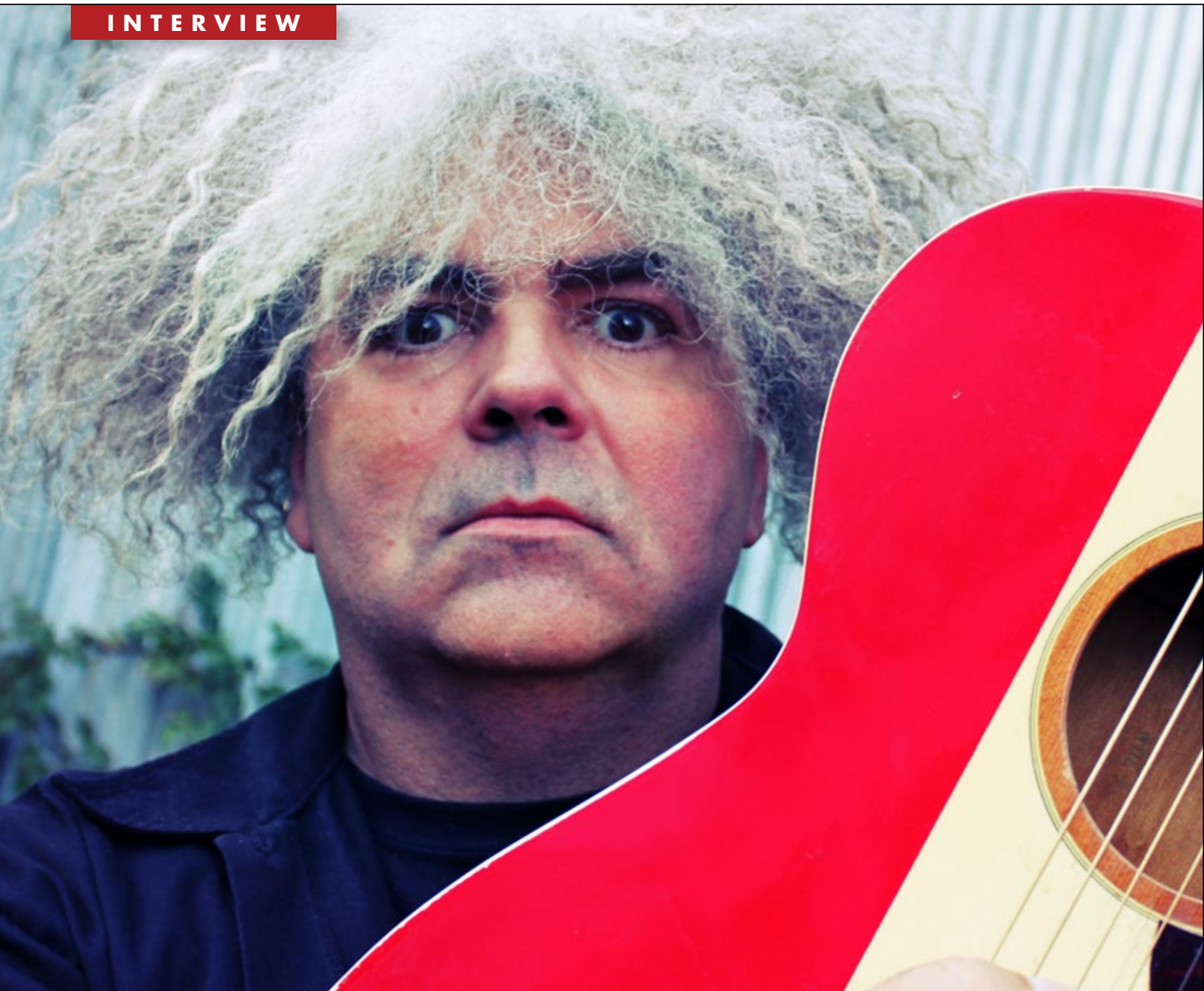
Moments, such as the elastic "1973," create a groove that floats like bubbles around Orton's malleable upper-register. If the album has a celebratory tune, this is as it. The springboard rhythm delivers an electric jolt. Similarly, "Flesh & Blood" shows some pin-ball-like action, its forward-momentum contrasting with Orton's melancholic vocals. Beats poke and rattle akin to dice in a plastic cup, and the sonic architecture recalls the more thoughtful works on Madonna's *Ray of Light*.

But *Kidsticks* never quite shimmies or shakes. That's perfectly alright, especially when Orton and Hung give us songs like "Moon." Orton hints at insomnia, and the tune toys with minimalistic digital tension for four min-

utes, letting the occasional organic sound throw off any sense of place as it builds with a low-to-the-ground digital throb. Orton's voice remains calm, stern, and direct in one verse, and mutates into a fragile falsetto in the next.

Kidsticks seems built to reflect such tonal disparity—the folk-concert-on-Mars feel of "Wave" versus the quiet, melancholic atmospheres of "Dawnstar." There's weirdness – ("Corduroy Legs") and wordless lullabies (the title track). Individual songs are meticulously crafted, but often so varied that *Kidsticks* feels too loose. Unlike Orton's past tinkering with electronics, the album doesn't come across like an attempt to bring folk music to the digital age. It instead asks if the digital age should have its own folk music, and the result often feels more conceptual than passionate.

—**Todd Martens**



Three Decades of Operating Outside Normalcy

Todd Martens Talks With the Melvins

Photos by Mackie Osborne

B

uzz Osborne is making a racket. As the leader of the Melvins, proponents of sludgy, guttural, and fast hard rock for three decades, this is, perhaps, to be expected.

Pans cling. Pots rattle. Running water drowns out the singer's voice.


Oblivious, Osborne, meanwhile, fields an interviewer's questions as if he's a slugger taking batting practice. Thwack. Crack. Boom. Don't care about this. Not apologizing for that. Never worried about the other thing.

On this day, Osborne is at home in Los Angeles. The background clamor? He's cleaning the kitchen, multitasking while talking on the phone to a reporter. But don't be fooled by the domestic chores.

The Melvins, more than 20 albums deep into their career, are not ones to give much of a hoot about maturity. The band's new album, *Basses Loaded*, serves as a sort of primer for their career—a bass swapping, head-spinning (and -banging) romp that's as stylistically diverse as it is aggressive. A key ingredient, as always, is absurdity, be it the carnival-like cover of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" or the constantly jolting shifts of direction (see the muddy stump and unexpected bluesy snarl of album-opener "The Decay of the Living").

Amid this cacophony resides a secret to the group's longevity. Work hard, laugh about it, and then move on.

"We're called the Melvins," says Osborne. "We can't be serious. It is serious and dark, to some degree, but that's part of the humor, too."



The world-class speaker manufacturer you probably never heard of. Until now.

Why does anyone start a loudspeaker company?

Good question. Ignoring the obvious answer (because they're nuts), it might just be because they felt compelled to.

Dali's first designs were originally created for a Danish hifi store. This retailer wasn't entirely happy with the loudspeakers then available, so they decided to build their own.

You're thinking what does a retailer know about manufacturing, right?

Well, actually, quite a lot as it turns out.

Three decades later, Dali are one of the world's leading loudspeaker manufacturers, with a list of international awards the envy of their industry, including several from EISA (The European Imaging and Sound Association), voted for by expert journalists from over 20 countries.

More importantly, European music lovers are huge fans too, which explains why Dali has sold over a million pairs of loudspeakers to date.

Dali control every stage of the design & production process, while drivers, crossovers and the cabinets themselves are engineered in-house.

At Dali the company motto states, 'In admiration of music.'

And now you can discover why we think you'll be hearing a lot more about Dali at one of our network of carefully selected dealers.



The Sound Organisation • facebook.com/TheSoundOrganisation
• call: 972.234.0182 • email: info@soundorg.com • website: soundorg.com

Exclusive US distributors of : Certon Systems • Chord Company • Dali • PMC • Quadraspire • Rega • Wilson Benesch

INTERVIEW



Or, as drummer-bassist and longtime member Dale Crover says, "Like most boys, we still have that sense of eighth-grade humor that will never go away. Farts will always be funny, no matter what."

How else to explain "Shaving Cream," a traditional children's limerick given an R-rated makeover? The Melvins take a break from the velocity, and slow things down to near-polka levels with screeching stop-and-start guitars. It's the novelty song taken seriously.

"That's what I like," Osborne says. "I don't find it to be too weird. Weird compared to what? You know what I mean? I don't mind stuff like that. I don't find it to be overly weird. Maybe it's weird compared to some normal pop song, but I think people can handle it."

Flatulence jokes and curse-laden children's songs aside, the Melvins remain one of the hardest-working bands in rock. *Basses Loaded* doubles as one of two Melvins albums released this year. The other is a once-abandoned collaboration album with Mike Kunka, a member of on-again, off-again, on-again noise duo god-headSilo that was mostly recorded almost two decades ago.

Basses Loaded, however, is completely fresh.

And Osborne is already done with it. "I don't like hearing any of our songs," he says. "I can listen to our records up about until the time that they come out and then I move on. Then I'm done with it. Let it go out in the world."

What the universe will hear on

Basses Loaded is a work that can stand as an introduction to the group. Recorded with a revolving door of bassists—six to be exact, including Nirvana's Krist Novoselic—the set ever-so-slightly shifts in direction from song to song. Seventies-era metal riffs? Check. Spacey, trippy synthesizers? Here, too. Crunchy punk rock with shout-along choruses? Absolutely.

Songs with Steven McDonald, of Redd Kross fame, take a no-fuss, no-mess approach. Jared Warren of Big Business brings a more melodic and groovy feel to "Choco Plumbing." Then there's "Captain Come Down," featuring the work of Butthole Surfers bassist Jeff Pinkus, which descends into murky, swampy territory. (continued)



Original Melvins drummer Mike Dillard even joins in on the fun, with Crover moving over to bass while the band relives the recklessly simpler days of the early 80s. Odder, still, is “Planet Destructo,” on which Osborne’s vocals sound muted and Trevor Dunn of Mr. Bungle leads the song straight into free-jazz regions.

While Osborne had sketches for the bulk of the songs before bringing them to the group’s collaborators, he says he gave the bassists total control to redirect the tunes.

“You let these guys do their job, that’s what you do,” he says. “You let the bass players work. You let them put their thumbprint on it. That’s one thing I always hated about composers, especially rock composer people who think they know everything. You haven’t thought of everything. You haven’t thought of a tenth of everything. Let these musicians do their work and they’ll come up with something you haven’t thought of.”

Novoselic, for instance, even brought a new instrument into the Melvins’ arsenal.

“It was a song he had written on the accordion, which was cool,” says Crover of Novoselic’s contribution, “Maybe I Am Amused.”

“I don’t know if a lot of peo-

ple know, he’s always played accordion and we’ve never had an accordion on the record,” Crover continues, “so we had to do it. We’re not afraid to trying anything weird or new.”

The band also isn’t scared of mouthing off. On the subject of Nirvana, Osborne found himself the center of Internet-driven ire earlier this year when he took the recent Cobain documentary *Montage of Heck* to task in an op-ed piece for online site The Talkhouse. He slammed the film as “90% bullshit,” citing his friendship with Cobain as his source to dispute the film’s romanticized claims.

Among Osborne’s gripes: Cobain lied about having stomach troubles to mask his addictions.

Less than five minutes into an interview, Osborne brings up the mini-brouhaha, unprompted, as if anticipating a question about the reaction to his essay. Nirvana, and numerous other bands of the grunge and alt-rock era, regularly cheerlead the Melvins, often going on to achieve more fame than Osborne and his revolving door of musicians.

“I speak my mind and tell things like they are,” he says. “I was talking about working with Cobain, and people actually piped in and said I should have

no comment if I have nothing nice to say. The guy was a heroin addict who ended up dead. What’s the nice part? So according to them I shouldn’t even bring that up. I find that to be fascinating.”

Osborne has little interest in reflecting, especially when it comes to the band’s early days in a small town in western Washington. Sure, he’s happy original drummer Dillard remains a part of the band’s circle, but he doesn’t have much to say about the band’s beginnings.

“I’m just not a good ol’ days type of a guy,” he says. “I’ve never looked backed fondly on all those days.”

“It was a relatively dark period in my life,” he continues. “I didn’t have a lot of people who were telling me, ‘What you’re doing is great! This is really cool!’ That was not happening. So I had to forge ahead, with almost everyone on all sides telling me that what I was doing was shit. You have to be bull-headed, and I’m nothing if I’m not that.”

Still, Crover remembers early on catching what made the Melvins so special. As a teenager in rural Washington, Crover says his initial bands relied on covers of mainstream metal bands—the Def Leppards and Judas Priests of the world. *(continued)*



Mu-so Qb

COMPACT WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Unleash 300 watts of music from
a sound system smaller than a milk crate!



naimaudio.com/mu-so-qb

INTERVIEW



Before he joined the Melvins as Dillard's replacement, he caught the band at a local talent show.

"When I first saw the band, we were playing in my high school cover band," Crover says. "We were playing at this radio talent show. It was like an open-call Christmas show. I don't know how we got on it. I don't know how they get on it, but I was like, 'Who the hell are these guys?' My other bandmates did not appreciate it. They thought it was dumb."

What was so, well, dumb?

"They looked different," Crover continues. "They didn't look like the normal red-necks who live in Washington State. They looked weird and had their own songs. They were aggressive and far different from what anybody else was doing. I could relate to it

because I really liked the new wave of British heavy metal, like more obscure stuff. Motorhead. That was obscure for living in a small town like we did. Nobody knew Motorhead where we were. So the Melvins were definitely out of place."

Three decades on, that's still the case. The band, says Osborne, survives because it continues to reside just outside of any sort of normalcy.

When the Melvins first started making money, Osborne was struck with an insight: "I realized I got to that point by not compromising. So I wasn't about to start. I'm not going to ruin it now by thinking, 'I wonder what they want.' No. Be happy with what you're getting."

"Even now," he continues, "if you put us in front of the right crowd, they're going to hate our guts." ●

FEATURE

The Wharfedale Diamond 250 Speakers

By Jeff Dorgay

The tiny Wharfedale Diamond speakers have received tons of accolades around the world for delivering major performance in a diminutive package, but there hasn't been much buzz stateside about the top of the line Diamond 250s. I couldn't resist the urge to blast Pink Floyd when I saw those dual 8-inch woofers staring me down as the photos were being taken of these lovely speakers. And that's just what I did, pulling the original MoFi UHQR pressing of *Dark Side of the Moon*, playing the alarm clocks at earsplitting volume. At \$1,299 a pair, these offer major bang for the buck. If you like to rock, grab a pair now before the guys at MoFi Distribution come to their senses.

FEATURE

For those not familiar, Wharfedale is one of Britain's oldest speaker manufacturers, and currently is a property of IAG (International Audio Group), which produces Quad, Luxman, Mission and a few other top-notch brands, following the business model of design in the UK and purpose-built manufacturing in China. As with the Quad 2812s we just reviewed, the level of build quality is excellent.

The black lacquer finished front baffle is gorgeous, and if you live in a dog- and kid-friendly environment, I suggest leaving the mini grilles off to bask in the carbon fiber beauty of the dual woofers. But I'm a petrolhead through and through and confess a serious love for carbon fiber.

They play everything

As great as the Diamonds are as an all-rounder, I just couldn't stop cranking the classic rock with these speakers. A friend brought over his new Lyn Stanley record and I threw it to my German Shepherds to play catch with, plopping a copy of Kiss *Alive!* on the new Rega Planar 3 (also in for review) via my recently rebuilt Marantz 2245 receiver. The room emptied just like it does at hifi shows. In my own living room no less.

After a few days of playing the Diamonds at maximum volume, it was safe to say that break-in was complete and it was time to get down to some *serious* listening, but the dogs just weren't having it. (continued)



Balanced Audio Technology

ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS LISTEN



CHECK OUT OUR NEW SITE [BALANCED.COM](https://www.balancedaudio.com)

FEATURE

They would not give up their new Frisbee. But you can't live on a steady diet of the Scorpions, right? Ok, six Scorpions albums later, it was time to move along, but these damn speakers are so much fun to wind out it's hard to do serious listening.

Future tense

Fun as the vintage Marantz is, even refurbished, this classic beauty is still somewhat challenged in terms of resolution and refinement. The Diamond 250s work equally well with tubes or solid-state gear, so whatever your fancy, rest assured it will be a match. We used two systems, one based around the recently reviewed PrimaLuna DiaLogue HP integrated (75w/channel, KT120 tubes) and the solid-state Pass XA30.8. Both cabled with Nordost Frey 2 cable, it was a whole new day via modern electronics.

Finally resisting the call of the classic rock bin, SBTRKT's "I Feel Your Pain" fills the listening room with gut pounding bass and a cinemascope stereo image. Wow. By now you've figured out that the Diamond 250s can rock with the best of them. The dogs were still guarding the Lyn Stanley record, so vocal duties fell to Sam Amidon's *Lily-O* album. Again the Diamonds deliver every bit of acoustic guitar nuance and crackly vocal delivery that Amidon can muster in a big, wall-of-sound way with a massive three dimensional sound field.

You've figured out by now that these speakers are a blast to blast, but they play at quiet to modest levels with equal finesse. Brian Eno's obscure *Thursday Afternoon* was reproduced with a delicacy that was as relaxing as a plate full of pot brownies. Keeping the mellow mood going the next step was *The Best of Burt Bacharach*. I felt like I was transported back to the Playboy mansion in the '60s, needing only a smoking jacket, a Pepsi, and a few buxom blondes to round out the fantasy.



FEATURE

Make no mistake, these aren't one-trick ponies. No matter what you enjoy listening to, the Diamonds will bring you a lot of listening pleasure. With plenty of low end frequency extension along with enough dynamic range to play the toughest tracks and keep it together, they are speakers you can build an awesome system around.

Techie stuff

You know from the beginning of this review that I pretty much confirmed the maximum SPL of 110dB on these babies. Check. Wharfedale claims a -6dB LF point of 32Hz, and measuring bass output with my iPhone's SPL meter and the *Stereophile Test CD*, I can indeed corroborate that spec. With some careful room placement taking advantage of room gain, you should be able to get solid bass at this point, though it drops off pretty quickly after this.

Thanks to an 89dB sensitivity rating, it doesn't take a ton of power to rock out. 35–50 watts per channel will make more than enough noise for most apartments and modest-sized living rooms. Double that if you have a larger listening room or really need to party hearty.

