LOUDSPEAKERS: The quintamplified (yes!) Linn Artikulat, and the slim, elegant ASW Genius 300

ELECTRONICS: Preamplifiers and phono stages from ModWright and Linn

PLUS: The legendary LP12 turntable is upgraded...again. Paul Bergman looks at ways to absorb low frequencies. We look back at the origins of the audiophile recording, and we tour the Montreal show
Roksan Kandy LIII

“It displays serious bass kick and high-frequency slam that’s hard to better for the money. Add solid build into the equation and this power amplifier is a winner.”

What Hi-Fi?, June 2007

ASW Genius 400

“It has all the volume you could ever want, its bottom end goes down to bedrock, and its top end is delightfully smooth.”

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UHF No. 73

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Absorbing Low Frequencies
by Paul Bergman
The series continues, with an evaluation of what materials can absorb those low frequencies

The Montreal Experience
by Gerard Rejskind
Touring the terrific (and less terrific) rooms at one of North America’s biggest audio shows

Haunting the Festival
by Albert Simon
Albert picks up a second, third and fourth opinion

Waiting for Godot
New technology for home theatre…coming soon?

The Linn Artikulat 350A Speakers
The “A” stands for active or — as Linn spells it — Aktiv. How does quintamplification sound?

The ASW Genius 300 Speakers
From Germany, a moderately-priced speaker that is slim, elegant, and what else?

The ModWright 9.0SE Tube Preamp
Can you use first quality parts and still hold the price below C$3000?

The Linn Klimax Kontrol
Think refinement inside a bank vault

The Linn Linto
In a black box, Linn’s take on phono preamps

ModWright Phono Preamp
Bigger, heavier, and more expensive than its matching preamp, this is no mere accessory

Linn LP12 Turntable, the Final Version?
It’s not getting any cheaper, but it keeps on getting better

The Man from ASW

The Music Teachers
by Reine Lessard
Most composers are male, but not their teachers

Software Reviews
by Reine Lessard and Gerard Rejskind

Editorial
Feedback
Free Advice
Gossip & News
State of the Art
Another 25th anniversary

We’ve been making a big thing about the fact that UHF turns 25 this year, but ours is not the only audio magazine of that (advanced?) age. I’ve just received the latest edition of Andrew Marshall’s Audio Ideas Guide, and look what it says on the cover.

But wait a minute, isn’t AIG actually older than we are? A little, yes. Andrew told me that, “We’re actually a little late in celebrating (as in everything else these days, it seems), as the first AIG was published in the Fall of 1981, and subsequently (though not immediately) took over from ‘The FM Guide’.”

The blog branches out

For over a decade, our on-line blog was about one thing: what was going on at UHF. That remains an important topic, but since this Winter it has also been reporting on ongoing news touching hi-fi and high end video, as well as other questions we think may interest you. We can blog faster than we can publish.

We have therefore been using a lot more pictures, to the despair of visitors with dial-up Net accounts. To lighten things up, older posts now get pushed off into an archive page.

The blog is at www.uhfmag.com/Newsletter.html (case-sensitive). Yes, “Newsletter,” because that’s what it used to be before we decided to go with the flow.
HOW TO AVOID DOG EARS

We didn’t say dog years, we said dog ears.

You know, those little folded-down corners on a magazine you were hoping to get in pristine condition.

And the way to avoid them might not be what you expected! Surprisingly, it’s the expensive copy that’s likely to be tattered, torn, and… yes, dog-eared. We mean the neweststand copy.

After all, where do copies sit around unprotected? At the neweststand. Where do other people leaf through them before you arrive, with remains of lunch on their fingers? At the newsstand. Where do they stick on little labels you can’t even peel off? We’ve always wondered why newsstands do that, but they sure do.

Our subscribers, on the other hand, get pristine copies, protected in plastic, with the label on the plastic itself, not the cover.

We know you want a perfect copy, even if it means paying a little less.

As if that weren’t enough, there’s the fact that with a subscription you qualify for a discount on one or all three of our original books on hi-fi (see the offer on the other side of this page).

So what should you do?

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SAVE EVEN MORE WITH THE ELECTRONIC EDITION!
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This is our original book, which has been read by thousands of audiophiles, both beginners and advanced. It’s still relevant to much of what you want to accomplish. It’s a practical manual for the discovery and exploration of high fidelity, which will make reading other books easier. Includes in-depth coverage of how the hardware works, including tubes, “alternative” loudspeakers, subwoofers, crossover networks, biamplification. It explains why, not just how. It has full instructions for aligning a tone arm, and a gauge is included. A complete audio lexicon makes this book indispensable. And it costs as little as $9.95 in the US and Canada (see the coupon).

This long-running best seller includes these topics: the basics of amplifiers, preamplifiers, CD players, turntables and loudspeakers. How they work, how to choose, what to expect. The history of hi-fi. How to compare equipment that’s not in the same store. What accessories work, and which ones are scams. How to tell a good connector from a rotten one. How to set up a home theatre system that will also play music (hint: don’t do any of the things the other magazines advise). How to plan for your dream system even if your accountant says you can’t afford it. A precious volume with 224 pages of essential information for the beginning or advanced audiophile!

At last, all of Gerard Rejskind’s State of the Art columns from the first 60 issues of UHF. With a new introduction to each column, 258 pages in all. Check below to get your copy!

Five dollars off any or each of these three books if you subscribe or renew at the same time

The UHF Guide costs $14.95 (in Canada plus 6% GST, or 14% HST in NB, NS, NL), US$19.95 (USA) C$25 (elsewhere).

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State of the Art costs just $18.95 (in Canada, plus 6% GST or 14% in NB, NS, NL), US$18.95 (USA) C$32 (elsewhere, including air mail)

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We will take $5 off any or each of those prices if you subscribe or extend a subscription at the same time.
It’s hard to believe that it’s been 25 years!
I’ve been reading UHF from those early days. In all of that time UHF has been a source of equal parts entertainment, education, disappointment and frustration. I suppose it can be all of those things because of all the time we have spent together in my home over these last 25 years.

Along with the wisdom that comes along with getting older (I least I hope I’m getting wiser, no use getting older if we’re not getting smarter), my experiences of the last couple of years has shown me people sometimes don’t say the things they truly want to say the people in their life that matter most until the end or it’s too late. I have been tempted to write to you on many, many occasions. Now that I have all of these pent up feelings towards UHF, I fear that if I started to write you now my letter would turn into a book. It would be hard for me to express all of my feelings in just one letter so I may have to put you through what you’ve done to me. I’ve decided to write you multiple letters over the next 25 years.

Take that!

Rick Benyei
CALGARY, AB

 Sounds to us like a deal, Rick, and we will hold you to it.

For the past couple of months I’ve been ill and not been able to do much, except for reading and listening to music. But on Saturday I was feeling pretty good and told my wife I would like to go out and visit the Montreal Festival. She wasn’t sure I should, but finally agreed and we went to the show.

We enjoyed most of what we visited, but one room stood out in our minds. It was the Mutine room, with the CEC transport and Audiomat’s Maestro DAC and Récital integrated playing through Equation 35 speakers. The music was played at low volume compared to everywhere else, but the sound and emotion weren’t low at all, and my wife and I are still talking about it.

Just before the demo started, Mr. Rejskind walked in. There were no seats available. I was standing at the back. My wife got up to give him her seat. Pascal Ravach, from Mutine, made the remark that there was only one woman in the room, and she was the one to give up her seat…

I have been a reader of UHF for the past four years. I have also ordered a bunch of back issues and have found in this mag my only audiophile friend. It does not talk back to me, so it was special for me to be able to talk with Mr. Rejskind. For me, UHF is the only mag I know that puts the emotion music brings above specs or technology, and talking with Mr. Rejskind confirmed that aspect.