Setup is quick and easy. Only weighing in at 65 pounds easy, if you aren't man enough to move them around, you don't deserve to own 'em in the first place. *(continued)*

FEATURE

In my 15 x 24 foot room on the short wall, they produced the best balance of bass reinforcement and upper bass clarity about five feet out from the rear wall about eight feet apart, but your situation will probably be a little bit different. Thanks to their fairly wide dispersion, they sound decent, even thrown in the room with compromised positioning, but will sound their best with about 20 minutes' worth of fussing if you have a friend to move the speakers while you concentrate, maybe an hour if you have to move and repeat by yourself. With decent HF output, I didn't find toe-in necessary; however, if your room necessitates moving the speakers a bit further apart, by all means investigate this option.

The entire line of Wharfedale speakers offer tremendous performance and value, but the top of the range Diamond 250s are pretty special. Superlative sonics and aesthetics in a very affordable package makes for a great combination. Enthusiastically recommended! ●

www.wharfedale.co.uk
(factory)

www.musicdirect.com
(US Distributor)



Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



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

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

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

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

echo)))
audio

www.echohifi.com 888.248.echo

Anker SoundCore Bluetooth Speaker

\$35.00 www.anker.com



Music lovers often have a mobile device laden with favorite tunes close at hand. Granted, headphones or earbuds deliver a little solitude, but sometimes a shared music experience is needed, and the tiny Anker SoundCore Bluetooth speaker proves an excellent portable option, only setting you back \$35.

Available in red, black and blue, the SoundCore is a model of simplicity. Buttons embedded in the top of the unit control volume, power,

Bluetooth connectivity and play/pause and have embossed symbols to make for easy reading in low light situations. A mini-jack audio input and micro USB port for charging grace the side with a tiny blue LED indicating power status. Best of all – it delivers on the promised 24-hour battery life, an all important spec in the world of portable electronics. A full charge takes about five. Setup and connectivity take a few minutes, and thanks to the fact that it conforms to USB 4.0

specs, your device can be up to 60 feet away if the view is unobstructed. Not bad.

How does the SoundCore, well, *sound*? First, it's important to frame expectations. At a mere 35 bucks, SoundCore is not an audiophile device, nor is it trying to be. If you have appropriate expectations of its performance, you will likely be surprised by the sound – and volume – barking from this tiny audio Chihuahua. Convenience is the SoundCore's top design

feature, but the sound is pretty impressive for such a modest speaker. Mids and highs offer nice clarity and responsiveness. Bass response, as expected, is not very robust in such a small enclosure. However, what's there is well rendered.

With a lot of tech in a tiny space, the SoundCore can satisfy a musical craving no matter where you might be. Simply toss it in a suitcase, backpack, or coat pocket and you are ready to rock anytime.

NEW

M O O N | 780D

Being moved by the emotional power of music is a feeling one must experience to fully comprehend. The **Evolution 780D** Streaming DAC redefines this experience by elevating it to an all new level. How? Through the use of a fully balanced dual-mono design that can decode virtually all digital audio formats (DSD256 and 32-bit PCM) plus our MiND network player. The new **780D** is the finest streaming DAC ever created, unleashing dynamics and detail that you never thought existed in your music. The ultimate expression for digital music playback.

You owe it to yourself to test-drive the **780D**.


M O O N
simaudio.com



MUSICAL ECSTASY

TONE STYLE

Bald Eagle Skull Shaver LCD

\$119 www.skullshaver.com

Seems that shavers are as polarized as audiophiles. Some like razors, while others insist on going electric. Should you be of the latter persuasion, and needing ongoing head maintenance, the Skull Shaver Bald Eagle comes highly recommended from more than one of our readers sporting the smooth look. And ladies, lest you think we are being sexist and not considering your needs, Skull Shaver does make a pink model named the butterfly. We can not attest personally to the effectiveness of this device however.



Eunique Jean'ster and Ride'ster Jeans

\$350 and \$450, respectively www.eunique.us

Like many of our readers who enjoy two-wheel travel, head honcho at Manley Labs, Eve Anna Manley has taken outerwear to the next level and has embarked on a new venture to import Bolid'ster jeans made from Armalith. For those not familiar with this fabric, it is five times more abrasion-resistant and 2.5 times stronger than Kevlar. According to their website, this material can be used for bulletproof gear as well as tethering spacecraft.

As you know, a long day riding can lead to perspiration, and the high performance Armalith does not lose its strength in the presence of intense UV or when washed, so they should stand up well regardless of what you dish out on the road or zooming through your favorite watering hole on a dirt bike. Not to mention, they will still look great when you hop off your bike and head into the local pub for some chow.

Stylish and useful in case you end up going over the handlebars, these could come in handy should you be inadvertently in harm's way at your local 7-Eleven or movie theater. Either way, leave it to Ms. Manley to come up with a great way to cover your butt.



DJ Pillows

\$5.99 www.pillowking.co

What better way to show your love for your vinyls than a few pillows with the iconic Technics deck silk-screened on them? For \$5.99 these are really fun, and for those of you who are more on the performing side of the desk, Pillow King has equally hip drum machine pillows. How awesome is that?



Hot Wheels Yellow Submarine

\$69.95 www.mattel.com

Whether you're a Beatles fanatic or love collecting Hot Wheels, here is something that is sure to provide hours of fun – or spend lots of time up on the shelf in the shrinkwrap with your other toys that you merely collect and don't use. Either way, this one joins the other six toys released to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the song.

Watch for the full line of Yellow Submarine toys to hit Wal-Mart and Amazon by the time you read this. Be sure to buy two!



Appearances can be deceptive.



Rega products are elegantly simple in appearance. Deceptively so, in fact. Everything is straightforward to setup, easy to use and utterly consistent in performance.

Yet underneath that apparent simplicity lies some of the most radical thinking, advanced engineering and innovative materials development you'll find anywhere.

Based on 40 years of continuous research and unwavering commitment to UK manufacturing, everything Rega does is there for one reason alone.

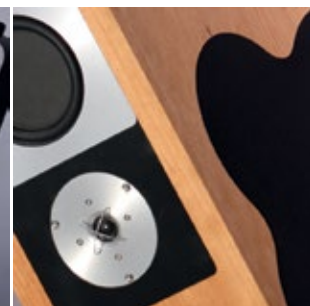
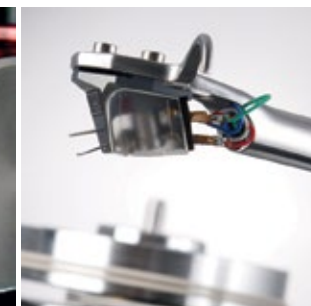
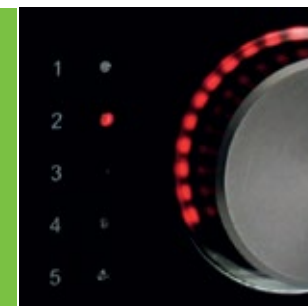
Quite simply, if it doesn't sound better, it doesn't happen. (If it does sound better, but is considered 'impossible,' they'll figure out how to do it anyway. There's a very good reason the company's named Rega Research).

Rega's view is that hifi's simply a tool for listening to your music.

So we think you'll quickly forget all about the technology. But we're 100% sure you'll remember the performance.



Record Decks
CD Players
DACs
Amplifiers
Loudspeakers



regal



The Sound Organisation • facebook.com/TheSoundOrganisation
• call: 972.234.0182 • email: info@soundorg.com • website: soundorg.com

Exclusive US distributors of : Certon Systems • Chord Company • Dali • PMC • Quadraspire • Rega • Wilson Benesch



Muzo Cobblestone

\$59.00 www.muzohifi.com

If you have a pair of powered speakers with an analog line in, adding a Muzo Cobblestone makes for a perfect wireless solution. We set ours up in about five minutes. You can stream via a number of music services or just stream from a UPnP server, wired or wirelessly.

Muzo tells us that you can set this up via their app and configure multiple Cobblestones throughout your home for multi-zone audio with ease controlled via your smart device. We've got a couple more on order on Amazon to see how well this works, so watch for

a full review in The Audiophile Apartment to see what we find out.

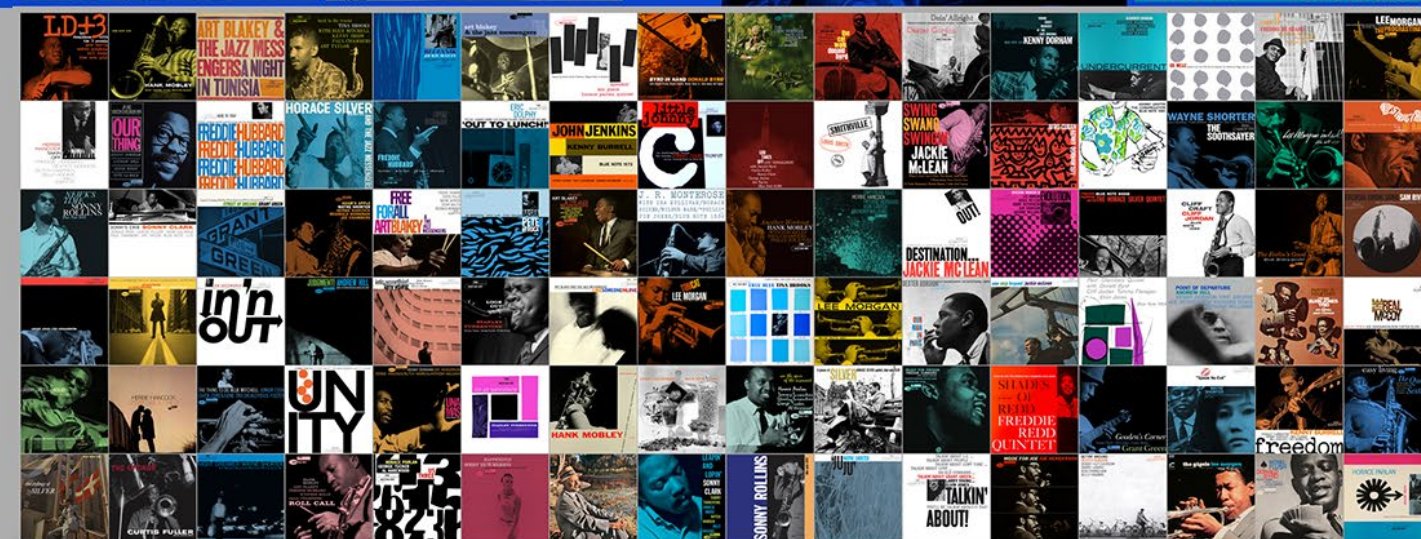
So far, the sound quality of the Muzo is way beyond what you'd ever expect for 59 bucks. How about better than any of the Sonos stuff? Yep, it's that good. And if the multi room thing works as promised, that's a savings on something that would set you back thousands of dollars anywhere else.

And, it's cuter than cute, with a sand dollar shape that easily fits in any décor. Combine that with Apple-like packaging and you've got a winner.

give thyself



WWW.MUSICMATTERSJAZZ.COM



BLUE NOTE The Definitive 45 rpm Reissue Series
You listen, you look, you're there...

Internal processing 5,6 MHz, 72 bits
Formats PCM 24 bits
up to 384 kHz, DXD, DSD 2x



Nagra HD DAC converter. High definition, unlimited emotion!

It is time to rediscover the pleasure of listening to music,
whatever the format, from red-book CD to DSD 2x.
Extensive connectivity possibilities, from SPDIF to proprietary
USB inputs. Output volume control, inter-stage Nagra transformers,
vacuum tube output stage, state-of-the-art headphone amplifier.

NAGRA
Swiss Made

TONE STYLE

Star Trek Communicator Net Phone

\$19.95 www.amazon.com

Where else would you go for a
Star Trek Communicator *but*
Amazon? I suspect you can
even get dilithium crystals there, too. For
just under twenty bucks, the audio quality
is surprisingly good and this looks like a
great gift for that special nerd in your life.



AUDIOPHILE PRESSINGS

By Jeff Dorgay



Adam and the Ants

Kings of the Wild Frontier
Sony Legacy, 180g LP + 2CD +
DVD deluxe box set

We know what you're thinking: 120 bucks for Adam and the Ants? Only if you have to have every molecule of information surrounding this quirky bit of new wavery. In addition to a gold LP that sounds like it was sourced from a cassette tape, the remastered gold CD rivals the sound of original LP. But you never bought an Adam and the Ants record for the damn soundstage, did you? Honestly, the CD sounds very good, with dynamics not present on the original 1A pressing we have on hand. Want a smoother listening experience? You can probably find an LP copy in your local record store for a few dollars. Do you want the goodies? Bend over and put your credit card down for this deluxe box.

All kidding aside, the level of care paid to each facet of this special Legacy edition is exceptional in every way. Where most fancy reissues add some postcards and related paraphernalia, their quality often borders on lackluster. Not here. Everything inside this set has been reproduced in excruciating detail, right down to the application for the Adam and the Ants official fan club and handful of cool stickers.

As mentioned above, the remastered CD sounds great. But the additional discs that offer plenty of booty put it all over the top. The second CD features the band's April 1981 performance at Chicago's Park West while the DVD contains the videos for "Kings of the Wild Frontier," "Dog Eat Dog," and "Antmusic" that ruled MTV for a few months during Reagan's first term. Several BBC performances and a 1981 Tokyo concert offer further insights into touring exploits, a theme rounded out by *Ant Invasion*, a documentary of the ensemble's first US jaunt.

If that's not enough for the Ant people in our audience, a 36-page booklet written by the Antmeister himself tells the proverbial "Story of the Album"—an in-depth discussion of the creative process behind this Grammy-nominated classic as well as of the struggles leading up to record's finish, plus personalized impressions of the first US tour. It's more than enough persuasion to turn off Eric Clapton and turn up Adam and the Ants.



Joe Jackson

Night and Day and *Look Sharp!*
Intervention Records, 180g LP

As you slide the new pressings of these Joe Jackson staples out of their high-gloss gatefold jackets, it becomes obvious Intervention Records proprietor Shane Buettner learned his craft from the best. These sleeves are flat-out gorgeous and printed by the same team responsible for Music Matters' Blue Note reissues. When people talk about the tactile experience vinyl offers, this is what they mean. If only all record jackets looked so inviting to hold.



Dropping the stylus on the first cut of the Day Side of *Night and Day* proves the sonics haven't been forgotten, either. The recording quality is phenomenal, matching the caliber of the wrapper. In this era of countless analog reissues, it's refreshing to hear an album treated with such care. Flipping back to the Night Side feels equally refreshing. The big bass drum that opens "Another World" is rife with texture and decay—welcoming characteristics that pervade the entire record. Going back to an original A&M LP as well as a former go-to pressing, the old MoFi version, confirms this amount of weight has never been present. The improvement adds another enticing dimension to the 1982 rock classic, fleshing it out like never before.

Look Sharp! also sounds greatly improved, yet a bit of high-frequency crispiness lurks here and there. Buettner says these records were produced from "1/2-inch safety copies of the original masters" and mastered by Kevin Gray at Cohearent Audio. By comparison, the original version of *Look Sharp!* comes on like an early Todd Rundgren album. There, most of the life is squashed out of the catchy tunes, whereas the Intervention pressing teems with life and dynamics, making for a major upgrade.

Leaving nothing to chance, the single sleeve jacket for *Look Sharp!* is even debossed as an homage to the original UK pressing. If you've been seeking to revisit a couple of new-wave gems, or simply craving to hear and see why vinyl is worth all the fuss and then some, these two LPs belong in your collection.

When super size won't do.

Getting great sound in a smaller space requires extra placement and planning. Large speakers usually won't do, components often need to be stealthier and neighbors in close proximity might not appreciate your need to rock out at all hours of the day and night.

We're here to help those living in smaller spaces find solutions that will keep smiles on everyone's faces.

Check out our website, and join our growing community on Facebook.



The Audiophile Apartment.
Sonic solutions for small and stylish spaces.