My wife and I would also like to wish a happy 25th anniversary to UHF, and also mention that Mr. Simon and Mrs. Lessard do a wonderful job.
Marie and André Avon
SAINT-JEAN SUR RICHELIEU, QC

I was glad that we got to meet face to face. I was pleased that you recognized my name…as you can imagine it does get mangled quite often. My apologies if I was incoherent, but I was sleeping at the hotel, and as you likely know sleeping in a strange bed is never fun, so when we spoke I was running on four hours of sleep.

I did get to see a bit of the show. I really liked the AvantGarde horns. I also spent some time visiting the eateries of Montreal, which was also good.

Estes Moustacalis
OAKVILLE, ON

I just read your writeup about the iPod in State Of The Art (UHF No. 79). It was interesting, but I have to say: 90% of the people who owns an iPod, who didn’t buy it or got it bought for them by their parents, care about the music’s quality. They don’t even know the difference between MP3, WAV, AAC, etc. The 90% have an iPod is because it’s cool, hip, the in-thing. You’ve got to hand it to Apple when it comes to marketing.

I’m not disagreeing with you. I too think that it’s great that there are people out there now who are listening to more music. I think you and your magazine need to keep telling people of the quality sound that can be found in products such as the iPod.

I don’t own an iPod because I just find it too expensive. I did however buy a Toshiba 60 Gb Gigabeat several years ago and a pair of Shure E-2’s. I also bought my niece a Samsung player and have introduced her to new music.

Whenever my brother-in-laws ask me about music downloads (I’m the hi-fi enthusiast), I always tell them I don’t download music because it’s not pure. I’ve introduced one of them years back to good-sounding stereo. I’m going to continue my part, and you and your magazine should too.

Bob Lowe

Message received, Bob

I received UHF No. 79 in the mail today and have read a healthy chunk of the articles thus far. Thank you for another great issue.

I hate to tease the writers of a magazine that I both thoroughly enjoy and rely upon for sound advice, but since so many of your other readers have been keen to point these things out in the past…

There is a funny looking word on the editorial page, “…losing billions because its music was bzeing copied on cassettes.” Was the UHF computer spell-checker inadvertently switched from English to Russian?

I have a suggestion. How about a “Be the first reader to spot a UHF typo/spelling error, and win a UHF 25th anniversary commemorative coffee mug” contest?

Bob

But if you really, really want to ensure that the next issue has no errors whatsoever for all the pedants to latch onto, I suggest a “Be the first reader to spot a UHF typo/spelling error and win UHF’s Alpha system Linn Unidisk 1.1” contest. I guarantee not one jot or tittle would be out of place! And I guarantee that not one article would go unread (twice!) by your readership.

Jeff Tennant
BURLINGTON, ON

Well, Jeff, we’ll ask Linn if they’ll co-sponsor the effort, but we won’t get our hopes up. By the way… you say you read a good chunck of the magazine?

Are you serious?
Do you really think it is a good idea to connect a variable supply to the Squeezebox 3 (Squeezebox on Steroids, UHF No. 79)? That voltage adjust knob is a very tempting target for curious visitors and children. I can hear it now: “Hey, what does this do?” as the knob spins up to 12 volts.

Maybe those 12 volts are the “steroids” you’re referring to in the title…

For your information, hanging a large capacitor on the output of a regulated power supply is likely to reduce the performance of the regulator. You guys should check this stuff with an engineer before you publish such nonsense.

Tyler Derden

Your point about strangers twirling the knob is well taken, Tyler, and it would be a good idea to hide the thing away, or else to get one of those locking knobs that are used on technical instrumentation. Our own supply is tucked away where visitors won’t suspect its existence.

Your other comment is beside the point, however, since the bench power supply is a variable source, not a regulated source, and it has a meter for correct adjustment. In this instance, it is the user who is the regulator.

If we had gone through with the idea of designing a whole new auto-regulated supply, then the filter would have preceded the regulator.

I am wondering if you will be reviewing the vaunted Vandersteen 5A or the Vandersteen Quattros. I have heard from many sources that they are truly the ultimate listening experience and that they sound like real music. Can these speakers really replicate a facsimile of the input signal with no coloration? If this is true then Richard Vandersteen is a genius.

I hope to hear from you because I am interested in buying one of the two.

Ray Maksi

We have heard them under pretty good conditions, Ray. The 5a definitely breaks with the Vandersteen tradition of offering quality at a low price, but it makes real music, and we like it a lot. For that matter, we do consider Richard Vandersteen a very smart man.

I should thank you for showing me that music reproduction can be more than background noise in the house, or learning about the top 40 in the bus with my MP3 player. Thank you for your great magazine.

Stéphanie Aubé
ROSEMERE, QC
I have a question concerning the connection of my speakers. I have KEF C55’s and SW200’s, highly modified. The C55 is a mini-monitor and the SW200’s are a pair of passive subwoofers. They are normally connected from a Cayin MT-88 tube amp with a 4 ohm tap that goes to the SW200, then to the C55 via internal crossover.

I want to know if it's safe to connect them in parallel (to take a cable directly from amp to the monitor and another from the amp to the subwoofer), I've noticed that many solid-state products with that model name (since the “SW” stands for “subwoofer), including our products, are normally connected in parallel (to take a cable directly to the SW200, then another from a Cayin MT-88 tube amp with a 4 ohm tap that goes to the C55, without the subwoofer). It might be useful for use with a product that is not truly balanced, the balancing circuit stage, sometimes an op amp. Such products will sound worse with balanced cables, not better.

You can submit your own question on line at uhfmail@uhfmag.com, but note a couple of conditions.

Your question (and of course our answer) may be used in the on-line version on our site, and it may also be used in the print version. For those reasons, you need to supply your name and your home city. (Can you submit a question and specify that it not be used? Yes…but that’s a paid consultation service, currently costing $50/hour. Contact the designer if you are interested.)

The C55 is an ancient model, but like pretty much all loudspeakers, it is a 4 ohm load. We don’t know anything about your ears, so we can’t determine which subwoofers you use. We assume that if you connect the two, they are designed to work together.

We’re not surprised that running the C55’s straight, without the subwoofers, results in clearer sound. The high-pass filters in the subwoofers are not transparent, and the extra pair of cables (from the subwoofers to the main speakers) won’t be transparent either. Fact is, though, it’s nearly impossible to mate a passive subwoofer to a speaker unless the two are designed to work together.

Once again that is pretty much de rigueur in a studio.

It may be advantageous in a home system as well, but not always. Some home electronics have XLR connectors because that’s the fashion, but they are not genuinely balanced, often because the designer doesn’t understand what balancing is, let alone what it’s for. Even if it is truly balanced, the balancing may have been done by adding an extra circuit stage, sometimes an op amp. Such products will sound worse with balanced cables, not better.

How to know? The best way is to borrow a pair of balanced cables, if you can, and do some careful comparisons.

I see a lot of articles and ads for cables, such as hum and radio frequency response will be a parody of what you want, and you can see why we urge you not even to try it.

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I read reading your articles and ads for Benchmark DAC1 (UHF Powered) and Pod too. In the forums I find a comparison of the Benchmark DAC1 and the Lyrasound DAC 53 and the Lavry Studio DAC, and a few others. What Integral may be interesting: the Floating Pin.

I’ve been noticing that floating pin 3, and that’s a paid consultation service, currently costing $50/hour. Contact us for details.)

The Free Advice section was actually in our very first issue, and it is one element that makes UHF different from other magazines. It’s not that our ears are any better than yours, but we have, collectively, many years of experience. Perhaps we’ve learned something that can help you.

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Your question (and of course our answer) may be used in the on-line version on our site, and it may also be used in the print version. For those reasons, you need to supply your name and your home city.

(Can you submit a question and specify that it not be used? Yes…but that’s a paid consultation service, currently costing $50/hour. Contact us for details.)
I would like to know your advice about the first step to improve the analog part of my system, which consist of: a Jolida CD-100 valve CD player (with JJ 12AX7 tubes), a Jolida JD-1701 hybrid integrated amplifier (with Sylvania 12AX7 tubes), a Pro-Ject RPM-4 turntable with Pro-Ject Arm, Grado Silver cartridge, and NAD PP-2 phono preamplifier, Linn Keosa speakers, Prisma Cable 10 speaker cables, Nordost Blacknight CD-to-amp cables, and Monster Interlink Reference 2 turntable-to-amp cables.

Would it be the cartridge or the phono preamp, and what level of price should I invest to get a good improvement?

Alain Berthiaume
CONTRECOEUR, QC

What you have, Alain, is a system that is quite well balanced, but of course there are some improvements possible.

The Silver cartridge is one of Grado's mid-priced models, with an elliptical stylus that can't do full justice to your records. However we are aware that a cartridge with a line contact stylus (which can yield reduced groove noise and distortion) will be considerably more expensive. We would, then, look first for a replacement for the NAD phono stage, and then to some of your cables, especially the speaker cables.

It's difficult to recommend a price range, since what you should spend is not up to us, but in general we recommend against small improvements, because you lose money each time you make one. You might as well make it worthwhile.

I am in the market for a flat panel TV, now that SED appears far, far away. A salesman at one of the large consumer shops told me to consider a 42-inch Sharp Aquos as opposed to a 50-inch, because the space between the pixels is less pronounced on the 42-inch, hence resulting in a sharper image. Is this true?

You should do a critical article showing us your insights into the plasma vs LCD debate.

Nick L.,
MONTREAL, QC

We’ve written about this in some detail, Nick, and there is an article on the same subject (Waiting for Godot) in this very issue. LCD cannot for the moment replicate the range of colors that some other screens can (D-ILA, DLP, plasma), but cheap plasmas are not a great buy. What the salesman told you is true, but it’s trivial. A 14-inch set, if you follow his argument to its logical conclusion, would look even sharper.

No, what you need is a screen whose size is appropriate for the viewing distance. The 42” set is a perfect choice for viewing from 8 to 10 feet away, but if you’ll be viewing from farther away you’ll probably want the 50”.

(Say, you don’t suppose the commission is bigger on 42” sets because the store has tons of them tucked away in the basement, do you? Nah...that’s way too cynical.)

I am currently selling my separates system, which includes a Technics SU-A700 Mk3 amp and B&W 601 speakers.

Okay, I realize this isn’t high-quality stuff, but I have been more than happy with it for several years. Now there is a space issue (rack, stands, tuner, etc.), so it has been decided to buy a system purely for iPod!

I have just listened to the Fatman iTube with KEF Q5 speakers (Fatman have just released a 25 watt version), and I was thoroughly impressed with it. However once home I plugged the iPod into my amp, and I actually found that this also sounds very good.

With a budget of just £600 (£300 each for the iTube and the KEFs), are there any other recommendations which would compete with my old Technics combo? A similar sound to my old system but just smaller and aesthetically pleasing would do!

I appreciate everyone has a different opinion on sound, but a point in the right direction would be very helpful and appreciated.

Rob Tolson
HULL, UK

We yield to no one in our appreciation of the iPod, Rob, but when we connected it to our system we found, like
you, that it was “pretty good.” However “pretty good” was a little less than we really wanted.

We have seen the iTube, complete with the little KEF speakers, and they are a neat combination. Our guess is that the amplifier will sound a lot better than your Technics amplifier ever could. So we give this kit a qualified yes, but...

Our question is whether your B&W speakers actually are too big for the space you want to give them. It’s obvious that, if you don’t need to buy new speakers, and if yours are paid for, they are essentially free. That liberates funds for the rest of the gear.

The weak point in your proposed system is not either the iTube or the KEFs but the digital-to-analog converter built into the iPod itself. A possible upscale alternative is an amplifier with a built-in DAC, which we will assume (or hope) is superior to that of the iPod. For instance, Audio Space makes a tube amp with its own Burr-Brown DAC, the Mini Galaxy. If you already own a computer, plug it into the amplifier’s USB input, store your music in uncompressed or lossless form on a spare hard disc, and control it all with software such as iTunes. We think that could turn “pretty good” into “really great.”

I need your advice on a balance issue with the phono section of my system.

I am using an older Thorens turntable with a relatively new Ortofon OM10 cartridge and a new Bryston B60 integrated amp (no phono stage). For a phono stage I use an Advent 300 integrated via its “tape out” jacks (thus bypassing its volume, tone and balance controls). The problem is that the right channel is noticeably louder than the left, requiring a significant adjustment to the Bryston’s balance control. The problem only occurs using the phono stage; my Denon CD direct to the Bryston or with the Advent as preamp shows no imbalance.

How can I determine if the problem lies with the phono stage or the turntable/cartridge? I have eliminated the speakers and the non-phono sections of the Advent (i.e. no balance problem when using it as an integrated or preamp with non-LP sources). I don’t have a spare phono stage or turntable to do any swaping around, but I do have a multimeter, but don’t know how to measure the output from these devices. Can you help?

If the problem is in the turntable or cartridge, what could be the cause and potential fix? To my untrained eye, it looks like the azimuth of the stylus might be ever so slightly off; could that be it? Also the Thorens’ hardwired cables have a few bite marks from my crazy cat. How can I tell, and is it worth replacing the cables? I know you are not fond of older Thorens, but I would like to avoid total replacement of components for a few years.

Nicholas T. Starin, PORTLAND, OR

Our colleague, Albert, had a young cat who seemed to be a music lover. When music was playing he would sit in front of the speakers, prick up his ears, and listen intensely during long periods of time. We suggest a firm talk with your cat: one more misplaced toothmark, and
As to the imbalance problem, the source of it is really simple to determine. Interchange the leads from the turntable to your Advent amp. If it is now the left channel that is louder, then the problem is in the turntable or cartridge. If there is no change, it’s the fault of the Advent amp, or at least its phono circuit.

We’d put odds on the turntable being the problem, actually. A damaged cartridge is one possible cause, but a poor contact of the connecting pin at the rear of the cartridge is also a possible suspect. And since Thorens tone arms had detachable headshells (that’s one of several things we hated about them), we would check that the connections between headshell and arm tube are both tight and clean. You might also clean the plugs at the downstream end of the turntable cable.

If none of this works, you’d have to do a more test you can make: interchange the headshell wires to the cartridge, then channel to right, channel to left.

The alternative would be a sort of pass-through headphone amp that could simply pass the signal on through to the preamp, but I hate anything extra in the signal path. Any thoughts?

Chris Moss
TATAMAGOUCHE, NS

We would also hesitate to add anything extraneous to the signal path, Chris. It’s bad enough dealing with the stuff that has to be there no matter what. And besides, your preamp almost certainly won’t drive your headphones adequately. We observe with a jaundiced eye the tendency of some manufacturers to drop the clout is sufficient to stop the war cold of the usual concentric stereo plug. Or would the preamp output be too powerful for headphones?

Yes, it’s interactive

Just click on the ad on the next page, and you know what will happen? You’ll go right to the advertiser’s Web site … if there is one, and of course if you are connected to the Internet at that moment. Try it with any of the other ads in this issue.

Of course it works with the full (paid) electronic issue as well.