AudiophileApartment.com Facebook.com/AudiophileApartment

SON OF A GUN

There is no mistaking the lineage of the conrad-johnson

ET5 line-stage. It closely mimics the circuitry and parts

quality of conrad-johnson's big gun - the GAT preampli-

fier. Same zero-feedback audio circuit, though without

the dual- mono layout. Same regulated power supply

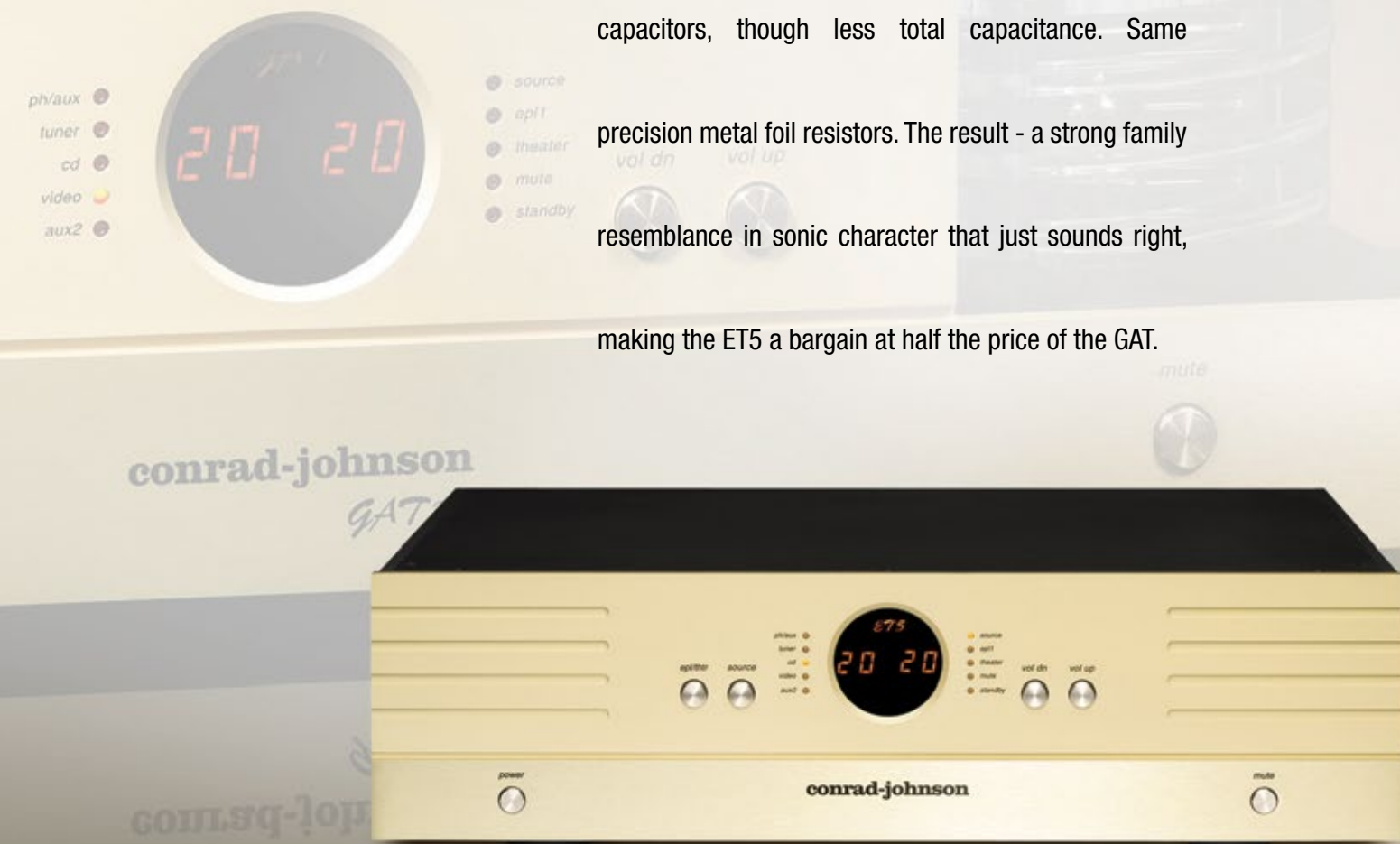
circuit, but shared between the channels. Same CJD

capacitors, though less total capacitance. Same

precision metal foil resistors. The result - a strong family

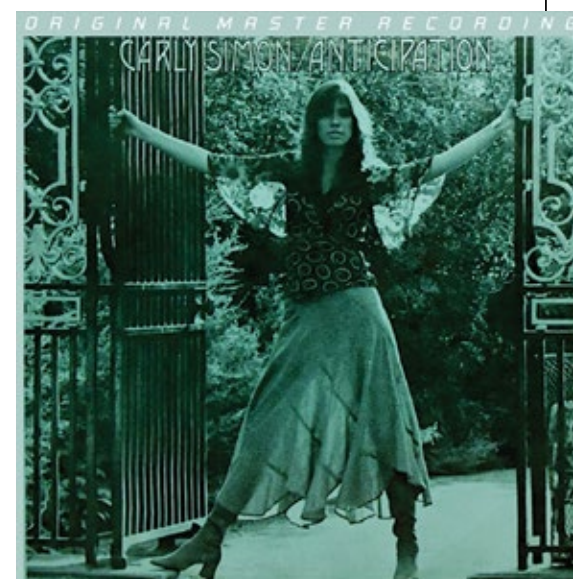
resemblance in sonic character that just sounds right,

making the ET5 a bargain at half the price of the GAT.



conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

2800K Dorr Ave • Fairfax, VA 22031 • phone: 703-698-8581, fax: 703-560-5360 • www.conradjohnson.com



Carly Simon

No Secrets and *Anticipation*

Mobile Fidelity, SACD

While fewer and fewer new SACD players get made with each passing year, Mobile Fidelity should not only be commended for continuing to support the format but congratulated for doing such outstanding work with SACD releases. If Sony had done half as good a job, SACD would likely be with us as a major format. All of which brings us to Mobile Fidelity's latest two releases from 70s crooner Carly Simon.

Played through our reference dCS player, both discs sound so clean and clear, they rank miles ahead of the early LPs we've on hand for comparison. The standard-issue CDs and Tidal are rubbish, too. You need to go no further than Simon's biggest hit, "You're So Vain," to hear the magic MoFi performs here. Mick Jagger's voice has always been relatively lost in the mix. Now, he's right there in the room and in his own space. The remainder of *No Secrets* is equally captivating, and those that have listened to the record over the years will delight in the subtle bits they either haven't heard or heard so distinctly before. The added clarity also does more justice to Simon's underrated vocal abilities.

The singer's prior release, *Anticipation*, proves equally enjoyable even though the upper-most register remains somewhat flat. Cymbals still lack punch, yet the rest of the drum kit now sounds much more dynamic than on any of the originals. Perhaps that 45-year-old master tape just doesn't have any more life left in it. And, as with the *No Secrets* SACD, a major midrange veil has been lifted. The harmonies boast a more lifelike quality and are more easily discernible, where on CD, it all turns to mush. Another winner from Mobile Fidelity. ●

FEATURE

Quad PA-One Headphone Amplifier

THE BEST OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

By Rob Johnson



FEATURE

Paging through Ken Kessler's book, *Quad: The Closest Approach*, it's hard not to respect a company like Quad with such a long lineage of coveted audio gear. Quad invokes images of electrostatic speakers like the famous ESL57 and classic tube amplifiers in many audiophiles' minds, and Quad has earned its place among the pivotal companies that have defined high-end audio, bringing great sound to a dedicated fan base.

Founded in the UK by Peter Walker in 1936, Quad is owned today by the International Audio Group, based in the UK with production facilities in Shenzhen, China. Quad's newest offering, the PA-One, embraces the growing segment of headphone enthusiasts, combining classic Quad styling with modern updates and functionality. The PA-One is a headphone amplifier that features an integral 24/192 DAC and can also be used as a cracking linestage.

FEATURE



More than meets the eye

The PA-One's striking, yet compact appearance pays homage to the famous Quad II valve amplifier, and its Lancaster Grey chassis should be at home in any décor, perhaps mated to a vintage or current Quad power amplifier. We will be following up on that in a future issue, but for now, let's concentrate on the headphone and DAC functionality.

Though the three components of the PA-One are combined in a compact (7 x 11.2 x 7 inch) chassis, it does require AC power and is not a portable component in the sense of something battery powered. The small footprint makes it perfect for a desk, audio rack, or anywhere

else that space is at a premium. Just be sure to leave a little room for the valves to breathe.

Shielded within a ventilated cage giving said valves plenty of breathing room, the 6LS7, 6SN7 and EZ81 tube complement provides a familiar, delicate glow. As any valve gear owner knows, they can get really hot, and the protective cage protects prying noses and fingers from risk of accidental burn. All of the circuitry is hidden underneath the chassis, physically shielded from each other. The headphone section features a half-watt (at 32 ohms) on tap and drove my reference Sennhesier HD650 and Audeze LCD-X headphones with ease. *(continued)*



Introducing PRESTIGE[™] SERIES

Respect for the original source.

For over 30 years, Paradigm has set the standard for innovation and technology in loudspeaker manufacturing. The new Prestige[™] Series builds on this history by combining new technologies with smart engineering, for astonishing performance at an incredible value. And Prestige[™] is designed and crafted right here in our Canadian facility.

Visit paradigm.com to find your local Authorized Paradigm Dealer.



Prestige 75i shown

Paradigm



HPA-1

- All Discrete
- Class A Design
- Pass Labs Sound
- Smaller Package



Ins and Outs

The rear of the unit sports a balanced XLR line level input as well as an RCA line in, allowing you to connect two line level sources to the PA-One. Should you be using the PA-One as a line level preamplifier, there is one set of RCA outputs, so choose your amplifier accordingly.

For digital inputs, the Quad offers choices including USB, optical and SPDIF coax. Should the PA-One owner choose to use the unit as a preamplifier, a set of RCA outputs is also included. The three digital inputs (coax, optical and USB) should accommodate most digital users. Utilizing the USB input requires a few extra steps. Quad in-

cludes a mini-CD with USB drivers for Windows and Apple computers. After software installation, and a few step-by-step instructions illustrated in the PA-One manual, the Quad appears among options in the computer's sound settings. The front of the PA-One is a marvel of simplicity, with a conveniently placed balance slider located underneath the large volume control. A single toggle controls high or low impedance output, (above or below 100 ohms in this case), and the rest of the inputs are selectable by three buttons. Finally, a pair of 1/4" headphone outputs allows two users to enjoy the PA-One's sound at the same time. For headphones or earbuds with mini-jack only, an adapter is needed. *(continued)*

FEATURE

A great companion

Admittedly, I prefer sound to the slightly warm side of neutral – especially when using headphones. The Quad delivers smooth sound that makes possible hours of listening, at reasonable volume levels, without fatigue. No matter which headphones or IEMs are used to enjoy music through the Quad, the PA-One has the power and impedance options to deliver plenty of oomph, detail, and musicality.

While the soundstage is not as wide and airy as a few more expensive headphone amps I've encountered, instruments are well separated and vocals deliver the power and emotive presence of the vocalist. A beguiling ease and organic quality to the audio presentation remains evident in the Quad's voicing regardless of musical source, yet the PA-One doesn't over-embellish either, striking a great balance. Tracks like Massive Attack's "Angel" which commands the listener's attention from the get-go with its low frequency opening notes, could benefit from a little more heft. On the other hand, for long listening sessions, not having the eardrums used as punching bags remains a welcome voicing choice.

The PA-One accepts high resolution format up to 24 bit/192kHz. There's no DSD capability, but then again, many listeners still have the bulk of their audio collection as CD-quality 16/44.1 or prefer streaming options from a computer, NAS, or a service like Tidal, so this shouldn't be an issue for most listeners.

Putting the Quad through its paces with a plethora of vocally driven



FEATURE

tunes by k.d. lang, Lana Del Ray, Cat Power, Chris Isaac, Enya, Jeff Buckley, Adele, Leonard Cohen and others, the Quad's smoothness provides the performances with a very beguiling and addictive quality. The PA-One does a stellar job of presenting the entire musical picture with vocalists upfront. It's easy to get drawn into the "just one more song" syndrome, and suddenly you realize several hours have evaporated.

Big Iron

Connected to a conventional two channel system, the PA-One serves as a great preamplifier. The sonic characteristics of the headphone amplifier remain true through an external amp and speakers with a slightly warm character. The Quad's soundstaging, transparency, resolution of ambient cues, and bass characteristics cannot match that of more expensive, dedicated preamps, but this is an excellent place to build a very enjoyable two channel system, as your needs expand.

At \$1,799 Quad's latest offering serves up major sound and value. And considering you're getting a great pre-amp and highly competent DAC all on one chassis for this price, it's an amazing value. However, it's important to reiterate all its owner receives in capability and value. I very much enjoyed time with the PA-One and would place it on a personal list of headphone amplifiers I could enjoy daily. If you are seeking a component with great sound and a lot of value under the hood, do yourself a favor and head to your local Quad dealer for an audition. ●

Quad PA-One Headphone Amplifier
\$1,799
www.quad.com

FEATURE

The Audioengine HD6

THE BEST AUDIO SNACK TREAT

By Jeff Dorgay



FEATURE



Powered monitor speakers have been around for decades in recording studios and, to some extent, in the consumer market with companies like Meridan and Linn offering world class, powered, floor standing speaker systems with an equally world-class price tag. Audioengine burst on the scene about nine years ago with small, high quality powered speakers that looked great, sounded great and best of all, were very affordable.

Much like comparing the original Porsche 911 to a current model, Audioengine has pursued a path of steady refinement, rather than making radical change with every new product they produce. And like *Star Wars*, they didn't name their first product the Audioengine 1, but the Audio Engine 5. Comparing the current HD6 pictured here to the original Audioengine 5s that are still rocking out in a good friend's garage without bother, the lineage is easy to see, and after a brief listen to refresh my memory, the Audioengine 5 still stands up (and rocks out). That's the sign of a great company, and the success that they've enjoyed is no accident.

FEATURE

Unlike the Porsche 911, the price of the original Audioengine 5 – now the 5+ – has only gone up in price to \$399, but the HD6 is now the top offering in their product lineup, where they only had one speaker before. The new HD6 you see here is now \$749, and while they still produce the same 50 watts per channel as the 5+, the HD6 offers a built-in 24/192 DAC and multiple streaming options. Considering you used to have to buy a separate Audioengine Bluetooth adaptor for \$149 and you still didn't have a DAC, adding a great DAC and higher quality everything into one box is pretty awesome for the price. I dare you to find a combination of separates that offer this much for anywhere near the price.

The new speakers feature upgraded drivers with a slightly larger 5.5 inch Kevlar-coned woofer where the 5+ has a 5-inch unit, and when listening to both side-by-side, you can not only hear a touch more bass grunt from the HD6, but throughout the range, there is a level of tonal refinement that you don't notice so much in the originals until you hear the new speaker, and it still underlines what a tremendous value the 5+ still is, if you don't need a built in, streaming DAC. *(continued)*

FEATURE

Subliminal

Much as I love the HD6, adding Audioengine's S8B powered subwoofer really makes for an unbelievably good compact system, whether out in a room, audiophile style, with the HD6s up on stands (the more massive the better) on a desktop with your computer, or my favorite combination: in the bedroom as a high performance 2.1 system for your television.

With the S8B available in white, it's incredibly easy to tuck away in the corner, adjust the controls appropriately for a seamless blend and give your favorite action movie the punch it deserves. Unfortunately the HD6s are not available in white, this would be a nice touch for bedroom and bathroom use. Marketing department, are you listening?

Color notwithstanding, the wood finish our review samples came in is outstanding. This is another area in which Audioengine has stepped up the game, getting better all the time. These little speakers look a lot like something you might expect from a British company that's been doing this kind of thing for decades!

Tonally Scrumptious

If you want all the technical minutiae, click here (<http://audioengineusa.com/Store/HD6-CHR-Powered-Speakers>), but the minute you play some music you won't care. The first generation speakers are fantastic, but the current models are a revelation. Streaming through a wide range of known favorite tracks on Tidal, I am the most impressed with the wide dynamic range, solid bass response and lack of grain these small speakers present. Having sampled a number of powered, wireless speakers from other manufacturers, some costing twice as much, the HD6 provides some of the best audio performance I've experienced.



FEATURE

Good as streaming tracks from your tablet or phone is, stepping up to a direct connection via the optical digital input is even better. Connecting this way in my office via Mac Mini makes it easy to compare. You'll notice it most on solo vocalists or acoustic tracks. Listening to Al DiMeola's *Diabolic Inventions and Seduction for Solo Guitar Vol. 1*, the direct input captures more of this guitar master's fingerwork on the fretboard than when streaming. Not only is the presentation clearer, there is more air around where the notes begin and end. Ditto for solo vocals. Johnny Cash's solo work is always a go-to, and again, his voice sounds bigger and scarier through the direct input.

Saving the best for last: analog. Should you be a music lover with a turntable to integrate, the analog input of the HD6 is the perfect solution. Jacking in the new Rega Planar 3/Elys 2 via a Lehmann Black Cube (nearly three times the price of the HD6s, but still awesome) takes these little speakers to an even higher level. And as good of a performance as they muster in a small room, analog through the HD6s on my desktop with the sub tucked under the desk is sublime. It's like the world's largest pair of headphones in a compact space. Spinning Spinning Neuls self titled album turns my tiny office setup into a fishbowl of sound, feeling like the world's biggest pair of headphones!

No matter how you choose to configure your HD6s, these are the best value in compact, high performance powered speakers going. We are very happy to give the folks at Audioengine one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2016. There's no better way to get into high end audio without spending a ton of dough. ●

www.audioengine.com

JAZZ & BLUES

JACK DEJOHNETTE IN MOVEMENT
RAVI COLTRANE MATTHEW GARRISON

ECM



Jack DeJohnette/Ravi Coltrane/ Matthew Garrison

In Movement
ECM, 2LP or CD

The fact that Jack DeJohnette unpacks his versatility on this new trio album shouldn't be a shock to fans that have followed his career. The master drummer with the Windy City origins and Woodstock lifestyle has long made the most of his varied interests. Now 73, he has recalibrated freebop with his Special Edition outfits, churned out steely funk with his Audio-Visualscapes group, and gotten folksy with kora maestro Foday Musa Suso. Along the way, he spent a good chunk of the last three decades bringing a unique eloquence to mainstream jazz with Keith Jarrett and Gary Peacock.

©Photo by Peter Gannushkin



His ability to convincingly glide from heartfelt reflection to frenzied alarm on this, his umpteenth studio date, is simply part of a diverse continuum.

The music on *In Movement* speaks for itself. But this time around, the colleagues DeJohnette throws in with remain key to the narrative. Ravi Coltrane and Matt Garrison are both sons of famous jazz improvisers. Still, there are no foregone conclusions as to how the trio's personality will be shaped by any family legacy. Saxophonist Coltrane long ago sculpted a discrete sound for himself, and electric bassist Garrison (also DeJohnette's godson) boasts the agility and architecture of Jaco Pastorius as much as that of his dad, Jimmy.

When I first saw them in Brooklyn a couple years ago, one of the thoughts that rushed to mind was how singular they came across (credit the choice of electric bass). DeJohnette is always working, and one of his signature traits is the way each of his new groups moves in a substantially different direction than its predecessors. A restless experimentalist, he turns from swing to grooves to abstraction. If you're looking for an example of the latter, don't miss *Made In Chicago*, last year's hook-up with Roscoe Mitchell, Muhal Richard Abrams, and Henry Threadgill. *(continued)*



©Photo by Sandrine Lee

So, variety serves as a building block when it comes to DeJohnette's point of view. He admires ambling a bit as much as he does a forthright gait. The former tack functions as a sub-text of this album, whose title insightfully harks to a Thomas Wolfe quote about Americans being "fixed and certain" only when they're "in movement." In "Two Jimmys," the trio spends time noodling, setting up a contemplative mood rather than iterating a melody. Because they're such impressive players, the extended pulse of Garrison's bass and the drummer's high hat houses enough personality to make the piece valuable. With a slightly Eastern feel, Coltrane links a string of curt phrases with tone and texture rather than thematic logic. Garrison's synths enhance the drone effect, and a slightly eerie outing becomes an

inspired lynchpin between John Coltrane's hymn-like "Alabama" and Miles Davis' sublime "Blue in Green"—two of the record's most reflective pieces.

Investigation and scene-setting are band fortes. Whether searching for the essence of a ballad or establishing a barroom backbeat on a romp through "Serpentine Fire," the players take their time and glance around the territory they're roaming. Coltrane shines on the Earth, Wind & Fire nugget, sniffing out an array of options while dancing through the melody. It's a soprano feature, and the straight horn gets plenty of time on this album. It's also used to shape the delicate moves of "Lydia" and "Blue in Green" (one of two pieces where the drummer forsakes his traps for piano). Yet the apex of equilibrium arrives at the start, when he guides his tenor through "Ala-

bama," his dad's ode to the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four black schoolgirls. With DeJohnette directing via tom-toms and cymbals, the trio captures both loss and sorrow in one heart-wrenching swoop.