Digital and dts used on most DVDs, contains only two channels, but the sounds sources are mixed with complex phase relationships, so that a certain surround effect can be obtained when the recording is played through the appropriate decoder.

In fact the word “decoder” is not truly appropriate, because the recording contains no code. The system is simpler than that. For instance, sounds that appear in both channels but in opposite phase will be routed to the rear speakers. This technique was introduced around 1970 by David Hafler, and was refined (if that’s the word) in the SQ and QS quadraphonic systems marketed through 1975. Dolby Surround is a similar “encoding” (no code), and the Dolby Pro Logic playback system is the last generation of course these recordings, with two-channel signals, are all they need.

Surround systems have been supplanted by Dolby Digital and DTS, which are true surround systems (still with no code), the system is simpler than that is doing you dirt.

André, it could just mean that an enterprising Sony rep has made the video club owner an offer he couldn’t refuse. A possibly more significant clue is that Wal-Mart has a display loaded with both Blu-Ray and HD DVD movies. If the demand exists, why not?

There has recently, however, been a rumor concerning Wal-Mart, the world’s largest DVD retailer. That rumor, which Wal-Mart quickly denied, says that the company is about to get its hands on a source of extremely cheap HD DVD players, and that its market clout is sufficient to stop the war cold.

I don’t have a headphone amp, so I can’t personally try my disk player (Ayre C-5xe) or DAC (AE3 DJH Signature edition). My disk player is intolerant of some styles of music, using headphones on occasion and can give out four channels of music when played on a multichannel player. I only have a stereo player and they sound pretty good, maybe not audiophile quality, but close; certainly among the very good ones in my collection. They are on the SACD and DVD Audio.

So my question is why hasn’t this medium been more popular?

Pierre Lalibérté
MONTREAL, QC

Actually, Pierre, there have been several variations of this recording system over nearly four decades. Dolby Surround, not to be confused with Dolby

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and declare HD DVD the winner. Then again, Blockbuster has announced it is dropping HD DVD in most stores in favor Blu-Ray. Either way, it wouldn’t be the first time “market decisions” were made by the people with the most power. That doesn’t mean you.

In fact, wouldn’t the opposite be a big surprise?

I have a chance to buy a Sima W-3050 power amplifier for about $400. I would like to know if you recall hearing this amp, or if you could comment on it. I know that a lot of early Simaudio and Sima products were tried by you, but I cannot recall if this was one of them.

I am using a Celeste P-5003 preamp and the power amp section of a Rega Luna amplifier. The W-3050 would certainly provide more current, but should I hold off for a W-4070se?

Paul Hirvinen
THUNDER BAY, ON

Yes, for a couple of reasons, Paul. First of all the W-3050 is about twice as old as the W-4070, which right away gives it somewhat less value. True, the 3050 was reasonably good (we did review it, as we did a short-lived earlier version called the 2050), the first true hi-fi power amplifier from what was then Sima Audio. It was designed, as a possible point of interest, after Victor Sima heard our Robertson 4010 amplifier in our reference system alongside one of his own amplifiers.

But the 4070 was of an entirely different generation, and was a mighty leap forward for Simaudio. Indeed, its “Renaissance” circuit is the basis for such ground-breaking amplifiers as the W-5. A 4070 will probably cost you more, but that’s what we would rather have.

I have been a loyal member of UHF for many years now and still can’t wait to get my next copy of your great magazine. I have based many of my purchases on your excellent reviews!

My system consists of a Copland 301 Preamp, Rogue Zeus Amp, Linn Ikemi CD player, BIS Audio speaker wire, ASW Genius 400 speakers, Atlas Navigator All-Cu between preamp and amp, and Wireworld Equinox interconnect between CD player and preamp.

I am also using the Inouye SPLC line filter. The Inouye has two orange lights on the front, and they blink a lot. Is this normal?

My second question is about the Copland. I have been getting a bit of static when I turn the volume up or down. As well, recently the right channel stopped working. When I turn the volume up a bit louder it starts to work again. This has happened about three times now. I gather I will have to bring the Copland to Winnipeg to have it repaired at an audio shop. Do you think that the whole volume control will have to be replaced and is this something that a competent repair shop can handle, or should I send it to Divergent Technologies for repair? The Copland is long past warranty.

Peter Boulton
KENORA, ON

Peter, the problem with your Copland is that its volume control is either worn or dirty. We’d bet on dirty, because that happens a lot. It can be cleaned fairly
easily with a cleaning spray. Electronics houses sell volume control spray bottles for about $10, and it will work for a while. Much better yet is Caig ProGold (also called DeOxit), which is more expensive but will do a better job, and it’s good for your connectors besides. You’ll have to unplug the preamplifier, especially from the AC line, open the cover, and find an opening (usually a narrow slot) in the control housing. Squirt a little cleaner into that, turn the control back and forth, then repeat.

As for the blinking lights on the Inouye, that is unfortunately normal with neon pilot lights, but it seems to be largely harmless. Here, by the way, is a scientific curiosity. Shine a pocket light on one of the blinking lights, and it will stop blinking. Turn it off, and the neon light will blink again. As you can see we’ve spent time thinking about this over drinks, but we haven’t come up with a solution any more practical than that one.

I have a Clearaudio Aurum Alpha cartridge on a Rega P3 turntable, I am planning to upgrade to an Aurum Beta S cartridge. Would this be a wise choice? I also have a Bryston 2BLP amp with a Bryston 11B preamp with a built-in MM stage.

Douglas Roach
AZILDA, ON

We’re always embarrassed when we are asked to comment on Clearaudio cartridges, because the company seems to consider certain basic details of the cartridge construction to be state secrets. The Aurum Alpha and Beta S look similar on Clearaudio’s all-too-sparse spec sheets, as does the top-of-the-line MM pickup, the Maestro. They all have the same inductance, namely 0.42 Henrys, which is way high for a quality cartridge. There is not even a hint as to stylus shape. If the upgrade means getting a line contact stylus instead of an elliptical, you could look forward to lower distortion and less groove noise. In actual fact, we don’t know what the difference is. Clearaudio’s moving coil pickups have suitably low inductance, but you don’t have the right input for one. The advantages are a mite vague, we think, especially considering the (low) resale value of your existing cartridge.

I have a Roksan turntable with approximately metre-long RCA cables that are hard-wired to an Artemiz tone arm. I would like move the table to a different, more convenient spot in my system, but I would need a least another half a metre on the cables.

Can you recommend a quality RCA female-to-female extension cable or adaptor? Could adding such a device degrade the sound quality? If so, could you suggest some other solution? Moving the Bryston preamp is not an option.

Bob Salsbury,
BATH, ON

Quality cables don’t usually come with female plugs, Bob. An technician who isn’t allergic to solder can alter a cable for you, but it might be a better bet to use the adapter you asked about, a small female-to-female inline adapter. That would enable you to use the conventional interconnect you want. Yes, there will be a certain performance hit, but with good connectors it can be minimized.

Do, however, use the best possible interconnect. Some years ago, we attached an interconnect that seemed reasonably good to a turntable, and we would have sworn there was a dust ball under the cartridge, or that we had bunged up the stylus. There wasn’t, and we hadn’t. It was in fact the fault of the cable. That turntable signal is really small, and it needs coddling.

I’ve decided to dramatically upgrade my digital sound source, leaving my horrible jukebox CD player to the kids. From recent articles in UHF, I’m convinced that a PC-based solution is the way to go for me, using a Squeezebox as the go-between from the PC to a DAC.

At the same time, I’m trying to preserve some of my old LPs, and (at your suggestion) purchased the Edirol UA-25 to assist. Considering that the Edirol already can do D/A conversion and has RCA outputs, is it suitable for connecting the Squeezebox to my preamp, or are there distinct advantages to using a
higher-end DAC like the Benchmark?

John Finlay
CALGARY, AB

The Edirol UA-25 is meant for recording and playing back from a computer, John, and that is all it knows how to do. It does have RCA outputs, but it doesn’t have a digital input, either coaxial or optical. What’s more, it has no access to electricity unless it is connected to a powered USB hub, like that of a computer. Though it could be used directly with your PC, it is not suitable for use with the Squeezebox.

The Benchmark does have a full complement of suitable inputs, and it would work very well with a Squeezebox.

This is going to sound a bit odd but I think I need some sort of tone control (!). I have been diagnosed with a vestibular schwannoma (benign brain tumour), and it’s affecting my hearing. My right ear has high frequency rolloff, the left side is fine. So the balance knob doesn’t really help, because it adds volume to the affected side across all frequencies.

Is there something that could exaggerate the sound by X dB above a particular frequency (maybe I could match to my audiogram?) that I could put into the signal path without making a total hash of the music? It would need to be something that could be adjusted, as the condition inevitably worsens.

Nick D.
PORT COQUITLAM, BC

The obvious solution is a multiband equalizer, Nick, one which has a set of controls for each channel. Such equalizers are commonly available from stores catering to deejays, including larger music stores. Any equalizer will impose a performance hit, but you’ve got your own performance problems just now.

The problem with that solution is that your right ear is not the only ear hearing the output of the right channel. Boost the highs on the right channel, and your perfectly fine left ear will be hearing excessive top end. You may be able to minimize that problem by listening in the “near field,” which is to say by sitting close in. Of course, an equalizer plus good headphones would solve the problem, and you may want to consider that for some of your listening.

The best of luck with what we fervently hope is a treatable ailment.

I have a modest system, but I am still young, which gives me plenty of time, and hopefully better income, to upgrade it along the way.

My source is a TEAC DV-H550 plugged into a Harman/Kardon AVR-30 and a pair of Paradigm 7SE mk3. All my cables are above “The Source” quality, but not yet what they should be. Well, I do have an Atlas Questor interconnect. I am also very aware of the tweaking of the room and system, thanks to your magazine.

I guess I should ask the usual basic question: “what should be my next move?”

But I know my next move, or a parallel one I should say. My real question today is about vinyl. I was almost born in the CD era, and the only vinyl I played was my Walt Disney booklet collection. As we say in French: “vous avez piqué ma curiosité” with your magazine, and
I would really like to try some vinyl.

I bought some record at a garage sale (we may cross each other sometime), and I can get my hands for almost nothing on a Sony PS-T22 turntable with its original ND15G stylus. Does this turntable even deserves a test, or should I look for some other entry-level turntable? I mean, does it have some hi-fi virtue? Also, does my integrated AV-R-30 phono amplifier have some? Is it worth changing the stylus on this low-level turntable and, if so, for what? I have around $400 to invest in my vinyl 101 boot camp.

Stéphanie
ROSEMERE, QC

Well, “almost nothing” is a bit optimistic, I would say, but you should be able to get a real audiophile gear at that price. Stéphanie, and I’m sure of it. In other words, guessing that it will leave you with your budget nearly intact. That Sony turntable shows certain resemblance to the more common Technics direct-drive turntables. It’s quite time, though its tone arm seems rather less rigid. The best we can say about it is that it will enable you to look at an ear to the LPs you’ve already purchased and the ones you may find Saturday morning, while you look for something better. We don’t recommend spending money on a new stylus at this point (and this is a big “unless”) the stylus is worn or damaged. If it is, you should probably forget of course let it touch your records.

What should you look for? Your best bet would be a belt-driven turntable from a company that was known for real audiophile gear. That pretty much excludes companies such as Sony and Yamaha (the latter makes pianos, but we don’t think their instrument and audio people drink together). The models most likely to turn up used are Regas, Systemdeks, Linns (not the LP12, unless you’re very lucky), and perhaps even Revolvers (we once picked up a mint Revolver for $45, but that doesn’t exactly happen every week).

For the integrated amp, what other components in that price range would you warmly recommend?

I have been a loyal reader of UHF for some years now and fondly remember the YBA reviews, especially the Intégré amplifier, but I don’t have the issues where the Audio Refinement products were reviewed. I realize that YBA Design stuff isn’t up to the classic or other lines of YBA (you have to sacrifice something), but how good is this line really?

Second question, would you recommend an isolated ground receptacle (one or two) for the audio system room.

Dean Nicholson
SPEERS, SK

Some audiophiles do prefer an isolated ground receptacle, such as the Hubbell 8300, Dean. Understand, however, that this doesn’t mean letting the ground connection float. It means simply that the outlet frame is not connected to its ground (green) screw. You need to ground it with a separate wire. If your electrical system’s ground is less than perfect, you can then use an alternative ground, typically a thick copper wire connected to a metal stake in the ground. In most homes this will make little difference, but there are exceptions.

The YBA Design components are the successors to the earlier Audio Refinement series. It is built by a different company, the company, the older Audio Refine did quite good job, but they are out of the picture. We can’t recommend them, and we haven’t even talked to the YBA company. The Audios also offer amplifiers and CD players, but again, it’s your budget, your choice. Audiophile gear at these prices, from such companies, as Antique Lab and Creek. I would say, from such companies, from such companies, as Antique Lab and Creek. It is built by a different company, with a different philosophy, but it is built by a different company, with a different philosophy, but it is

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If not, can you be so kind as to tell me your impression of this cartridge, why maybe you selected this cartridge over others to use, and not just one but twice, and any suggestions on setup.

I have the cartridge on a Pink Triangle Anniversery turntable with a Mythology Pan arm. My Eroica GX went bad after about 10 years. I really liked that cartridge, but I wanted to try something else. So after trying five different cartridges, the last being the Benz Micro Glider M2, I went back to Goldring. I don’t think the phono stage was my problem. I have seven different ones, so I tried different combinations with each new cartridge.

Mitch Smith
APO

You don’t mention what problem you’ve had, Mitch. If you actually bought a Goldring Excel you got one of the last ones. It was on the cover of UHF No. 29, and it has been discontinued for a while. We don’t know why, though we imagine it takes a lot of precision work to make one. Goldring still offers the Elite, a “detuned” version of the Excel. Following the blind test reviews in issue No. 29, we actually purchased two of the cartridges in the test, the Excel and the Roksan Shiraz. When we wore out the Shiraz we went to another Excel.

Setting up the cartridge is simple enough, though it can be finicky. Lateral tracking angle is done with a good protractor, which is to say one that is calibrated accurately. Vertical tracking angle, which depends on arm height, is best done by ear on a true stereo recording. Adjust and listen for best focus.

There is no surefire way to adjust antiskating force, but our experience tells us that adjusting it as recommended in the arm instructions will give you about double the optimum force, which actually varies from record to record.

Where is the truth about cables making any audible difference when someone like Richard S. Burwen, who is an expert and has designed equipment for big names like Mark Levinson, and has built a system (20,000 watts) that has no match anywhere, tells you, “Forget expensive cables. They are inaudible

Dick Burwen is certainly an eminently quotable “name,” Jean-Paul, but let’s see just what else he believes. He designed a product called the Burwen Bobcat, part hardware and part software, which he says makes an MP3 music file sound like the original. When we first saw the press release we declined even to publish it.

Building our reference systems cost us money. If we could have had the same results with wires from Home Depot, we would have been delighted. Ditto for the theories that all amplifiers and all CD players sound alike, other strange beliefs held in some quarters by people who should know better.
Talk about absorbing sound, and most people think instantly of soft, pillowy materials. Certainly, cushy materials do absorb sound waves, but — for reasons I have explained in earlier installments of this series on acoustics — they absorb mostly high frequencies.