Another Trane nod arrives in "Rashied," a soprano/drums flurry that harks to the impact of the master's animated duets with Rashied Ali on 1967's *Interstellar Space* but also conjures such jewels as Anthony Braxton and Max Roach's *Birth & Rebirth*. Its aggression is as formidable as its grace, and as the dust settles after the explosion of ideas and supercharged momentum, it becomes obvious that this group—like past DeJohnette aggregates—is charged with creating a broad set of experiences. They are multi-taskers of the highest order. —**Jim Macnie**



A MASTERPIECE OF DESIGN AND ENGINEERING



Renaissance ESL 15A represents a major evolution in electrostatic design. A 15-inch Curvilinear Line Source (CLS™) XStat™ vacuum-bonded electrostatic transducer with advanced MicroPerf™ stator technology and ultra-rigid AirFrame™ Blade construction provide the heart of this exceptional loudspeaker.

A powerfully dynamic low-frequency experience is rendered with unflinching accuracy and authority courtesy of dual 12-inch low-distortion aluminum cone woofers, each independently powered by a 500-watt Class-D amplifier, and controlled by a 24-Bit Vojtko™ DSP Engine featuring Anthem Room Correction (ARC™) technology. Hear it today at your local dealer.



George Coleman

A Master Speaks
Smoke Sessions, CD

Nothing in the packaging (or publicity) hints at it, but George Coleman's *A Master Speaks*—with Sonny Rollins' preferred bassist Bob Cranshaw binding the quartet and containing a sleek blowing tune called "Sonny's Playground"—might have been designed to attract fans of another veteran tenor giant and NEA Jazz Master. In truth, anyone who values the fine art of tenor saxophone improvising should heed *A Master Speaks*, and not just because Coleman has recorded so little of late. His sound here is luminous.

This is exactly the kind of sterling jazz record that's easy to overlook, with a bunch of well-trod tunes that don't read like much of a set list, starting with "Invitation" and "The Shadow of Your Smile." But from the former's opening bars, it's clear we're in good hands. The rhythm trio sets a lightly bouncing groove even before tenor enters. Coleman has the kind of deep, round, resonant saxophone timbre that comes from minding the shape of every note. As an improviser, he's sure-footed, sounding as if he knows how every phrase will end before he starts it: instant composing with composure. After six-plus decades of manipulating his materials, he knows every idiosyncrasy of reed, mouthpiece, and saxophone pads, and every cranny of extended bebop harmony. With all that knowledge he could just coast, but he's ever-alert. The rhythm section keeps him listening, if only to hear how well they listen to him. Drummer George Coleman, Jr. knows his father's timing well, and how to prod him.

Easy to overlook it might be, but *A Master Speaks* serves up just the kind of music for which some dyed-

in-the-wool jazz fans long. It swings non-stop, is full of fire and grace, and remains so steeped in tradition that allusions to past glories abound. It's not just a matter of artful citations of old tunes. The way Mike LeDonne times and voices his piano chords can suggest to the knowing listener some specific forebear or jazz classic. The trick is to make that allusive phrase sound natural and right even to those who don't catch the reference. Soloing on a 13-minute "Invitation," the pianist quotes the signature lick from "Blues in the Night" in double-time disguise, and then he repeats, modulates, and develops that propulsive germ for 16 bars. Such citations aren't about playing scholarly games, but making informed choices and drawing on the myriad possibilities umpteen old masters have already laid out, along with one's own invention.

The leader walks in the big shoes of the ancestors, too. On a medium-slow "Blues for B.B."—Coleman had played in guitarist King's band way back when—he dredges the deep river bottom, evoking vocal blues inflections and Charlie Parker's blues masterwork "Parker's

Mood" and twirling a spinning-top figure that's a covert quote from "It Might As Well Be Spring." (Guest picker Peter Bernstein shoots a few B.B. stings into his not-overly-busy choruses.) The catchiest original arrives courtesy of LeDonne's midtempo "You'll Never Know What You Mean to Me," whose rhythmic hook dances on one pitch. Once or twice, the Memphis-reared saxophonist pinches and bends notes like a blues harpist.

Other potential listeners who might lend an ear: New-music fans that think old-school players just go through the motions. Coleman's deep commitment to inventing in the moment comes through every time he exhales. —Kevin Whitehead


Pat Metheny

The Unity Sessions
Nonesuch, 2CD

Pat Metheny's ongoing swoop between the blatantly sentimental and keenly aggressive has long charmed certain parts of his audience. Music generalists tend to swoon for the winsome fantasias the guitarist's electro-acoustic outfits created during the last four decades. Jazz fans with a deeper sense of scrutiny are often more engaged by his overtly swinging work, which puts his terrific improv skills upfront. Of course, there some listeners have a yen for each of Metheny's myriad approaches. They're the ones that will embrace this double-disc live set by the Unity Band. Moving from serenity to turmoil, it's custom-built to tickle anyone who appreciates the 61-year-old bandleader's scope.

Making its recorded debut in 2012, the Unity Band proved its versatility from the start. Adept at pushing muso buttons while stretching its emotions towards the cloying side, it nonetheless finds a way of wringing epic excursions from balmy melodies and prog-informed interplay. During the last four decades, Metheny the composer has shown us his prowess at placing a bittersweet vibe in a few of his most eloquent tunes. But they're made a bit richer, and certainly more distinct, by being flecked with other hues as well. From moment to moment, this new album's "Sign of the Season" morphs from lighthearted melancholy to pensive elation. That makes it somewhat unsettling and rather attractive. During this in-studio concert, taken from a feisty performance previously released on DVD, each band member plays a role in enhancing the steady shift of moods.

As an instrumentalist, Metheny is expert at bolstering the ethereal. "Come and See" starts with his harp-like Picasso guitar and lets saxophonist Chris Potter roam on bass clarinet. When the engine of bassist Ben Williams and drummer Antonio Sanchez drops in, we learn it's a vamp tune with a twist. Each soloist bends it a bit, and from the guitarist's liquid pronouncements to the horn player's animation (Potter remains supple yet vigorous at every turn on this album), the performance seems to jet along while somehow floating. The comparatively aggressive "Two Folksongs" does something similar (and did so when Michael Brecker recorded it with Metheny on the latter's terrific *80/81*). While it glows with the leader's acoustic strumming, it also burns with the band's rambunctious interplay.

Metheny's music sounds earthier with a reed player in the band. Potter brings a gravitas to the inherent dolor of "Born" and reminds us of the joy in tearing shit apart on "Roof Dogs" and "Rise Up." For a full two minutes, the group also rips through the fractious "Genealogy," which might be a pithy postcard pointing to the way Ornette Coleman initially influenced the guitarist. (The band also bounces through Patnette's "Police People" from its near-perfect 1985 outing, *Song X*.) Potter's fluency positions him for almost anything. His duet romp with the leader on "Cherokee" serves as a hot snapshot of his blowing skills, the spot on this record where he and Metheny sound like they're having the most fun. Ultimately, the saxophonist is as convincing on a freak-out as he is during the music's most genteel passages.

And indeed, several tender moments arise on *The Unity Sessions*. Metheny's acoustic recital through a medley of past themes functions as one of the most enchanting pieces. Thirteen years ago, he dropped *One Quiet Night*, a boomer's valentine to pop radio. It reminded doubters just how expressive he can be on his own. Here, he ambles through seven originals before subsiding with a "Last Train Home" that puts a lump in your throat. It's the direct opposite of "Go Get It," the closing track and an ornery rampage that suggests this adamant experimentalist won't be abandoning the aggressive stuff any time soon.

The distance between the two items is sizable. But as that signature shock of hair hits its graying phase of life, Metheny's vision becomes more and more commanding. It's now powerful enough to make opposites feel like part of a whole. Unity, no matter how you slice it. — **Jim Macnie**

©Photo by Jimmy Katz





Brad Mehldau Trio

Blues and Ballads

Nonesuch, LP or CD

Brad Mehldau's new trio album might have been called *A Blues and Ballads*—Charlie Parker's "Cheryl" is the only blues of the seven tunes—or perhaps *Blues in Ballads*, since the pianist works bluesy figurations into "These Foolish Things" and Paul McCartney's "My Valentine." Creative mix-and-match remains Mehldau's modus. He minds tiny details that make all the difference—a barely grazed grace note, a sublime clinker buried in a chord, two lone notes harmonized (in very different ways) in a long lean run—as well as big, candelabra gestures. He'll blurt out a smushed-up graceless cluster into an elegant line and make it right. His precise touch lets him foreground and background select notes in a complex run, and he has a keen sense of texture: Knows the value of open space, and of letting notes ring.

©Photo by Michael Wilson



He also improvises with intense focus. On "Cheryl," he keeps relating his solo line back to the melody, one way or another: Covert paraphrase, a similar melodic contour, some tattered remnant of the original. He plays that melody in octaves, with two hands, you might assume—until he starts tossing off held chords on the side.

He's also good at nosing out jazz potential in contemporary pop. "Little Person" is a bitter-sweet Jon Brion movie ballad (from *Synecdoche, New York*) with the composer's characteristically graceful jazz-adjacent harmony, a catchy hook, and bassist Larry Grenadier tolling like stately Percy Heath with the Modern Jazz Quartet. When Mehldau plays a song you know the words to, you can tell he knows them too. His phrasing reflects a vocal line even after he wanders off the melody. At four minutes, that one's the airplay pick. I daresay his right hand sings "My Valentine" better than Sir Paul did. The tune is McCartney in romantic Michel Legrand big-ballad mode. Mehldau anchors it to a Bill Evans-like two-chord vamp, ever mutating. There's a marvelous (tiny) moment a minute or so in, before the first time into bridge, when amidst the gossamer melodizing the pianist quietly slips in an uncouth high note, quickly redeemed when it's revealed to be the start of a passing phrase one octave up. It's a little window into the games he plays. *(continued)*



©Photo by Michael Wilson

There's also one more (mostly) McCartney song and big movie ballad (from *A Hard Day's Night*), "And I Love Her," where Mehldau makes pivotal use of the four-note signature riff George Harrison cooked up. This number—one of three topping nine minutes—gets a bluesy rideout, where the pianist's Keith Jarrett influence comes out: The rolling in the river. But his grooving is never absent-minded.

Grenadier and drummer Jeff Ballard, at the boss' service, keep their textures transparent, so as not to block any piano frequencies. Bass volume doesn't compete with piano. The drummer goes light on the cymbal wash, and can keep a backbeat firm without walloping. The pair remains ever-sensitive to the

pianist's sudden shifts. I miss them when Mehldau goes off on romantic rubato solo flights mid-performance—though he may use those breaks to alter the mood.

The other selections are less unusual but get no less attention. "Since I Fell for You" has tinges of gospel cadences and, momentarily, chrome-plated Professor Longhair chords. The way Mehldau frames and embellishes the melody on a bossa-fied "I Concentrate on You" functions as a primer on his gifts: The hesitations, the constantly readjusted dynamics and changes in register, the way he'll surround a simple phrase with a coiled-snake arpeggio or a smoky haze, the way he gives everything time to breathe when it would be so easy to overplay. —**Kevin Whitehead**


2015
NEW
PRODUCT

aurender

REFERENCE MUSIC SYSTEMS

N100H Caching Network Music Player

- 2TB internal storage
- 120GB SSD for caching playback
- Cached playback of internal and NAS music files
- Clean USB audio class 2.0 output
- Full linear power supply
- Machined aluminum case; 3.0 inch AMOLED display
- Gigabit Ethernet LAN Port for Network Connectivity
- Aurender Conductor App controls a variety of modes, including artist name, song title, etc, including TIDAL lossless streaming

Aurender App Aurender comes with a dedicated Aurender Conductor App, hailed by reviewers worldwide, which has been specially tuned for performance and convenience. The Aurender iPad and Android app has been developed with a huge music database in mind and exceptionally fast browsing/searching of your favorite music. It's very intuitive and easy to use.

TIDAL Enjoy 25 million lossless CD quality music tracks with the world's best sounding Music Server. All Aurender Servers and Players support the TIDAL service fully. You can easily play music from your NAS, on Aurender's HDD or music from the TIDAL service using the same app.



©Photo by Rob Lowell

Imagine being at the bow of a 30-foot whaleboat with one goal: Heaving a harpoon into the beast and taking command of its last moments. One good slap of that tail and your hunting cohort would be on its way to Davy Jones' locker. Now imagine sitting in front of Albert Ayler's quartet—revered for the clout of its holy shriek and often deemed one of jazz's most fiercely joyous outfits. One proper pique of frenzy on, say, "Universal Indians" could be a heart-stopper, sending you and your nightclub cohort to St Peter's golden gates.



Brooklyn Blowhards

Brooklyn Blowhards
Littleimusic, LP or CD

Connecting the dots between these two hypothetical experiences probably isn't on the minds of many musicians. But as century-old sea shanties entwine with raucous free-jazz nuggets of the 60s on the debut by this intriguing New York outfit, you realize Blowhard boss Jeff Lederer likely spent a chunk of time mulling over such scenarios.

A fan of the way collective voices can align towards a common goal (he previously reworked the trance-like reveries of Shaker "vision" tunes), saxophonist Lederer is also smitten with the work songs of seafarers. Classics like "Haul on the Bowline" and "Shallow Brown"—originated while sailors went about their rigorous daily duties—set up a rhythm and milk a groove. Call 'em the field

hollers of the ocean. Known for his scholarship in all things Ayler (2012's *Sunwatcher* serves as stop one when acquainting yourself with his lyrical roar), Lederer built the Blowhards to marry two seemingly disparate interests. As the brays and booms of each realm spill into each other during this 14-song program, parallels continually reveal themselves.

The octet's book is full of frolic. The sing-along nature of Ayler's themes help buoy the red-zone wail he and his trumpeter brother Donald often brought to their performances in the mid-60s. Sometimes, it's hard to tell if their emotionally rich mix waxes melancholy or beams with elation. Regardless, the melodies are all earworms with repetitive designs that make them distant cousins

of the shanties Lederer has revamped. When you hear the traditional "Santy Anno" sitting a couple of tracks away from Ayler's "Heavenly Home," the similarities are hard to miss. The Blowhards smear the particulars of each until the blend becomes unique. With its splashy rise-and-fall design, the traditional "Black Ball Line" could easily be mistaken for an Ayler original.

The group's instrumentation lends itself towards full-throated howls, and the squad's verve gooses the material. The reeds of Lederer and Petr Cancura, the brass of trombonist Brian Drye and cornetist Kirk Knuffke, the wheezing keyboards of accordionist Art Bailey—over and over again, they fuel the kind of shared shout that harks to the bluster of a ship-bound crew on its third month at sea. (*continued*)



oppo Pocket Power.

We took the power of our award-winning HA-1 headphone amplifier, and shrank it down into a stylish and portable pocket-sized design that's perfect for great listening on the go. With the mobile version of the same DAC chip as its big brother, a hybrid class AB amplifier, and a clear signal path, the HA-2 turns your smartphone or other device into a high performance digital audio player capable of 384 kHz 32-bit PCM and DSD256. Visit us at oppodigital.com today to learn more about our tiny audio titan.



HA-2 Portable
Headphone
Amplifier
\$299

   @oppodigital

OPPO Digital, Inc. | www.oppodigital.com | Menlo Park, CA

MUSIC

Crucial, too, is the pound-along percussion of oversized drums, chains, bells, and “chum bucket”—a massive pail that usually holds fish remains to be dumped overboard in hopes of luring a more valuable catch. In concert, the Blowhards can sound like a parade band run amuck on the docks: All martial grooves, drunken swagger, and blaring horns.

A couple of left turns widen the program's scope. When vocalist Mary LaRose arrives to front the band on Ayler's “Island Harvest,” she brings the original's droll philosophy and Caribbean sashay to the fore. And Gary Lucas' National steel guitar chimes in nicely as LaRose pines away during a gritty spin on the 1800s lament “Shenandoah.” With a signature YouTube promo that references Melville's *Moby Dick* texts about the “universal cannibalism” and “eternal war” of life below the sea, Lederer's experiment could perhaps have placed its bets on nothing but swells and storms. That's not the case.

From his heartfelt soprano lines on “Dancing Flowers” to Knuffke's plaintive opening of “Santy Anno,” a reflective side emerges amidst the action as well. (In 1970, after years of animated music-making, Ayler's body was found floating off a Brooklyn pier not far from where several of the Blowhards reside.) Ultimately, this impressive date is defined by poignancy as much as it is by pandemonium. —**Jim Macnie**

©Photo by Rob Lowell



FEATURE

A Mini Miracle from Totem Acoustics

By Mark Marcantonio



FEATURE

The concept of mating a pair of small speakers to a subwoofer for room-filling sound with a modest footprint has been around for a long time and it caught my attention briefly in the late 1970s. The juiced high end and boomy bass quickly became irritating and I was soon back to those big bookshelf speakers that made me happy in the first place. But a lot has changed since then, and the developments in driver, cabinet and crossover technology, along with the emphasis on desktop and small space audio, make this a concept worth revisiting.

Case in point: Canada's Totem Acoustics has been working magic with small monitor speakers for over two decades now, continually impressing audio enthusiasts with great sound at shows around the world. My journey with Totem began about ten years ago with their Dreamcatchers. That diminutive cabinet sporting only a four-inch woofer and one-inch tweeter had major dynamic punch and incredible imaging ability. Ten years later, Totem's Kin Mini with matching Mini Sub takes advantage of everything they've learned since then. These are major fun!

FEATURE

Serious upgrades

The KIN Mini is a true multi-purpose speaker, working well on a bookshelf, mantle, desk or anywhere else space is limited. The only rule is to give them at least three inches from the back wall for best results. With a few feet of left to right KIN Minis make excellent desk warriors between your monitor or laptop. With the frequency absorbing feet in place, the \$500/pair KIN Mini stands 9 inches tall, 5 inches wide, and 6 inches deep at the base with grills on. The sloped front face leaves the top just 5.5 inches deep and they are available in satin black or white. While not quite as stunning as a gloss white speaker, the matte finish is much more practical on the desktop where food, toys and Sharpies can be flying – they are easy to keep looking spiffy.