Why should this be? Perhaps these diagrams will make it clear, or at least clearer: Imagine a wall, made of rigid, hard material such as gypsum board or even concrete, and place a foam pad over it. In comes a sound wave, which is of course not air movement at all but rather vibration of the air.

The wave penetrates the foam and bounces off the hard surface underneath, just as before. However, because the wavelength (the distance between two waves) is so long, most of the wave never makes it into the foam pad before its leading edge strikes the hard wall. It therefore encounters little friction, and little of its energy is absorbed.

That is the reason an overstuffed room, filled with draperies, carpets and sofas, will typically sound unbalanced. High frequencies will be absorbed just fine, perhaps too much indeed, with the result that articulation of voices and instruments will be poor, and it will be difficult to make out details. At lower frequencies, however, reverberation will remain high, causing considerable confusion as to the source of individual sounds. Such a room will be frustrating even for conversation, because you will need to speak up to make yourself heard, never mind understood. I need hardly add that this is not the ideal room in which to listen to music, either live or reproduced.

But now let us now take the same hard wall, and the same pad, but make the incoming wave of much lower frequency, and therefore longer wavelength. Here is what happens.

Once the leading wave enters the pad, the vibrations will take place inside the foam rather than in the air. The friction caused by the air rubbing against the fibres will quickly turn acoustic energy into heat. The wave will cross the pad and bounce off the hard wall surface underneath, crossing the foam a second time. It is easy to see that it will be diminished, containing less energy than before.

However the diagram shows a relatively high frequency wave, whose wavelength is shorter than the pad thickness. If it has a frequency of, say, 16 kHz, its wavelength will be about 2 cm, less than an inch. The entire wave will have room to enter the pad.

Allow me a parenthetical comment. Notwithstanding my negative comments about such a room, it was once common for acousticians to prescribe what we would today regard as an unbalanced milieu. It was considered that strong absorption of highs would make sound seem smoother, whereas a longer reverberation at the bottom end would provide body and “resonance.” It was even common for recording studios to be designed for such an imbalance.

Why was this? I believe there are two reasons. Reproducing equipment of the time suffered from rather harsh highs (a blight not entirely banished even today), and it was considered that minimizing high-frequency reverberation would make the harshness less evident. As for low frequencies, well, as we shall see taming low-frequency reverberation can be extraordinarily difficult. The difficulty could be avoided if it were defined as undesirable. We could then, in good conscience, not attempt to do anything about it.

These older studios, however, did not really sound very good, and their inadequate acoustic profiles can clearly be sensed when listening to acoustic recordings made in them. The 1950’s fad of adding artificial reverberation to popular recordings was largely a reaction against the dry, dead sound of the standard studio, an attempt to put back some of the life that was clearly missing.

As for home listening rooms, it seems clear that it is desirable to strike a reasonable balance between absorption of highs and absorption of those difficult lows.

Well, if foam pads and carpets are not sufficient, how do we tame those low frequencies?

Control through resonance

The problem, remember, is that the wavelength of low-frequency sounds (that is, the distance from one travelling wave to the next) is very long. We could compensate by making the thickness of our pad or carpet greater. Couldn’t we?

Well, let us make a calculation to determine if this can be reasonable. We know that the wavelength of sound is equal to the speed of sound in air (about
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Did previous generations understand acoustics better than acousticians of our own day? It might seem so. Walk into Chartres cathedral or the monastery atop the Mont Saint-Michel, and listen for yourself. Or visit the ancient outdoor amphitheatre of Epidaurus.

That amphitheatre, shown at right, dating back some 25 centuries, could hold some 14,000 spectators, as many as a modern rock music venue, but spectators in the back rows could hear perfectly the actors and musicians, who of course spoke and played without the thousands of watts of amplification available today. How was it done?

The amphitheatre was the subject of an article in last April’s issue of the Journal of the Acoustics Society of America.

Georgia Institute of Technology mechanical engineer Nico Declercq, for years, tried to explain the remarkable acoustics at Epidaurus in terms of its shape, specifically the sharply rising seating area. Yet modern replications of the amphitheatre just couldn’t match its acoustic clarity. There had to be more.

Declercq says that the secret sauce is the material used for the seats, namely limestone. Unlike modern acoustical materials (concrete, steel or even wood), limestone has a highly porous surface capable of absorbing low frequencies.

Absorption of lows is important in a large venue, because high frequencies, which are required for clear articulation, don’t travel well, being absorbed by the air. Because low-pitched waves travel with little attenuation, the distant listener will hear a muffled sound, with lows — including those generated by the spectators themselves shifting in their seats — overpowering the more delicate highs. Declercq says the porous limestone is especially effective at absorbing frequencies below 500 Hz, allowing the highs to be heard clearly.

There were no schools of acoustical engineering in ancient Greece, but it has taken 2500 years for modern architects to figure out what the ancients apparently knew.

345 m/sec) divided by the frequency. If we wish to absorb a sound of 256 Hz (which is Middle C in North America), we note first that its wavelength is 1.35 metres. We can get reasonable attenuation with an absorber depth equal to a quarter of the wavelength, which is still about 34 cm, or just over one foot. This is rather thick even for a long-haired throw rug, and that thickness will double for 128 Hz and double again for 64 Hz.

We conclude that we will need to use some other method. Fortunately, there are several possibilities, but we should bear in mind that the lower the frequency we want to control, the larger and more expensive will be whatever device we select. In normal rooms, therefore, we may choose to throw up our hands and realize that we cannot entirely do away with reverberation.

Taming the extreme bass

We hope you’ve been keeping up with Paul Bergman’s new series on acoustics (readers have been asking us for it for years now). Of course this issue is incomplete, because... well, we need to stay in business. Thus, the rest of this article will look like Latin, though it’s not.

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Acoustics

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Randomness is your friend

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This 20th edition of Montréal's Festival Sound & Image was the second to be held at the very large Centre Sheraton rather than the more high-end-friendly Delta. The reason for the move, last year, was to open up large rooms for companies like Apple, Nikon, Microsoft, and other deep-pocketed players in the consumer electronics space. Has it been a success?

That's not for me to say, of course, however none of the three companies mentioned was at the show. Indeed, only Sony brought any cameras, and only entry-level cameras at that. At the same time, some high end companies that normally attend were absent, companies such as Focus Audio and Blue Circle.

I don't know whether that's the reason for the deterioration in the quality, but it did seem to me that there were fewer really good rooms. At the same time the bad rooms seemed more toxic than ever. Was I just in a bad mood because of the mid-April snow storm (a Festival tradition, it should be said), or are exhibitors losing touch with the way to set up a hi-fi room?

The picture shown here is that of one of the two rooms of Mutine, this one featuring Equation 35 speakers, Audiomat electronics and an upscale CEC transport. Several visitors told us they thought the two rooms were oases of music and calm after the aggressive noisiness of some surrounding rooms, but that was accomplished at a cost. Mutine was booking appointments, letting in only as many visitors as there were seats, then closing the door. The result is that a lot of people didn't get to hear either room. Whether they enjoyed the more accessible ones is an open question.

Also well worth mentioning is the room of Aurum Acoustics, whose all-in-one system graced the cover of UHF No. 78. It was accompanied by a number of acoustic panels, which helped make it sound much more lively than it had at CES. This was one of the best rooms at the Festival.

The loudest rooms are nearly always the ones with home theatre systems, as we know. There seemed to be fewer of them this time around, but some of them were determined to get noticed by pouring on the watts. That was the case of Niro, whose single-speaker (plus subwoofer) surround sound system is the invention of Niro Nakamichi. There were actually two demos of the Niro system, both using the obnoxiously endless attack scenes from Pearl Harbor: Zero dialog, zero music, just airplane motors and explosions. Proving...what?

The best home theatre demo was the large one run by Adam, whose Tensor Beta speaker is on the next page. This is a huge speaker, with multiple amplifiers built in, and with a complement of drivers that includes what seems to be an offshoot of the Heil tweeter. The image, from a Vidikron Vision 150 projector (also on the next page, and note the hand, which gives you a hint of its size), was one of the best I have ever seen. Yes, gear of this size and price is best suited to a castle, but that's not my point. A scaled-down version of that demo would have impressed a lot more people than the noise boxes in other rooms.

While I'm on video, I saw (but didn't hear) the Arcam Solo (shown on the next page). It's a (nearly) all-in-one movie machine, with DVD player, AM-FM tuner, surround sound processor, and two channels of power amplification. It will cost C$4000.

I was glad to see the legendary British brand Sugden return to North America. That's the A21a integrated amplifier shown on the upper shelf of the rack on the next page. The original A21, a pleasantly competent amp running in, yes, pure class A, was on the cover of UHF No. 28. The new one, by the way, is single-ended. We'll pencil it in for a review.

The oddest amplifier I saw at the show is from KR, the Kronzilla DX: you can see it on page 29. What are those tall output tubes? Well, KR makes tubes as well as amplifiers, and those are its own T-1610 tubes. If I tell you that a replacement tube runs to US$800, you'll have a hint at the price of the complete amp. Tube life is projected at 10,000 hours, if that's any consolation. The KR mono-blocks were driving a pair of Escalante Fremonts, which I've mentioned before: they look (and sound!) like bookshelf speakers on a growth hormone overdose. This was definitely one of the good rooms.

There's another oddity, which you can see at the bottom of the next page: a bright red version of a Jadis Reference integrated amplifier. What it's also notable for is the built-in iPod slot.
That’s UHF’s iPod on it, by the way. If the Jadis belonged to us...well, Apple does offer a bright red iPod. I didn’t hear that amplifier, though I liked what I heard elsewhere in the large Pierre Gabriel room.

At pretty much any show there are more loudspeakers than anything else, and that was true in this case. I was glad to see Totem bring out its Mani-2 speakers for the first time in many years (one of its dealers, Audioville, was showing them last year). The large Halcro power amp was showing no signs of distress. The venerable British speakers maker, KEF, now has its own distribution arm in North America, and was showing the 207-2, one of its new Reference series speakers. The large Reference 205-2 (at the bottom of page 27) was delightfully natural and long, thin speakers that can be mounted discretely below and beside a home theatre screen.

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At the bottom of the next page and it was more than the last year). They are known to be difficult to drive, though the large Halcro power amp was showing no signs of distress. They are known to be difficult to drive, though they don’t need much of an invitation to sit for a while and listen to a pair of hybrid (electrostatic, with dynamic woofer) speakers from Advanced Audio Technologies, the Metro. You can see them on page 27, at upper right. I’ve often said that I like electrostatics in principle, but that there are only a few models that please me. I should count the Metros as one of them. I’ve often said that I like electrostatics in principle, but that there are only a few models that please me. I should count the Metros as one of them.

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Nearly any show will have a pair of Lowther horn speakers somewhere, but I have seldom heard them sound as exceptional as I did this time. They were driven by AirTight electronics, with an Audio Exklusiv turntable (page 31). I listened to a recording of Palestrina motets that were, frankly, thrilling to hear. Why don’t they always sound this good?

Verity Audio always has at least one pair of its upscale loudspeakers at any show, and there were three pairs this time. The Lohengrin II speakers were playing in a huge room, as befits their size and price. They were driven by multiple tube monoblocks from Artemis Labs (you can see one on page 29), and one of the sources was a Nagra digital recorder, playing a copy of a master tape. The sound was at once impressive and disquieting. I preferred the smaller Verity Rienzi speakers, playing rather more quietly, yet more satisfyingly, with a CD player and electronics from Ayre.

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or a custom-built woofer. Driven by a Moon Super Nova player and a Linar amplifier, it was the speaker I heard the most buzz about.

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Lots of articles are written about components, fascinating texts about what they are, how they work and the passion that drives those who create them. But who writes about the other side, the crowd of regular audiophiles? Can’t a regular, ordinary audiophile be passionate too? Who is that stuff made for anyway?

This article is for you, it is about your reactions to the music you heard and to some price tags that left you wondering if you were maybe attending a car show. Yes, some of the comments I gathered (and mine along the way) may not please everyone, especially those who make and those who price and promote the stuff. It is not meant to be a criticism of your actions, but rather an invitation to adapt, once you realize how it is perceived by others. To all who take the time to read this, I’d humbly suggest you use everything that may come your way — no matter who brings it up — as constructive.

I spoke to a friend of mine a few days after the show. He is Just a Regular Yet Passionate Audiophile Consumer (JARYPAC), and he asked me, “What did you think about this $95,000 system?” And I asked, “How did it sound to you?” “Not too good,” he replied. “Well, you know the answer, I heard what you heard.”

Some of us write about the sound, telling others what we think is wrong with it in some instances, and why it disappointed us, and when we find great-sounding gear we attempt to explain what we liked about the music and why we think it was so great. But when it comes down to you not liking something you heard, chances are we didn’t like it either.

I mean, it’s not an acquired taste like, say, wild mushrooms. It’s sound and music, it’s a voice or an instrument or any combination of those known elements, reproduced with the illusion of space. That’s it. It’s simple, yes, but it’s not easy.

We were reminded of that as we went from room to room, taking time to sit and listen in most of them, while avoiding others when we felt the walls buckle and

Below left:
• The truly transparent Ferguson Hill speaker
At right:
• the Totem room
• Totem’s Vince Bruzzese holding one of the drivers of his Tribe 3 speaker
• the battery-powered Omega Signature amplifier

Haunting the Show
by Albert Simon
people streaming out with glassy eyes.

Gerard and I had some time together at first, and we were impressed with the sound of the large Accentus speakers, featuring a ribbon tweeter at the back, reining over a wide space and hooked to a large pair of Jeff Rowlands power amps. The source was the emmLabs CD3D linked to the emmLabs DCC2 preamp, playing excerpts of Jazz at the Pawnshop, followed by Amanda McBroom's unmistakable voice singing The Rose. All CDs were treated with a layer of AVM anti-vibration coating.

We then arrived at the Totem room (on the previous page), where we attended an interesting demonstration by chief designer Vincent Bruzzese introducing his latest Tribe 3 wall-mounted speakers. The sound from that single unit was riveting and it expanded widely, filling the room, as we listened to Fever played on the MDS CD player by Accuphase through a set of Halcro preamp and power amps.

As we entered the Simaudio room I was attracted by the finely sculptured components. I must say that since I am already familiar with the high quality of their sound, I was first taken by their beauty and less by the music playing at that moment — I didn’t even write down what it was. There were the new W-7M’s, a hefty pair of monoblocks, the Moon P-8 preamp and the Andromeda CD player, all leading to the tall Evidence Temptation speakers by Dynaudio.

In the dimly lit KEF room we were treated to a superb and humorous song happily sung by the Ladysmith Black Mambazo group of male voices. The KEF Reference speakers, a leader in a new line, offered a particularly open and detailed sound, with the help of a Chord CD Player, the CPA Reference preamp and a pair of huge power amps, also by Chord, and all illuminated by that inner blue glow.

Another pair of that new line of KEF speakers, the 207 Reference, greeted us in another room with the flowing, open, detailed and silky sound, provided through a pair of Chord SPM 6000 monoblocks, a Conrad-Johnson preamp and the strikingly designed CEC TL-0X transport linked to a Chord DAC.