The .75-inch soft dome tweeter provides a smoother top end than the metal dome of those Dreamcatchers, yet the KIN retains the open treble response I've come to expect from Totem. The piano from Fourplay's title track "Elixir" offers plenty of extension without harsh artifacts. Burt Bacharach's "This Guy's in Love with You" maintains its easy tone. Smooth is the word and the KIN has a level of refinement associated with a much more expensive speaker, but then Totem has been making this magic for some time.



FEATURE

Enter the Mini Sub

Without a subwoofer the bass output of the KIN Minis drops off quickly around 90 Hz. This isn't as bothersome on a desktop, but the \$500 matching KIN Mini Sub is the secret sauce, making this threesome a full range system. Measuring only 9.5 x 9.5 X 7.75 inches, with 110 watts on tap, the KIN Mini Sub stealthily has a claimed LF limit of 32Hz. This pint-sized dynamo had no problem filling my 13x18 foot family room with plenty of thunder while watching Kurt Russell in *Mean Season*. The high excursion 6-inch driver truly belies its size, and hiding it under your desk and letting it rip turns you into the guy in the Maxell poster.

In the end, a good subwoofer blends and disappears, and the KIN Mini Sub does this exceptionally well. *(continued)*



STOP Fake Auto Bias

Most music lovers crave a tube amplifier but are overwhelmed by the task of biasing output tubes. So they buy an amp they think is “auto bias” when most are actually **cathode bias**: An inexpensive design usually found in **budget guitar amps**. Cathode-bias amps are **cheaper to build**, plus they **lose about 30% of the tube’s power** as heat. Many run in **Class A**, which means **shorter tube life**.



In 2003, PrimaLuna engineers rocked the audio world with the first ever truly **Adaptive AutoBias** system which not only **eliminates biasing**, but **compensates for aging tubes**. Adaptive AutoBias is **not in the signal path** and **dramatically improves sound quality by lowering distortion over 50%**.

In 2009, we went even further. If Adaptive AutoBias senses a tube failure, it tells the user which one with a **Bad Tube Indicator LED** and puts the amplifier into Protection Mode. **No guesswork, blown resistors, trips to the shop, or to UPS**. True plug and play. Plus, Adaptive AutoBias enables users to switch between **EL34** and **6550, KT88, KT120**, or even **KT150** tubes.... **it’s like Five Amps in One!**

So what have we done in 2016? Wait till you see! We’re the only company that **takes you on a tour inside** our products. Go to www.primaluna-usa.com and learn why audio critics and experts from around the world use PrimaLuna as their personal reference.

info@primalluna-usa.com 909.931.0219



PrimaLuna®

Our Name Is Sound. You Know It.

FEATURE

Adjusting the frequency output is easy and smooth. No jumpiness, or need to fight to find the right setting. Paring the Mini Sub with a pair of Magnepan 1.6 QRs was outstanding and left me pondering what a pair of these might do in this situation.

Great anywhere

After the KIN Minis are moved to a bookshelf and the Mini Sub controls adjusted for near wall placement, the title track of Alan Parsons / *Robot* instantly reveals the imaging characteristics that make a sub/sat system a pleasure to listen to. Even

in a bookshelf placement the vertical imaging of the lead guitar broadens nicely.

Listening to the same track after moving the speakers out to the middle of the room on stands spreads the horizontal image well beyond the outside edge of each speaker with strong activity between the speakers as well. While on “The Voice” synthesizers echo from wall to wall in head nodding detail, and the perfect delineation of the hand claps, mid-track underlines the magic that these tiny speakers bring to the party. *(continued)*



FEATURE

Changing setup to a credenza table top with the KINs placed four feet apart and a foot out from the back wall expands the stereo image, pushing instruments wider both left to right and top to bottom, while moving the entire image further out into the listening space than the prior setup. This configuration makes for more of multi-person listening sweet spot.

In the context of a smaller, 9 x 12 foot room, the KIN system is a ton of fun turning up the volume and really rocking out. Totem's head honcho Vince Bruzzese has been known to demonstrate the imaging prowess of their speakers by facing them at the wall instead of the listener, so I tried this to good effect. In Springsteen's "Waitin' on a Sunny Day," even with the slight congestion of synthesizer and guitars, the drums come out clean and clear, even with the speakers pointed at the wall. Pretty impressive hifi nerd stuff!

Placing the KINs on a mass-loaded set of stands about two feet out and five feet apart into the room is an instant recipe for success in most other applications. Don't bother with toe-in; the KINs sound great firing straight-ahead. Cranking up "Ophelia," the latest from The Lumineers, the funky, quick

FEATURE

beat doesn't overwhelm or hide the ever-present room echo. Even classical lovers will be impressed with how well the KIN Mini setup handles symphonic recordings. The simple duet of Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott playing the Brahms classic "Lullaby" with its lush cello will raise your arm hair.

Performance that belies the small size

Most people love a big surprise in a small package, and many non-audiophiles appreciate that equally well. Tipping the scale at just under \$1,000, the Totem Acoustic KIN Mini and MiniSub take this concept to a new level for the price asked. The ability to perform so well in five different placement options (stands, credenza, desktop, bookcase, and ceiling corners) says everything you need to know about designer/founder Vince Bruzzese's passion for engaging sound.

Add spectacular build quality and a robust world-wide dealer network and you've got an award-winning loudspeaker that is sure to satisfy without draining your checkbook. We are happy to award the KIN Mini and MiniSub one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2016. ●

www.totemacoustics.com



Audio Research PH-9 Phono, DAC9 Digital to Analog Converter and LS-28 Linestage

Prices TBD www.audioresearch.com

Audio Research has always been a technology driven company, taking what they learn in their REF series and then making a more cost effective version for those with slightly lighter pocketbooks. The three new “Foundation” series components you see here (and there’s a really tasty power amp on the way as well) all offer equivalent or better performance than the outgoing REF 5 preamplifier, combined with the sleek Italian style that made the GS series such a hit around the globe.

The new REF 6 preamplifier and REF 3 Phono components are also in for listening, so it’s exciting times indeed with this iconic American brand. Initial listening says that these components are awesome and worthy of the badge.

Stay tuned for our full report.

Resurrection of a Legend

Audio Classics 9B Amplifier

by Richard H. Mak

The Marantz Model 9 monoblock amplifiers tend to be a top choice when audiophiles are making lists of the most iconic amplifiers. First released in 1960, based on a modified version of the Marantz 9120 commercial amplifier, these were chosen by NASA to power precision arrays of antennas for its space program. The Model 9s were huge amplifiers for their time; the ultra-linear parallel push-pull design pumps out 70 watts each, using 4 EL34 tubes per channel. It was the only real competitor to the equally iconic first generation McIntosh MC275 (1961–1970), delivering 75 watts per channel in stereo mode, albeit with 6550 tubes. Aesthetically, however, the Marantz had more sophisticated styling with a round, centered-bias meter, and a drop-down panel concealing adjustment knobs, a look which Marantz products have retained to this day. If you own an original Marantz 9, you not only own one of the finest amplifiers ever made, you also own a piece of audio history.



Dynamic - energetic - alive

GamuT®

Handcrafted in Denmark

RS3 - The ultimate standmount

"The new GamuT RS3 stand-mounted two-way. Finished in beautiful cabinetry with integral stands, the \$19,000 RS3 was one of the show's musical highlights, with a spacious yet focused presentation, natural timbres, and engaging musicality."

Robert Harley, The Absolute Sound - October 2015

"GamuT's RS3 standmount monitors are one of the two finest loudspeakers I've ever had in my home. I've prized the time I've spent with them because, in very many ways, they've shown me a way forward toward higher levels of performance that I thought possible"

Chris Martens, Hi-Fi+, September 2015

"If I didn't know better, I would have sworn I was listening to much bigger speakers! These (RS3) are stunning small monitors that deliver big speaker sound!"

Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio - THE SHOW, Newport 2015

"The (RS3) speaker proved so wonderfully descriptive of the textures and timbres of acoustic and electronic sounds that it was never anything other than wholly captivating."

John Bamford, HiFi news, 2014



REVIEW

Equally admired and perhaps even more sought after than the original, are the two subsequent reissues: the first, Marantz 9k, was released in 1978, was available in kit form and required the owner's assembly. Then in 1995, Marantz commissioned VAC (Valve Amplification Company) to remake an exact replica of the original Model 9 monoblocks. The 1995 recreation was an instant hit worldwide, and it became the best selling high-end amplifier in Japan in 1997. A mint pair of the original or the reissues, if found at all, usually comes with a price tag anywhere from \$20,000 to \$40,000, the vast majority of them being snapped up by collectors in Asia.

Ten years after the VAC reissue, the idea to resurrect the Marantz 9 was conceived once again, this time by Steve Rowell, President of Audio Classics Ltd. in Binghamton, New York. Steve is no stranger to the audio world: he is one of very few audio shop owners to appear in the McIntosh book *For the Love of Music*, by Ken Kessler. Born of Hi Fi blood, or should we say McIntosh blood, Steve is infamous for his impeccable customer service. Most of his much-coveted customer base of over 150,000, which he has been accumulating since the early '80s, are McIntosh customers.

"I may sell a lot of McIntosh, but I am also a big fan of the Marantz. We sold a lot of those throughout the years." He wanted to produce a modern version of the amplifier retaining the look of the original, with an updated circuit and modern parts. After the merge of Denon & Marantz into D&M Holdings in 2002, Steve pitched the Marantz 9 reissue idea to D&M, but corporate strategy of D&M no longer favors the high cost point to point wiring of the original design. He even approached McIntosh, which has had several successful series of reissues, but were too busy making their own amps. In 2013, Steve approached Kevin Hayes of VAC, the maker of the original Marantz reissues, clinching the deal. In 2015, the Audio Classics 9B was born. (continued)





The Audio Classics 9B is a massive amp, weighing in at 70 lbs. and measuring 17.5" wide and 8.3" x 16" deep. The champagne color looks almost exactly like the original Marantz 9, with the exception of the drop-down front panel door. It can also be ordered in black. According to Steve, there simply isn't a need to duplicate the old circuit other than for nostalgic reasons. "The transformer we used is massive; it is potted with a viscous material instead of tar, which completely eliminates any transformer hums. The output transformer is coated with a varnish done in a vacuum, and bound to-

gether with a micro crystalline wax, giving it the most efficient energy transfer." The result is an amplifier with a higher output and lower levels of distortion. The new circuit also requires much less negative feedback, and has balanced input capabilities. With EL34s, the Audio Classics 9B produces 50 watts per channel in stereo, and it can be bridged to run in mono, delivering 100 watts per channel – 30 watts more than the original Marantz Model 9. You can substitute EL34s with KT88s with a change in bias resistor, resulting in 80 watts per channel in stereo, and 160 watts per channel in mono, re-

spectively. My review unit came with KT88s.

Operation of the amplifier is rather simple. The front panel has an on/off switch and a tube-bias control knob on the right, and a bypassable volume control on the left. The rear of the unit has a mono/stereo switch and bias trimpots. To bias the amp, the bias trimpots are turned clockwise until the meter needle hits the center dot, explained by the three-page owner's manual clearly and succinctly.

For most of the review period, the source was a Burmester 001 CD player, and the preamp was

a restored vintage McIntosh C22 original. Speakers were the Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand Symphony Edition (90 dB/4 ohms). On the same audio rack was my vintage McIntosh amp collection, which allowed me to do extensive comparisons between the 9B and the MC275, and MC225.

The vintage Marantz Model 9 has a reputation of having a livelier and more open sound versus its main vintage rival, the McIntosh 275. If I have been impressed by the vintage Marantz 9 versus the MC275, I am equally impressed with the Audio Classics 9B — it is

extended, detailed, lively, and fast sounding. I'd say the main characteristics of the Audio Classics 9B are a fast paced, well balanced sound with clean and tight bass. Of the three vintage Mac amps, the MC225 is closer sounding to the 9B than the MC240 or MC275. The McIntosh is more bass heavy, with a thicker midrange. It also sounds more tubey and more rounded. The 9B has noticeably less mid-range emphasis and more top-end sparkles. It has one of the cleanest top-end of any KT88 based tube amp I have heard, almost like a VAC Phi 200. *(continued)*



On Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson's VH1 *Storytellers* opening song *Ghost Riders in the Sky*, the track features a guitar intro with Willie Nelson's voice, followed by Johnny Cash against a backdrop of cheering crowds. John Cash, whose voice can be nasally at times, was noticeably well balanced, younger and less throaty on the Audio Classics 9B versus the McIntosh. The amplifier rendered the track with the lifelike presence of the live performance, with plenty of hall ambience while maintaining clarity and rhythm of the bass guitars. The 9B also excelled at the presentation of female voice. Lena Willemark's "*Längst inne i mitt huvud*", on Proprius' Contemporary Romantic Music for Choir and Instruments, renders a most beautiful and liquid female voice when played by

the Audioclassics 9B. The soft gentleness of her voice literally moved me to tears. Next is Cecilia Bartoli's performance on Scarlati's *Mentre io godo in dolce obli*, in her Opera Proibita album. Bartoli possess one of the most supple and flexible voices that I have ever heard, perfectly rendered through the 9B, with perfect technique, smooth portamento, control, range, musical sensibility and execution. Going back and forth between the McIntosh and the 9B, it was apparent that 9B had the upper-hand in mid- to upper-end extensions, which allowed the agility, speed and versatility of Bartoli's voice to come through, especially on the relentlessly fast staccato passages of the harpsichord, and the flutter of the flute, all in perfect pitch and tempo. (continued)



LS5/9



LS5/8

AUTHENTIC BBC MONITORS

Transparent...Uncolored...Accurate. This is what made the sound of the original British Broadcasting Corporation monitors legendary. Graham Audio has made it their mission to continue this legacy, and to bring the LS5/8, LS5/9 and LS3/5 to a broader global audience. Drawn from many years of BBC research, and through the engineering genius of Derek Hughes, these speakers have been recreated using state of the art materials and technology under license from the BBC. The LS5/9 is now available in the U.S. along with the LS5/8, and the never commercially produced LS3/5.

At Graham Audio the legend lives on...



Distributed in the United States by Graham Audio USA
www.grahamaudiousa.com | info@grahamaudiousa.com



The massed strings in the *Greensleeves Suite* in the Hovland – New Star in the Audio Sky album performed by The London Philharmonic Orchestra, produced a sound which presented the organic qualities of cellos, with bountiful harmonics and decay, yet offered enough details to distinguish between individual instruments. On the McIntosh MC275, the sound becomes slower and fuller bodied; bass notes go deeper but rounder and with less definition. The overall sonic characteristics of the Audio Classics 9B is quite neutral. As a tube amp, it has very little “tubeyness,” or colorations to the sound; it has remarkable top end extension, yet retains the musicality and airiness of tube amplifiers.

How does one unit in stereo compare with two units in mono? With simple jazz music, vocals, or simple chamber performances, I prefer just one unit in stereo operation. The sound is slightly softer and gentler, albeit with fewer dynamics. There is more sweetness and mellowness. But when it comes to rock, grand orchestral, or anything which requires more “oomph,” the added power of having two units or mono operation is clearly beneficial. Perhaps best demonstrated by Modest P. Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, with James Levine conducting New York’s MET Orchestra on Deutsche Gram-

mophon. This may be not the best interpretation, but it is certainly the most dynamic, earth-shattering renditions of *Pictures at an Exhibition* you will ever find (although you must stay away from the so-called “Polygram” edition sold online, which is a CD Rom knockoff with an inkjet printed booklet). In mono, the already powerful bass drum becomes noticeably tighter, deeper and above all, more solid yet tuneful. The biggest difference is not simply an increase in volume (approx. 6 dB or a 1/4 turn on the volume dial to be exact), but also a dynamic contrast where the holographic images of voices and instruments become more solid in mid-air. Channel separation is also better, which translates into more width and depth to the sound stage, a palpable sonic image of each instrument carried more air between them.

Listed at \$9,000.00, the Audio Classics 9B gives you the vintage look of a Marantz Model 9, but at a fraction of the market price of the original or the reissue. Even as a fiercely loyal and faithful collector of McIntosh amps, I am reluctant to let go of the Audio Classics 9B amplifier after the review. I love the amp so much, I have decided to buy not one, but two units of the review sample. ●



Audio Classic 9b
MSRP: \$9,000

MANUFACTURER
Audio Classics

CONTACT
www.audioclassics.com

PERIPHERALS

Digital Source
Burmester 001

Preamplifier
McIntosh C22 1st Gen

Amplifier
Audio Classics 9B, McIntosh
Mc275, MC240, MC225

Speaker
Vienna Acoustics Beethoven
Baby Grand

Cables
Furutech

A Pair of Relatively Obscure Danes

The System Audio Pandion 30 Speakers

By Jeff Dorgay

Ole Witthoft, the founder and designer of System Audio, said recently “An experience cannot be measured or calculated. And therefore loudspeakers cannot be made purely on the basis of technical specifications. This is why I founded System Audio A/S in 1984.” I haven’t met this guy, but I like him — *a lot*. You only need to listen to the SA30s for about 90 seconds to realize he gets it in a major way. And I must confess that most of the speakers that truly engage me seem to hail from Denmark. Guilty as charged.

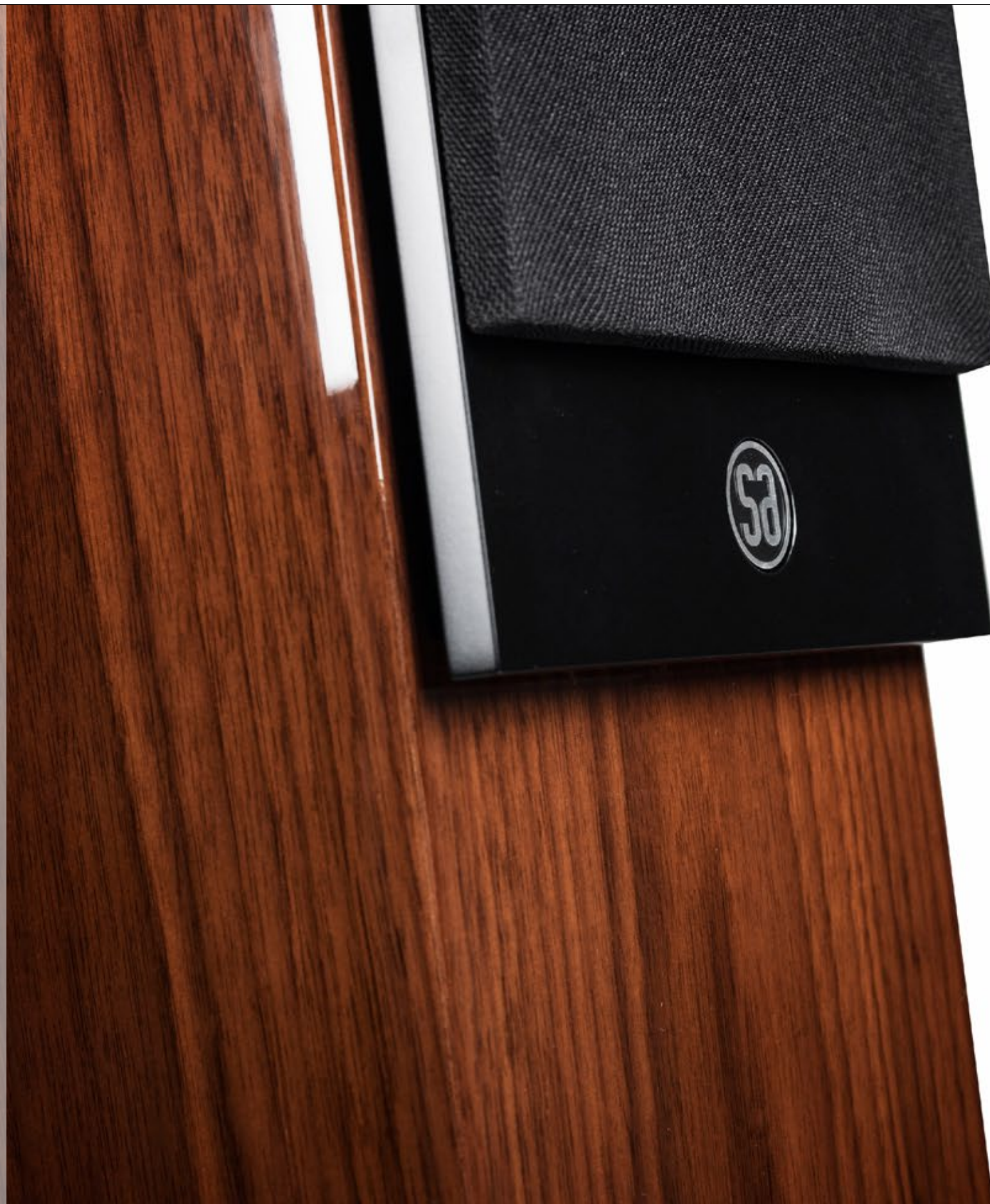
Somehow, most of the world’s finest, or at least the world’s most popular speakers, seem to fall into the design by measurements category or the design by feel category. Too often the speakers in the former category end up being really dynamic, but lose their appeal after any length of time, whereas the latter too often tend to do just one thing right. The music lover with a large palate usually ends up out in the cold. Not so with the SA30s. These are speakers you can listen to from the minute you get up until you fall asleep without fatigue. They are among the most natural speakers I’ve had the pleasure to listen to.

REVIEW

Their Facebook page says, “cool Scandinavian loudspeakers” and I have to agree. Every System Audio speaker has tons of style backing up the audio performance, yet none of them are massive in a physical sense. Oddly enough, System Audio has not had a lot of fanfare in the United States over the last thirty years. I hope that *TONEAudio* can change that – these are speakers you should see, touch and hear for yourself.

You might not think these gorgeous speakers can stand up to the rigors of loud, violent music, but they deliver the goods. Playing the Megadeth classic “Skin of My Teeth” at a truly punishing level instantly reveals the dynamic capabilities of the System Audio Pandion 30s. Dense metal may not be your first choice for a speaker audition, but a wide dynamic swing is so important to me, that if a speaker *can’t* do this, there’s no point going further – kind of like when a potential girlfriend tells you she doesn’t like driving with the top down. Any other attributes don’t matter, so there’s no chance of a relationship. Easily passing the first test, it’s easy to move on to the rest of the audition.

At right around \$10,000 per pair, the SA30s make a great showing. World class fit and finish combined with sonics that you’d easily suspect might have a higher price tag attached makes for a winning combination. \$10k is a highly competitive price point, and while most speakers at this level can’t reproduce the sheer scale that the biggest floorstanders can, they often deliver a similar level of resolution.



Whether you are a music lover in a smaller space, or just one that doesn’t need to play at brain drain levels (though the SA30s can play very loud), \$10k can buy you a major helping of what the top contenders offer. The SA30s are rapidly becoming one of my favorites.

A long and twisty journey around my record collection while auditioning other amplifiers, cables, and rooms prove the SA30s a great addition to any system. Every Dane I’ve met has been a great collaborator, and while an inanimate object like a speaker can’t really have a personality per se, the ease by which the SA30s integrate into any room and electronics on hand is welcome. They are equally easy to set up and optimize. In my 15 x 26 foot room the SA30s achieve the best balance of sound field size and midrange to bass integration about five feet from the back wall, ever so slightly toed in, with my GamuT Lobster Chair about nine feet back.

Robin Trower’s ethereal distorted guitar intro on the title track of *For Earth Below*, punctuated by delicate cymbal work and a solid bass line, fill the room as the vocals phase in and out between the speakers; 1970s trippiness at its best and the SA30s nail it. And as the record heats up, again these slim speakers prove that they can move some serious air, whether I’m listening to Aerosmith or Snoop Dogg. *(continued)*

REVIEW



DIFFERENT CLASS

★★★★★



A49 A lifetime of electronics design expertise has led to Arcam's finest ever amplifier; the new A49 integrated amplifier. Its ultra-refined class G topology* represents the pinnacle of Arcam's engineering heritage and sets new standards of performance. An audition will confirm that power is nothing without control.

ARCAM

www.arcam.co.uk

G Arcam's G class amplification provides the perfect balance of ultra low distortion and enormous power. You can read all about this world class technology by visiting our website.

BRINGING MUSIC AND MOVIES TO LIFE



**THE SOUND ORGANISATION IS
THE EXCLUSIVE US DISTRIBUTOR OF**
Arcam • Chord Company • DALI • Melco •
ProAc • Quadraspire • Rega • Wilson Benesch

www.soundorg.com
facebook.com/TheSoundOrganisation
972-234-0182
info@soundorg.com

REVIEW

Staying in the obscure groove, the dense prog groove of PFMs *Photos of Ghosts* is easily unraveled, keeping the subtle keyboard, guitar and bass riffs all firmly planted across the soundstage.

Serious quality

Maybe it's the synergy between Danes, but tracking through Sinne Eeg's self-titled album illustrates the sheer coherence that these speakers possess. If you love a great mini-monitor speaker, but always find yourself longing for more range, the SA30 is a speaker you will love. Both male and female solo vocals are reproduced with ease — not only coming across tonally excellent, but maintaining a proper size relationship to the listening room. Where my Magne-pans offer a sumptuous presentation of nearly any female vocal record, it's an overblown, oversized, unrealistic rendition. Of course, this can be a lot of fun, and might be exactly what you are looking for, but played through the SA30s, a much more realistic view is offered.

The SA30s are all about quality with a fairly large dose of quantity as well. The wider range of music and the higher quality the recordings you have, the more you will appreciate these speakers. They are fully up to the task of mat-ing with the world's finest electronics. While they turned in an incredible per-formance with the Pass Labs XA30.8 reviewed in this issue, when I switched to the much larger Pass Xs 300 Monos, they were easily able to transmit the difference between the two.

Maybe it's the crossover, or just conservative specs, but even with a 90dB/1 watt sensitivity spec, these are incredibly easy speakers to drive with any amplifier. (continued)



REVIEW

While I could crank the large Pass, Audio Research or Conrad-Johnson amplifiers on hand, even the 20-watt per channel Nagra 300p makes for an incredible listening experience – regardless of program material. You could even get by with a 9-watt SET in a small room if you don't have to shake the walls.

Under the covers

With a rear firing port, getting the SA30 a few feet out from the wall will make for the smoothest bass response, and thanks to three available finishes (black, white and walnut) they should easily fit into any décor scheme. Speaker cables terminated with banana ends will be the easiest to connect, with the binding posts on the bottom of the round base, making for a very tidy installation. You will probably need a friend to hold the SA30s as you tip them forward to insert the speaker cables, but they are light enough at about 40 pounds (22kg) to move yourself without back issues. Set up proved easy and within minutes the SA30s were playing satisfactorily.

The driver complement is straightforward, looking like some of ScanSpeak's finest. A pair of 5-inch (13cm) woofers with strategically sliced wood pulp cones with an oversized motor and long excursion surround a soft dome tweeter. The SA website says that these woofer drivers are "Maybe the world's best 13 cm woofers." Claiming a reach of 30Hz on the lower end of the audio spectrum is confirmed by a mix of test tones and bass heavy music. Not only can these speakers go low, they are able to play at a very high volume without cone breakup and the resulting distortion. Everyone who has



experienced the SA30s is pleasantly surprised when we start playing Mickey Hart's *Planet Drum*, and those little cones didn't blow right out of the cabinets. These are well-executed speakers.

Style, Performance and More

The System Audio Pandion 30 speakers have an amazing reputation in Europe where the company ships over 20,000 pairs of speakers per year, yet they remain a secret here in the United States. There are only a handful of dealers here, but should you be near one, I suggest a serious audition. They are excellent in every way and will easily fit into your system and décor. I would also like to thank Mr. Oswaldo Martinez of Let There Be Sound in Weston, Florida, for arranging this review. He is the oldest SA dealer in the US. These have been indeed a pleasant discovery! ●

System Audio
Pandion 30 Speakers
MSRP: \$10,000

MANUFACTURER
System Audio

CONTACT
www.system-audio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source
Brinkmann Bardo w/Koetsu Jade

Digital Source
Gryphon Kalliope DAC, MacBook Pro, Meridian MS200

Amplifier PrimaLuna HP Integrated (with KT150 tubes)

Phono Stage
Simaudio MOON LP610

Cables Cardas Clear
Power Torus TOT

THE SOURCE

AUDIO VIDEO DESIGN GROUP

THE ART OF DESIGN



1-310-534-9900



THESOURCEAV.COM

conrad-johnson

0 30

Compact Performer The Conrad-Johnson CA150 SE

By Jeff Zaret

Conrad-Johnson has been around for decades now, and they have received major acclaim for their products. While most of it has been for their vacuum tube amplifiers and preamplifiers, their solid-state components have been equally good. They have always exhibited a consistency in care, design and implementation and it's not unusual to find 30-year-old C-J components that are still running strong. As an owner of several pieces of Conrad-Johnson gear I can personally attest to the quality, ruggedness and simple elegance, which have not varied over the years. Every company does evolve with improvements and enhancements. Whether you dig the champagne-colored front panels or not is a personal matter, but Lew and Bill aren't going to change that part of their heritage.



Taking a slightly different approach, C-J does not build integrated amplifiers in the classic sense, incorporating a standard preamplifier and power amplifier on one chassis, but rather building what they call a “control amplifier.” With the CA150SE, as they have done in past iterations, they combine a power amplifier with a high quality level control and switching circuit, utilizing the same components as their best linestages. They feel that this is a purist approach, eliminating unnecessary circuitry and the resulting noise and distortions. For those interested, this 135-watt per channel am-

plifier uses circuitry nearly identical to C-J’s MF2250 and MF2275 power amplifiers.

That champagne front panel features a simple layout with Power, EPLThtr (Theater Bypass), Source, Volume (up and down), and Mute. The back panel is just as simple with the “normal” connections in the back for almost any peripheral device you might have in your collection. Kudos to C-J for also putting a separate subwoofer output in the back; this comes in handy for those who have one. The manual is standard Conrad-Johnson issue: simple and

to the point with all the pertinent information, just like their products. The remote is the newer style they have been using on other products, a simple plastic remote that serves its purpose. The CA150 has an MSRP of \$5,000 and the SE version reviewed here \$7,000, which features all the major capacitors in the signal path replaced with CJD Teflon units, along with upgraded resistors and a few other goodies.

Immediately on power up, it feels like home – and a welcome one indeed. To steal C-J’s tagline, “it just sounds right.” There are

no accentuated high frequencies, which some solid-state components tend to lean towards. The high end is there, never thrust in your face. The same is true for the low end: solid, tight and tuneful, never bloated. The mid-range, which I feel is where the “C-J sound” is, if there is actually such a thing, is pleasant and true to the instrument or vocal playing. Should you purchase your own CA150SE, a quick few tracks of your favorite acoustic music will convince you. It’s worth mentioning that should you purchase the SE version, with all those coolio Teflon

caps, this will take a few hundred hours of listening time. Like every other premium C-J component we’ve reviewed, the CA150SE sounds slightly flat right out of the box, then “comes out of the fog” right around 200 hours, with a major jump in performance around 300 hours, steadily improving until about the 600-hour mark. I suggest leaving your source of choice on repeat for about two weeks and just letting the CA150SE play all day at modest, non neighbor-annoying volume while you are at work to accelerate the process. You will be rewarded. *(continued)*

Initial listening in my second system in a smaller room instantly conveys the resolution this amplifier provides. Our publisher sent me the CA150SE with hours on the clock so I could get right to business. In my reference system, with the notoriously tough to drive MartinLogan CLS speakers, it does not disappoint, especially in light of the C-J Premier 350 that was previously driving these speakers. The CA150SE has an incredible amount of resolution, definition and ability to place individual instruments within a recording. Even at moderately high volume levels, the CA150SE still has plenty of dynamic power in reserves, even for complex music.

The ultimate test proves to be Bill Evans's piano on "Here's That Rainy Day," where the little C-J turns in a breathtaking performance, with all the nuances of this complex instrument reproduced with aplomb. Every bit of his complex chord structures is easily discernible with tonality spot-on. Very few solid-state components can muster this, but again the CA150 sails through. Equally enjoyable results are achieved with many of my favorite acoustic recordings. I'm particularly smitten with Jane Monheit's rendition of "Love Me or Leave Me." Her voice stays front and center, with the gentle cymbal work floating throughout the soundstage, all the while the acoustic bass line is locked in solid. This is an impressive amplifier!

Conrad-Johnson has a winner here. Whether you want to argue about semantics as to it being an integrated or control amplifier, the performance is impossible to argue with. Add in a modest footprint and this is a great anchor for a high performance audio system that doesn't require a ton of space. Well done Lew and Bill.

Weekend Pro-Ject.



MaiA
My audiophile integrated Amplifier



MaiA is an all-in-one integrated amplifier, combining an XMOS-based true asynchronous USB DAC, a Pro-Ject quality phono stage, high performance headphone amp, aptX Bluetooth streaming, and remote control (via app or included IR remote). Listen to music from your phone, from your computer, from a turntable or a CD player, via speakers or headphones. With nine inputs, MaiA does it all.

True audiophile sound quality, with amplification based on the legendary Flying Mole amplifier design. Also available are a preamp version, a high-power version with upgradeable power supply, as well as a matching CD transport and streamer.

Perfect for limited spaces, desktop audio, as a second system in a vacation home or office. MaiA represents the high performance, high value design philosophy music lovers have come to expect from Pro-Ject.

Not every weekend project has to come from a to-do list.



Pro-Ject
AUDIO SYSTEMS

distribution in the U.S.A. by
SUMIKO
2431 Fifth Street
Berkeley, CA 94710
www.sumikoaudio.net

Additional Listening — Jeff Dorgay

I have a long history with Conrad-Johnson, going all the way back to their first preamplifier, and I must admit I've never heard a C-J product that I *didn't* like. However, they have changed their house sound a bit over the years. Where vintage C-J gear has a bit of tonal warmth (or you could call it midrange magic) to it, with a slight softening of the uppermost register, their products for about the last 10–12 years have a slightly more modern sound if you will.

They haven't lost that magic midrange, but (thanks to, in part, the development of the CJD Teflon capacitors) now have the extension and resolution that their top competitors possess

as well. And much like two of my other favorite solid-state amplifier manufacturers, Burmester and Pass Labs, they've managed to make solid-state components that have that drop or two of warmth without the sacrifice you'd expect from a world-class tube amplifier without resorting to the glass bottle.

As Mr. Zaret mentions, the SE edition, chock full of Teflon caps, takes a bit of time to come on full song, but the wait is well worth it. While the extra \$2,000 to step up to this model is not a small investment, I urge you to go for the gusto if you can. I've listened to both SE and non-SE versions of quite a few C-J components and

the increased amount of music revealed on all levels is the best two grand you'll ever spend on your hifi system. The standard model is slightly more traditional sounding, if you will, so budget accordingly.

Having played the CA150SE with everything from my trusty (i.e. power hungry) Magnepans to the new MartinLogan Neolith and a number of excellent speakers in between, the only speaker that fell a little short was my Magnepan 3.7s. However, even my C-J Premier 350 couldn't play those speakers as loud as I'd like them to go!

Vinyl via the new C-J Tea 1 that is in for review was absolutely

lovely and, for most people, this will be a destination component. Personally, I like the champagne faceplate, so that's not an issue here. Regardless of program material, whether Metallica or Mahler, the CA150SE has a certain ease about it that I've come to expect in only the world's finest hifi components. While not everyone needs 300 plus watts per channel, it's lovely to see an amplifier at this level presenting such high tonal purity without breaking the bank.

Build quality is also identical to C-J's top of the line components in terms of electrical parts, mechanical assembly and even the volume indicator on the front

panel, which looks identical to the one on the face of the GAT 2 preamplifier. This is definitely a component you can be proud to own and pass on to one of your kids.

Fortunately, even though the CA150SE has a passive linestage, because this is an integrated, there are none of the usual issues that plague a passive setup. The amplifier section is perfectly impedance matched to the attenuator and there is no chance of screwing the match up with an interconnect that is too capacitive, causing that lack of body that you get when you do it wrong.

If you want fantastic sound with a compact footprint, the CA150SE is your baby. ●



The Conrad-Johnson CA150SE
MSRP: \$7,000
(\$5,000 as non-SE model)

MANUFACTURER
 conrad-johnson design, inc.

CONTACT
 www.conradjohnson.com

PERIPHERALS
Digital Source
 Oppo BD 105/Auralic Vega

Analog Source
 SME 10 w/SME V tonearm,
 Shelter Harmony MC

Phono Stage Nagra VPS

Speakers Snell Type Q,
 MartinLogan CLS iiZ

Cables
 Tara Labs

Power
 Running Springs Jaco



Power-Packed Perfection

Torus AVR 15 Plus Isolation Power Transformer

By Rob Johnson

More often than not your system's weakest link is the power that you plug it into. Without the luxury to have dedicated 20-amp outlets, you're stuck with what the contractor saved a few bucks on. Compounding the problem, you have to share said power with lights, appliances and who knows what else down the circuit panel.

According to my volt meter, voltage drops a little in the early evening when my neighbors come home from work and need their share of the electricity, too. This results in late night listening (or early morning) when everyone is asleep with their power needs minimized. However, they tend to be less appreciative of my volume.

As a result of all of this, some voltage sags and "polluted power" snake their way into my system, creating noise audible to any ear placed near the speakers. Herein lies an audio problem I've simply learned to live with. I can't have my own isolated power transformer inside the apartment, can I? As it turns out, the answer is yes. Even better, it does not require approval from the landlord. Enter Torus Audio's power isolation products.

All in the Family

Torus makes a wide range of units addressing the needs of the potential owner. Models in both the RM Series and built-in Wall/Floor Unit Series offer four key benefits. First, an enormous, and very specialized, Plitron transformer at the heart of each Torus offers connected equipment complete isolation from the wall circuit. The transformer accounts for a very high percentage of the Torus unit's size and weight. With supplemental noise filtering capability built in as well, quieter operation of all associated gear is made possible by Torus products.

Secondly, Torus's massive current handling capability feeds connected components with oodles of available power, so gear can sip or gulp all the power it needs to sound its best. An amplifier might run continuously using 5 amps of power, but momentary peaks may require significantly more when dynamic musical transients place demands on stereo gear. The Torus keeps as much as 400 amps of juice at the ready to keep the most demanding and thirsty amplifiers quenched. Even *Star Trek's* Mr. Scott would be impressed.

Third, Torus products include built-in surge suppression. No matter what's conducting along your home's power wires, the Torus protects your investment in audio gear.



The RM series offers the ability to withstand a power spike of 3,000 amps and 6,000 volts. I'm not putting out a lightning rod to test this, so I'll need to take the Torus team's word on that, but the added security is welcome.

Even Keeled

Torus's AVR series builds on all the above benefits in the RM series functionality, adding automatic voltage regulation, hence the designation. AVR-enabled units regulate voltage sags of +/- 10 volts maintaining a steady 120-125 volts, optimized for electronic gear. Should your home's power experience a brownout, or exceed the Torus's ability to accommodate it safely, the AVR gear will shut down to protect the gear connected to it. And their products are world compatible, available in any voltage scenario necessary for wherever you live. Merely peruse the Torus website, or visit a local dealer for the proper configuration.

The small and simple LED readouts indicating incoming voltage, outgoing voltage, and the number of amps drawn by attached gear is a welcome way to monitor your system's load. Should you be inclined to connect the AVR to your home network, via an Ethernet cable, a web interface allows the AVR's owner to control the panel readout, and get a more comprehensive picture of overall power usage.

The latest addition to the RM and AVR Torus lineup is the TOT series, made for smaller living spaces and smaller audio systems. The TOT mini delivers a continuous 7 Amps when needed. Its bigger brother, the TOT Max, doubles that. TOT units utilize three small transformers inside, rather than one huge one, reducing their size and heft a lot. All remain under 40 pounds.

Torus has just released a new member of the TOT family with AVR functionality. While Jeff Dorgay reviews the TOT AVR in his apartment, Torus included for comparative evaluation an AVR 15 Plus unit to test drive in my own apartment. The "15" designation refers to the unit's optimization for a 15-amp home power line. Similar numerical descriptors of 20, 45, 60, and so on translate into some serious power handling should building wiring accommodate it. Our test unit's "15 Plus" designation suggests 20-amp power can be utilized if the home wiring and breaker can take it. You can read more about Jeff's take on the TOT here.

Unlike Jeff's lower-back-friendly TOT, the AVR 15 Plus's 80 pound weight 19" depth, 19" width, and 8" height requires the help of a friend to move. Just remember two things: lift with your legs, and beer is the universal currency to compensate friends helping move things! Once in place though, any hard work associated with the Torus setup is complete. (continued)



Simply plug everything into it, plug the Torus into the wall, and turn it on. A friendly blue light on the switch tells you better power is on its way.

Sound of Silence

We gave the AVR 15 Plus a week of continuous usage before doing any serious listening. Listening seems a strange word to use when evaluating a power product since it's never carrying the audio signal itself. However, the Torus AVR 15 Plus offers an obvious and immediate sonic benefit.

First, the Torus creates a very quiet background from which music can emerge. With the volume turned all the way up, but with music paused, my ear placed within an inch of the tweeter and midrange speaker drivers barely discerns any noise at all. My

usual Running Springs Haley power conditioners do a very good job of this, but the Torus simply takes "quiet" to an even lower level. In fact the Torus quieted things down to such a degree that I did a quick survey to ensure all the stereo gear was really powered on. Yep, it was that big of a change.

Secondly, bass notes — especially noticeable in the lowest octaves — pour forth with greater authority, assertiveness, and rumble. The opening bass notes on Jean-Michel Jarre's *Rendez-Vous* surprise me by emerging from the silence unexpectedly, but the sonic presence and physical tangibility from the listening seat grip my attention and refuse to let go in a way that they do not with my prior setup. It's both rare and fun to experience something extra from a familiar recording. *(continued)*



Clear Reflection

*The geometry of Golden Reference.
The technology of Clear.*

cardas.com/reflection

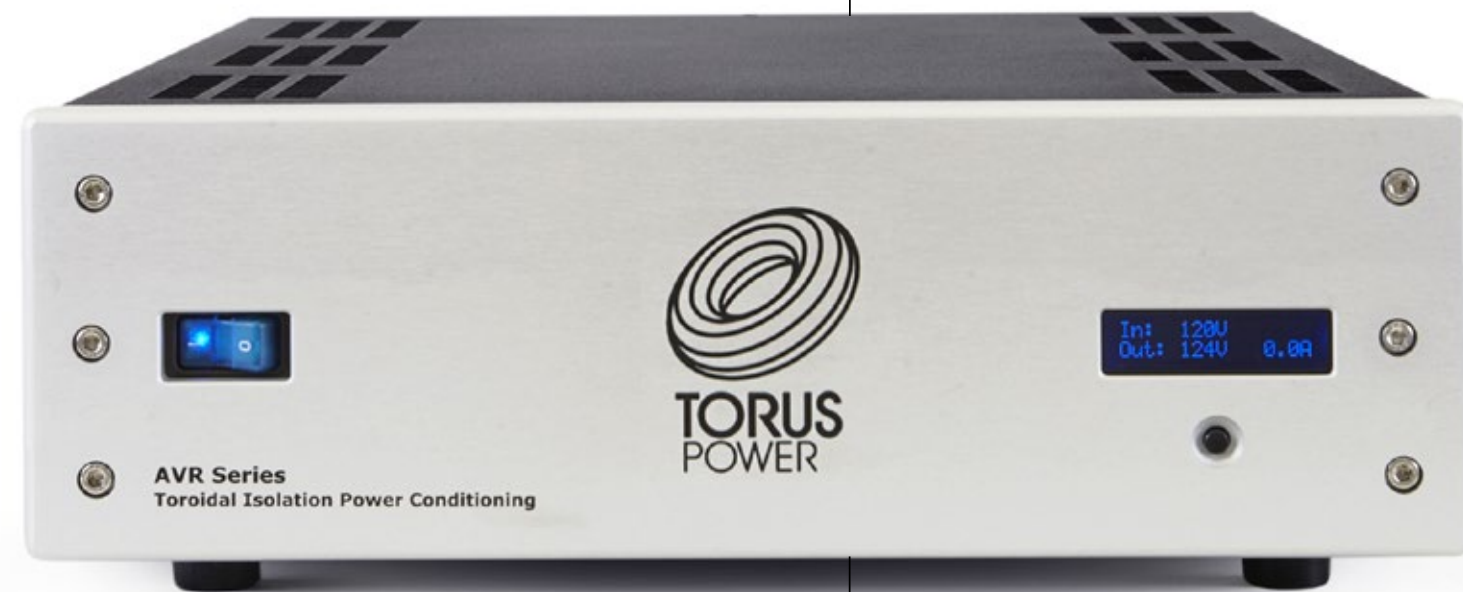


Third, the AVR 15 Plus imparts on my system another notch of richness, naturalness, liveliness, and flow to music that proves beguiling. Regardless of music type or genre, more is revealed. Yes, there does seem a bit more detail unmasked by the absence of background noise. But more than that, vocals, instruments, cymbals, and other percussion strikes have a greater sense of realism, excitement and passion when the Torus fuels the gear providing the music.

Fourth, the overall sound-stage appears wider and deeper. A combination of the power filtration and voltage stabilization allows connected gear to perform its absolute best, and the lack of background noise forms a whiter canvas onto which colorful music can be painted with delicate nuances on the edges. The result is wonderful to experience and goes away quickly when plugging straight into the wall without it.

Absolute Power

The Torus AVR 15 Plus defies the old wisdom that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Instead, it helps your precious gear give you all it is capable of delivering. It's a bit like splurging on high-octane gas for the car. The car runs just fine when using Regular gas, but with Supreme gas, suddenly the car offers its owner something extra. An added sense of engine power and authority enhance the driving experience. *(continued)*



All characteristics loved about the car remain true. Nothing goes away. Better gas simply encourages the car perform at its peak. Like a tank of high octane gas feeds an engine with better results, the Torus AVR delivers better juice to your system.

The AVR 15 Plus retails for \$4,195 – an investment for most audiophiles. No, it won't magically make a \$500 amp sound like one costing \$10,000. However, it will get the most from any gear plugged into it. Those seeking Torus benefit at a lower price point, with a smaller form-factor for apartments, should consider the RM and TOT families. The TOT AVR costs \$1,995, and is a great option for your next component upgrade. You will continue using the Torus with joy over the

years as other gear evolves around it.

If you need further justification for a Torus purchase consider three things. First, your gear can finally deliver all the sonic benefit of the investment you made in it. Second, Torus surge suppression is a rhetorical insurance policy for your expensive gear. Finally, Torus suggests that the delivery of power, regulated to the optimal voltage for your gear's design specs, will extend the life of your precious components. Time will tell on that last one, but one thing's for sure right now: the sonic benefits of the Torus increase my enjoyment of my stereo system. Once you try a Torus power isolation unit in your own system, like me, you may find it very hard to part with. Highly recommended. ●

Torus AVR 15 Plus Isolation Transformer
MSRP: \$4195

MANUFACTURER
Torus Power

CONTACT
www.toruspower.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source SME Model 10 with SME V and Model 10 tonearms. Dynavector 17D3 and Denon DL-103R cartridges

Digital Sources Mac Mini, Roon Music Service, dCS Debussy

Amplification Burmester 911 mk3

Preamplification Coffman Labs G1-B

Speakers Sonus faber Olympica III

Cables Jena Labs

Power Running Springs Audio Haley, and RSA Mongoose power cords

Accessories ASC tube traps, Mapleshade Samson audio racks, Coffman Labs Equipment Footers, AudioQuest Jitterbug, Atomic Audio Labs Mac Mini stand

Pass Labs XA30.8 Stereo Amplifier

Hot stuff, baby!

By Rob Johnson

At TONEAudio we have enjoyed hearing and reviewing many products designed by Nelson Pass. Through each iteration, there has been marked improvement in sonics, build quality and aesthetics. Considering the marvelous performance of his early products like the Aleph series amplifiers, it's a tall order to continue building on each model's success to deliver something extraordinary the next go, yet they always do.

As you can read from the many Pass Labs product reviews on our website, we have really enjoyed the recent XA .5 series amplifiers, and the new XA .8 series are even better with innovations trickling down from what was learned building the X's monoblocks. When questioned, Pass Labs' Desmond Harrington just smiles and says "It's all about bias..."



The “XA” Series is so named since it runs purely in class A circuitry. Alternately, Pass’s “X” Series operates in class A for a modest percentage of total output, gently easing into class AB at higher power levels. XA 30.8 is the baby in its family line, designed to deliver 30 watts per channel into 8 ohms, yet with the maximum current delivery of a much higher powered amplifier. The specs don’t hint at the surprising oomph this amp is capable of. Thinking back to the *Flintstones* cartoons of my youth, there’s a humorous parallel between the 30.8 and Bam-Bam, the toddler who lifts cars. The first time around, you just don’t see it coming.

Through GamuT RS3i speakers, the 30.8 never fails to deliver great sound and control. Those desiring more heft can choose from the rest of the XA family. The 30.8 is the only member of the family built as a stereo unit in a single housing. The four other models, capable of 60, 100, 160 and 200 watts respectively, are monoblock amplifiers.

Brick House

As with past Pass designs, the amplifier is beautifully constructed and made for long-term durability. Machined into the thick front panel are subtle lines and beveled edges, accentuated by attractive silver anodizing. Compared with the previous .5 series, the .8s take a lower-key approach with visuals, offering clean, modern, and understated good looks. As with past designs, the .8’s blue meter rests in the center of the faceplate, framed by a modest black metal ring. Unlike the XA.5 series, there’s no longer a second layer of metal plate extending forward of the meter, giving XA.5s a slightly more industrial feel in the overall visual design. *(continued)*



Class A solid state amplifier designs generate what many refer to as a more “tube like” sound coupled with an equally amazing amount of heat. According to Pass, even with the best class A designs, only about a third of the amp’s energy consumption ultimately results in juice for the speakers, and the rest is lost in the form of heat. The .8 series biases even further into class A operation than its predecessors, so the product line is a hot one indeed and the .8 heat sinks are redesigned with more surface area for cooling. Even so, the amp is designed to operate at a toasty 127°F (53°C).

With all those spiky heat sinks around the 30.8’s circumference, you won’t want to play catch with it. The large metal handles on the rear of the amp facilitate careful lifting and placement while also protecting the binding posts from damage, and your arms from inadvertent scratches. Measuring 19" wide, 7" tall, and 21.5" deep, including the mostly air heat sinks, a weight over 100 lbs. comes as a surprise. A lot of that heft comes from the gigantic transformers within the amp. Yes, we’re talking heavy metal in the very literal sense.

Hooking up the amp is a

breeze. While the XA amps are a fully balanced design, they do offer single-ended RCA connectors as well as the expected XLRs. Powering up the amp first via the rocker switch on the back, then the standby toggle on the front, the ever-magical meter comes to life, sweeping the power indicator needle to a vertical position and igniting the subtle blue backing glow. Even at loud music levels, the needle barely wavers to indicate a heavy load on the amp. This thing is really only 30 watts? Wow. Is there such thing as “Pass Watts”.... like there’s a dog-years scale for age? *(continued)*

The Best Computer Audio Gear and a Generous
60-DAY SATISFACTION GUARANTEE



SONY HAP-Z1ES
High-Res Digital Audio Player
\$1,999



MUSICAL FIDELITY MX DAC
\$800



PS AUDIO PerfectWave DirectStream
DSD DAC \$5,995



BENCHMARK DAC2 HGC
DSD DAC \$1,995



REGA DAC-R
\$1,195



MARANTZ HD-DAC1
DAC/Headphone Amplifier \$799



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DacMagic Plus
DAC/Preamplifier \$499

musicdirect

800-449-8333 | MUSICDIRECT.COM

Optimized or Compromised?



With the modular OCTAVE HP 700 preamplifier, there is no trade-off!

With the OCTAVE **HP 700** tube preamplifier there is no sacrifice of personal customization to enjoy perfect sound quality. Distinguished by its powerful and airy sound, the **HP 700** also boasts the incredible flexibility of eight optional high-end input modules, allowing perfect customization to any system without a hint of audible compromise.

OCTAVE
MODERN CLASSIC



Crafted from the highest grade components



Audiophile tone control option



Perfectly optimized optional input modules



Turn the Beat Around

After about 100 hours of break-in and about 90 minutes to warm up and stabilize, the 30.8 fully reveals itself, though it is great at turn on; a solid, detailed, yet subtly nuanced performance follows. Bass is very punchy and tight, but never to the extent that accuracy forces over-accentuation of lower registers. The amp is spec'd to deliver frequencies well below human hearing, and bass performance never disappoints throughout many listening sessions.

High frequency information is relayed with a high degree of realism, detail and relaxed naturalness – a tough balance to achieve. Even with recordings known for stridency and sibilance, the Pass never renders those elements in an over-revealing way. It's not that the XA30.8 romanticizes the sound or rolls off high frequency edge, rather, there's an organic quality to

it just as there is with the amp's midrange portrayal. When sitting in front of a live soprano vocalist for example, crescendos can be piercing at times, but even in those instances the human behind the music is evident and artificial glare does not enter into the equation. The Pass renders recordings in a way that reveals the human element in music, not just the sounds that make their way through the studio microphones to be captured by the recording gear.

The 30.8 is among the best I've heard at separating musical elements across, and into, a seemingly endless soundstage. Instruments, vocals, and ambient cues seem layered over and around each other, rather than being squeezed into a thin plane between the speakers. Instead, sound floats all around the room with no apparent limits to the width and depth of musical portrayal. *(continued)*



Especially interesting is the way the XA projects sounds beyond the speakers, behind them, and to far left and right periphery as a recording demands. Notes not only wrapped around the edges of the room, but had a sneaky-realistic portrayal which at times caused me to twist my head in response. There's an eerie realism to the Pass sound that lays music bare for good or for bad, but whatever comes out through the speakers proves engaging.

Rollercoaster of Love

The 30.8 is chameleon-like in the way it seems to adapt to the music genre thrown at it. Every time I think I've pinned

down the amp's voice, I realize during the next song that the amp does not bend the music to its own will and sonic signature. Instead, it seems the amp adapts itself to the music it receives in order to deliver the best possible listening experience. Extended listening lends a degree of suspended disbelief nevertheless. Even though it's all an illusion, it's a magical trick indeed.

Money, Money, Money

The XA30.8 retails for \$6,800. While that's a significant investment for most audiophiles, it's also important to consider long-term value. First, the sonics are exceptionally good. Secondly, the amp is built to

last with proven circuits protected within its metal armor. Third, the amp will pair well with other gear that revolves around it over the years. Finally, the XA30.8 delivers power that belies its modest rating. Those with efficient speakers are likely to be surprised by the level of oomph the XA30.8 provides. More power hungry speakers may be served better with a bigger amp in the XA line. Yes, those amps cost more, but from a magical sounding watt-per-dollar ratio, they are certainly worth it. The XA30.8, brought me incredible musical joy during its stay, and my visitor will be missed. To usurp an ABBA song title, thank you for the music, XA!

SONUS FABER
All Models in Stock

PRECISION SELECTED RARE TUBES
Upscale Audio
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
HIGH-FIDELITY MUSIC SYSTEMS

Telefunken 6922/E88CC
Made in Ulm, Germany in 1968, these are the most sought after and rarest 6922 type ever. An incredible upgrade to your gear. Find a HUGE inventory of vintage tubes only at:
www.upscaleaudio.com

E 88 CC 1
TELEFUNKEN

PrimaLuna HP
The World's Finest Tube Integrated \$4399

MANLEY
Chinook Special Edition Phono Stage
An Upscale Audio Exclusive

KISEKI
Purple Heart N.S.
\$3499
All cartridges in stock. No waiting.

AUDEZE
LCD-3

VPI
Largest inventory of VPI in the U.S.A

Upscale Audio is always on the hunt for new products. Check our website for the latest.

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

UPSCALE AUDIO
HIGH FIDELITY • MUSICAL SYSTEMS

www.upscaleaudio.com

2508 Wright Ave • La Verne CA 91750
[909] 931-9686 FAX: [909] 985-6968

Further Thoughts — Jeff Dorgay

It's no secret that I am a big fan of Pass gear, having used most of their larger amplifiers as my reference for the last five years now, nearly three of them with the top of the range Xs300 monoblocks. They are truly amplifiers I have never tired of in any sense. The XA30.8 review came partially out of curiosity and partially out of looking for the ultimate amplifier for my Quad 2812 speakers, which like the original Quad 57s really need the right amplifier to sing.

Though not single-ended like my old Aleph 3, the 30.8 not only has a certain sweetness to it, but listening with the Xs300s in the background, I'm taken back at how much of the essence of the \$85,000/pair amplifiers is alive and well in the XA30.8s. And I've got a lot of seat time with the former.

Of course, the 30.8 provides the best combination of dynamic range and musical clarity I've yet to hear with the Quads, but as Rob mentions, it's shockingly robust driving a wide range of other speakers that we've currently got on hand as either reference, or ones in for review. The amount of sheer bass grip this 30-watt per channel amplifier provides puts a lot of 300 watt per channel amplifiers I've heard

to shame. But remember, this is coming from the mind of the man that not only lives by the phrase "the first watt," but has a whole line of amplifiers named thusly.

No amplifier is everything to everyone. That's why there are so many variations on the theme. Like every other Pass amplifier we've put through extensive listening sessions, the 30.8 has a tonal balance that is ever so slightly on the warm side of neutral. It's never slow and sappy, but definitely possessing more tonal saturation than Simaudio, Spectral, Boulder, or the like. So that is a subjective decision that you have to experience for yourself. These are all amplifiers I enjoy tremendously, but they do serve the music up with a different feel than the Pass.

Should you be someone who's always enjoyed the sound of a modern tube amplifier, but just don't want to hunt tubes down and play that game anymore, I suspect you will be in heaven with this amplifier. I have turned a number of my tube-loving friends onto the range of Pass amplifiers over the last five years, even a few friends who said they would "never" own a solid state amplifier.

Whether I was listening to

acoustic music, solo vocals or heavy rock, the refinement and resolution of the 30.8 more than once had me walk up and make sure the cables from preamplifier to power amplifier were actually plugged into the smaller amplifier, not the big ones behind. Keep the 30.8 within its range of capability and you'll never want for anything else.

Whenever I've mentioned to fellow audiophiles that I have a pair of Pass Xs300 monoblocks, I nearly always get the same response: "I can't afford a pair of those," and I totally get that. You have to be crazy to want a pair of amplifiers that cost nearly a hundred thousand dollars. The Pass XA30.8 is a mega performance amplifier that you can afford and use every day, provided you don't really need to push large, inefficient speakers at concert hall levels. This one's all about quality. And should you be a Quad or Avantgarde owner, you'll never turn back.

I am happy to award the Pass XA30.8 one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2016. It's like Nelson Pass put the Xs300s in a shrink machine. He's kind of a mad scientist, so you never know. ●



Pass Labs
XA30.8 Stereo Amplifier
MSRP: \$6,800

MANUFACTURER
Pass Laboratories

CONTACT
www.passlabs.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source
SME Model 10 with SME V and Model 10 tonearms. Dynavector 17D3 and Denon DL-103R cartridges

Digital Sources
Mac Mini, Roon Music Service, dCS Debussy

Amplification
Burmester 911 mk3

Preamplification
Coffman Labs G1-B

Speakers
Sonus faber Olympica III

Cables Jena Labs

Power
Running Springs Audio Haley, and RSA Mongoose power cords

Accessories
ASC tube traps, Mapleshade Samson audio racks, Coffman Labs Equipment Footers, AudioQuest Jitterbug, Atomic Audio Labs Mac Mini stand

Take TONE With You

Experience TONEAudio Magazine in
higher resolution on the Apple Newsstand.

Download the TONEAudio Magazine App
to your iPad or iPhone and read up on all
the latest music, gear, and style reviews.

All that richness blended into each issue
for less than the price of a good latte.

TONEAudio
bit.ly/toneaudiomagazine



FROM THE WEB

Larsen 6 Speakers

\$3,995/pair www.larsenhifi.com

One of the toughest things many music lovers face is the face off between putting the speakers out in the room where they often sound best, versus back against the wall where they often look best. Sometimes this decision is based on those you share your living space with and sometimes it's just a function of available square footage.

Inspired by famous Swedish loudspeaker designer, Stig Carlsson, the Larsen speakers are designed to be placed right up against the wall. The effect is perfect and they deliver robust bass and a well balanced soundstage. Thanks to an 89db sensitivity rating, these two way speakers play well with all amplifiers and don't need a lot of power to make a lot of music. Read our enthusiastic review here: ●

FROM THE WEB



Torus TOT Isolation Transformer

\$1,995 www.toruspower.com

FROM THE WEB

Many argue that an isolation transformer is the best way to deliver clean power to your hifi system, and after spending a few months with two of Torus' products, we certainly see their point.

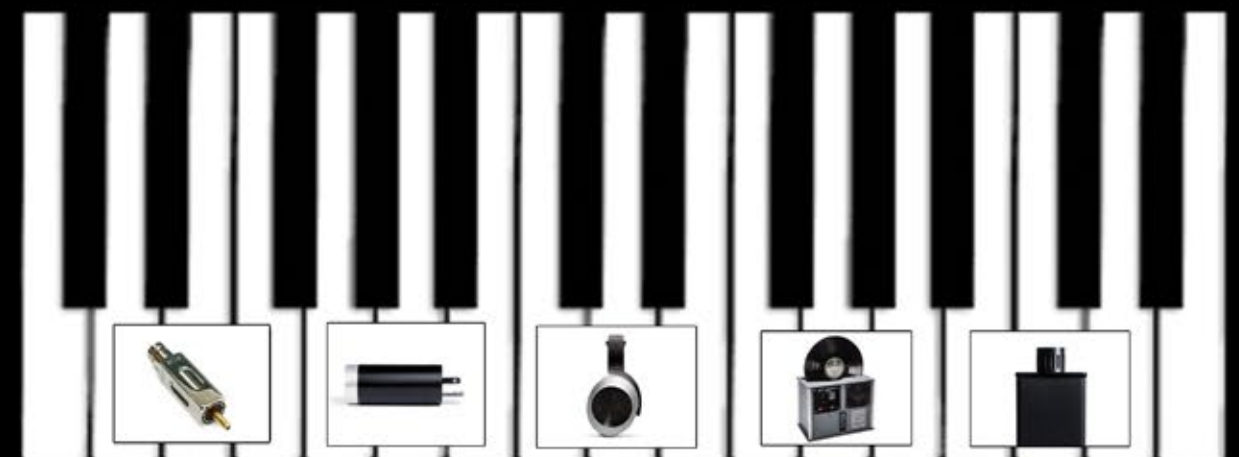
The TOT is the smallest series in the Torus lineup, but still mighty. With a 10 amp maximum capacity, it's better suited to smaller power amplifiers, but still has enough current reserve to power an entire system. Keep in mind this is the *small* Torus and it still weighs nearly 40 pounds. We put it through its paces here: ●

WHATEVER YOU ARE INTO...



You Can Play It Better

At home in your system with the only
Headphone, Powerline, Acoustics, Components and Cable Lending Library



Cables

Powerlines

Headphones

Analog

Acoustics

- 60+ brands of cables and \$2.5 million of products in The Cable Library.
- Evaluate cables, headphones, line conditioners and more at home.
- Connect with our experts for a free system consult, and enjoy their combined 100+ years of audiophile experience.

CABLE
COMPANY

Only at The Cable Company

800-FATWYRE or 215-862-4870 cable@TheCableCo.com New Hope PA 18938 USA www.TheCableCo.com

SLUMMIN'



Denon DRW-840 Dual Cassette Deck
 EBay, \$60

What could be better than one cassette deck? Why, two of course. Back in the 80s as the cassette format was dying, and CDs hadn't quite caught on, extended play via a dual well cassette deck was simply the coolest thing going. Here's a couple examples that still sound pretty darn good. The perfect thing for your garage system; queue up a few of your favorite mix tapes and get to work on your favorite vehicle. And reminisce.

The Denon is a fairly good example, but the Tascam was really well made. These show up on Ebay from time to time in the \$100 - \$150 range and if not mistreated, still provide great sound. This one was a stone cold steal. ●



Tascam 202 mk. II
 Garage sale, \$40

The High-End Super Speaker

You've Always Wanted- for Every Budget
meaningful technology & unbeatable performance from \$1,249/pr. to \$62,000/pr.



Performance-Driven Value In A World of Huge Prices. Is there such a thing as an \$1,249/pr.

Carbon-Fiber Tweeter Descended Directly from Award-Winning Model Seven Mk II's Patented Perfect-Piston™ Carbon Drivers

super speaker? \$13,900/pr.? What about \$62,000/pr.? What makes a super speaker? When a speaker at any price point is loaded with so much more technology and sounds that much better, it's a **real super speaker**.

"Better than some speakers I've heard that cost 20 times as much."
 —Jeff Dorgay, TONEAudio

Patented Aerodynamic "Reflection-Free" Midrange Driver Prevents Back Wave Distortion from Reaching Listener's Ears In Time w/ Music

Vandersteen Audio today offers a remarkable line of high-end super speakers in which each model shatters all expectations of what's possible anywhere near its price point. Because Richard

Vandersteen has always spent money on his speakers where it counts- on the drivers and crossovers that carry the delicate music signal- our entry-level floorstander the \$1,249/pr. 1Ci routinely **bullies bigger speakers costing two or three times as much**.

"...one of the biggest high-end speaker bargains out there..."
 —Roy Gregory, The Audio Beat

The **Treo** (\$6,900/pr.) is a modern-day version of the Model 2 that's **beautiful to look at**, but **over-engineered** to be as silent as the enclosures of today's most exotic super speakers regardless of cost.

"My new reference speakers." —Anthony Cordesman, The Absolute Sound

The **Model 5A Carbon** at \$29,900/pr. features an advanced carbon tweeter and the patented Perfect-Piston™ carbon midrange from the Model Seven Mk II, plus **BIG powered bass with a 400-watt powered subwoofer with 11-band room EQ**.

"Unbeatable powered bass." —Michael Fremer, Stereophile

Advanced Cabinet-Within-A-Cabinet Construction Renders Enclosure As Inert & Sonically Invisible As Exotic Speakers Costing 10X More

The **Model Seven Mk II** (\$62,000/pr.) is the ultimate expression of Richard Vandersteen's design philosophies, a radically advanced take on long held

design tenets. While other expensive speakers are seemingly "redesigned" every couple of years to turn new sales, the Seven has been in production continually since 2009 and updated just once. Model Seven owners can upgrade to Mk II status so **our best customers aren't left behind**. The Seven's legacy of Best of Show awards over the years is legend, and the Mk II earned four such designations in its first year. Yes, a super speaker in every sense of the word, designed and built to last.

Buy Vandersteen, Leave "Upgrade-Itis" Behind. When all of the information from the amplifier is faithfully retrieved, especially in the crucial time domain, you hear that something is missing. That something is the distortion of the original signal

that leads to the inevitable feeling audiophiles experience called "upgrade-itis." Yes, moving up the Vandersteen line always offers more performance and ever greater musical pleasure, as will

Dual 8," 300-Watt Powered Subwoofers w/11-Band Room EQ In Each Speaker For Perfect Bass in Virtually Any Room

any other true upgrade to your system. But owning Vandersteens and upgrading **because you love the way your music sounds** is so much better than swapping out your gear because you *can't stand* the way your music sounds.

Vandersteen's Quatro Wood CT at \$13,900/pr. is a real-world super speaker. It's loaded with Vandersteen's most meaningful technologies including powered bass with room EQ for "perfect bass in virtually any room," Vandersteen's patented aerodynamic midrange, a naturally airy Carbon Tweeter and much more. A ton of speaker!

VANDERSTEEN

vandersteen.com • 559-582-0324

Made in the U.S.A. Contact a Vandersteen Dealer Today

facebook.com/vandersteen-audio

Audiophile Pressings

Adam and the Ants

Kings of the Wild Frontier

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/33986147

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/adam-and-the-ants-kings-of-the-wild-frontier-deluxe-limited-ed-vinyl-lp-43-2cd-43-dvd

Joe Jackson

Night and Day

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/joe-jackson-night-and-day-180g-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/7226888

Carly Simon

Anticipation

Purchase Mobile Fidelity SACD from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/optical-disc/carly-simon-anticipation-numbered-limited-edition-hybrid-sacd

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/1554486

Carly Simon

No Secrets

Purchase Mobile Fidelity SACD from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/optical-disc/carly-simon-no-secrets-numbered-limited-edition-hybrid-sacd

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/1554380

Sarah Jarosz

Undercurrent

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/sarah-jarosz-undercurrent-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/61650390

Beth Orton

Kidsticks

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/beth-orton-kidsticks-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/60527761

William Tyler

Modern Country

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/beth-orton-kidsticks-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/58428072

Neil Young

Earth

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/neil-young-43-promise-of-the-real-earth-vinyl-3lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/62132141

Jazz

George Coleman

A Master Speaks

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/57736931

Pop, Rock & Country

BJ Barham

Rockingham

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/track/62272169

Bat for Lashes

The Bride

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/bat-for-lashes-the-bride-vinyl-2lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/62083070

Shawn Colvin & Steve Earle

Colvin & Earle

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/colvin-and-earle-colvin-and-earle-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/61477200

Lucy Dacus

No Burden

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/lucy-dacus-no-burden-vinyl-lp-ldd11511

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/62127053

Dinosaur Jr.

Give a Glimpse of What Yer Not

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/dinosaur-jr-give-a-glimpse-of-what-yer-not-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/62793844

The Gotobeds

Blood // Sugar // Secs // Traffic

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/the-gotobeds-blood-sugar-secs-traffic-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/61325506

Steve Gunn

Eyes on the Lines

Purchase LP from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/vinyl/steve-gunn-eyes-on-the-lines-vinyl-lp

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/60799310

The Highwaymen

The Highwaymen Live - American Outlaws

Purchase from Music Direct

https://www.musicdirect.com/optical-disc/the-highwaymen-live-american-outlaws-3cd-43-blu-ray

Stream in 16/44.1 from Tidal

http://listen.tidal.com/album/58684537

In an effort to help you find the albums we’ve been reviewing, we’ve started this handy index at the back of the magazine. This issue, we have a listing of all the albums available, and as we go forward, we will try and link to all of the music that our gear reviewers use in their hardware reviews, in an effort to help you listen for the same things we are.

Wherever possible, each title will have a link to directly purchase the vinyl from Music Direct, as we have done in the past. To make the game even more interesting, we also have links to Tidal’s digital music service, allowing you to stream if that’s the way you prefer, or just to take a good listen or two before plunking down your hard earned cash for physical media.

Either way, we hope this helps expand your musical enjoyment.



Organic - Dynamic - Alive

GamuT®

Handcrafted in Denmark



1628 california st. (on the cable car line)
san francisco, california 94109
www.audiovisionsf.com

abyss
audio physic
dali
davone
dynaudio
eclipse
enigma acoustics
gallo acoustics
gamut
grado
hifiman
jl audio
kef
mrspeakers
proac
psb
triangle
ultrasone
wilson benesch
yg acoustics

antipodes
arcam
aria
astell & kern
atoll electronique
audioquest
bel canto
bergmann
bluesound
b.m.c.
burson
cambridge
cardas
cary audio
chord electronics
clearaudio
crystal cable
devialet
dr. feickert
e.a.t.
funk firm
h.r.s.
ifi
integra
kiseki
lyngdorf audio
lyra
marantz
margules
micromega
moon by simaudio
naim audio
nordost
octave
pear audio
pono
primaluna
pro-ject
ps audio
quadraspire
rega
sonos
soundsmith
stillpoints
technics
unison research
woo audio

Manufacturers Links

LINKS

Where to find the gear you've seen in this issue.

Anthem: www.anthemav.com

Arcam: www.soundorg.com

Auralic: www.auralic.com

AudioVision SF: www.audiovisionsf.com

Audio Research: www.audioresearch.com

AudioQuest: www.audioquest.com

BAT: www.balanced.com

The Cable Company: www.thecableco.com

Cambridge: www.audioplusservices.com

Dali: www.soundorg.com

dCS: www.dcsLtd.co.uk

Dynaudio: www.dynaudio.com

Echo Audio: www.echohifi.com

GamuT: www.gamutaudio.com

Graham Audio: www.grahamaudioUSA.com

Focal: www.audioplusservices.com

MartinLogan: www.martinlogan.com

Mobile Fidelity: www.mofi.com

Mystere: www.mystere-usa.com

Music Direct: www.musicdirect.com

Music Matters: www.musicmattersjazz.com

Nagra: www.nagraaudio.com

Naim: www.audioplusservices.com

Nordost: www.nordost.com

OCTAVE: www.octave.de

Oppo: www.oppodigital.com

Paradigm: www.paradigm.com

Pass Labs: www.passlabs.com

Plinius: www.pliniusaudio.com

PrimaLuna: www.primaluna-usa.com

Primare: www.vanaltd.com

Rega: www.soundorg.com

Simaudio: www.simaudio.com

SPL: www.audioplusservices.com

Upscale Audio: www.upscaleaudio.com

Wireworld: www.wireworldcable.com

Vandersteen: www.vandersteen.com

VPI: www.vpiindustries.com