Quite a contrast with what we were hit by, however, in the next wide room as we entered through a crowd of apparently hearing-challenged audiophiles, listening to Jacinda’s rendition of Danny Boy. Her intimate, soft voice was enlarged to stadium-size proportions through a pair of Watt Puppies speakers by a couple of large VTL amplifiers linked to a VTL preamp. I could tell this system had superb potential qualities but I couldn’t enjoy them. We left the room puzzled. I attempted to return to that room a few times with other friends, during the show, but every time we got near it, it sounded as if the same group of audiophiles was having special requests, and my friends turned back.

What a relief it was when we then tried on the Grado GS-1000 headphones. I was so taken by the natural and smooth

**NOT JUST HARDWARE…**

What long-time readers tell us they most like about UHF is that it does more than review amplifiers and speakers. In every issue, we discuss ideas. We try to tell you what you need to know, besides what CD player to buy. It’s one of the features that makes UHF Magazine unlike any other audio magazine.

**Above left:**
- Two new speakers from Gemme

**Above right:**
- A new affordable speaker from B&W, and the Art Metro hybrid speaker.

**At right:**
- The new KEF Reference, and the Gershman Sonogram
If I could Sing Your UHF Children’s Feedback Listening Room

2   ULTRA HIGH FIDELITY Magazine

Grand Master speakers surrounded by a full array of Jadis atmosphere, linked by a brand new series of Pierre Gabriel cables featuring Furutech connectors. I asked to hear the sound that I forgot to focus on what was actually playing. These headphones feature a fine wood finish and were fed by their own amplifier.

We thoroughly enjoyed the sound of the Pierre Gabriel Grand Master speakers surrounded by a full array of Jadis tube electronic components, glowing warmly in the subdued atmosphere, linked by a brand new series of Pierre Gabriel cables featuring Furutech connectors. I asked to hear A Gaelic Blessing by John Rutter, a superb composition based on a traditional text, and we were all moved by the soft voices of the Turtle Creek Chorale supported by one of the deepest, most gorgeous organ sounds I know. (In case you own the CD titled Requiem, Reference Recordings RR-57, that piece is on the last track and, for some reason, it seems to have been recorded much lower than the rest, so you might want to raise the volume substantially in order to appreciate that depth I’m talking about.)

We wanted to listen to the boldly-designed Black Swan speakers by Gershman Acoustics, and, as we entered the room, Sara K was singing If I could Sing Your Blues. The Weiss Jason transport and Medea DAC were hooked directly to the Moon power amp by Simaudio. We then listened quietly to Amanda McBroom and Eric Clapton, before moving on to the next room where, for a moment, I couldn’t believe the quality of the music I was hearing.

There stood a pair of conventional-looking, neatly-finished speakers filling the room with a mellow, yet finely-detailed sound, with D5 Era speakers and controlled by a pure class A Sugden (a name that should bring back memories to long time UHF readers) integrated amp, the A21SE. Norah Jones also sang beautifully, as I noticed the fascinating design of the Funk V (for Vector) turntable featuring an asymmetric triple pulley arrangement to balance the drive. Very clever. Overall, the sound was noticeably airy and finely detailed.

The Modern Jazz Quartet was swinging along on a Well Tempered turntable through Audio Space tube amplifiers and the beautifully-finished JAS Orior Grand speakers with their ribbon tweeters. The atmosphere was intimate, the sound silky smooth and the cymbals sparkled softly between the speakers in the small and well-attended room. I walked into the next room with audiophile friends Michael and Jimmy, regulars at the Montreal show, and listened to BC Acoustique A3 speakers, sharing the stage with the SA100 integrated amp (with its tiny remote control) and CD100 player, both made by Orelle. Michael had to admit that, while he liked the sound and was impressed by the bass response, the room was, as in many cases, much too small. I had visited that room earlier and after listening to a very detailed sound, featuring French singer Calogero, I had heard the same comment.

Anne-Sophie Mutter’s violin was furiously going through a Carmen Fantasy when we walked into the next room and we sat appreciatively, listening next to Western Wall sung by Rosanne Cash. I then asked to hear the first of Debussy’s Children’s Corner pieces arranged for orchestra. The woodwinds danced and spread their joy to the strings through the widely placed Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand speakers, and the Primare DVD 30 Universal Disc Player, amplified by Primare’s Pre 30 preamp and A32 power amp. Michael had trouble locating the image of the numerous instruments (no doubt due to the long and narrow room), but Jimmy liked the lightness and the air around the performers.

We then entered an acoustically treated room by Inovaudio, featuring Eleanor McEvoy’s image solidly placed in the room. Gershman Acoustics’ latest creation, the truly affordable Sonogram speakers were helped by a Simaudio Supernova player and a Linear amp. Gerard and I exchanged glances and raised appreciative eyebrows. I returned often to this room with different friends, during the show, and their reaction was always the same.

A non-conventional orange pair of speakers (14 coats of recently applied translucent paint, I was told) was the center of attraction in the TEO Audio room as the Neville Brothers’ Yellow Moon album was played on a Shanling CD player, linked to an Audio Space tube preamp. Audio Space amplifiers bi-amplified the not-yet-named narrow and tall orange speakers which will be offered in different colors as required. Nothing so unusually striking about the design of the Creek EVO CD player we heard next, just the warm voice of Diana Krall coming out of a pair of small, surprising Sonogram speakers were helped by a Simaudio Super Nova player and a Linear amp. Gerard and I exchanged glances and raised appreciative eyebrows. I returned often to this room with different friends, during the show, and their reaction was always the same.

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the Aurum Acoustics system, and listened with pleasure to John Gorka and Greg Brown singing two Pete Seeger songs from Where Are All the Flowers Gone. We were told about the changes that were made to the system, since we tested it at UHF, now using top-of-the-line Crystal Cables Ultra series within the speakers and as interconnects. Michael asked to hear his CD titled Sea Change by Beck, and then, for contrast, I handed over my CD of baritone Thomas Hampson, singing Beautiful Dreamer, a 19th century song by Stephen Foster — after having it demagnetized on the spot. Inovacoustic had installed side panels and diffusers in the room and added their decoupling supports under everything that produced the wonderful music we heard (table, equipment, speakers). “Excellent, coherent sound,” said Michael as we were leaving. “I also discovered that sounds I never knew existed on this CD”. Added Jimmy enthusiastically, “It was so clear, so detailed!” I had to agree.

Leaving them for a while, I went over, with Gerard, to listen to the new Linn LP12. We were very impressed with Gilles Gagnon’s convincing demonstration, comparing the “old” and the new version of that legendary turntable, using the Klimax Kontrol preamp and the large Artikulat, 5-way active speakers. “Even the rhythm was different,” said Gerard, and I found an abundance of new details, also confirmed by another visitor sitting next to us. “The pianist was actually so much better,” added Gilles. “Hearing him play like that, I think he would have a much better chance of getting hired,” he added with a laugh.

When we sat down to listen to the Sonogram speakers by Gershman Acoustics, Michael asked to hear a track from The Gladiator’s film score. No comments, no exchange of glances. At the end Jimmy inquired about the tweeter and was told it was made of silk. “I knew it,” he said, “that’s why the highs are so smooth.” We were also told that the speaker cables (copper-covered silver) were also made by Gershman Acoustics. “I find that piece particularly touching,” said Michael, back in the hallway, still thinking about the music he heard, “It can almost make me cry and, in there, I had trouble holding myself back. I’ve heard it on many systems but I didn’t feel this way before.”

“These speakers are interesting and affordable,” concluded Jimmy, in his brief, down-to-earth way he uses for praise.

We went slowly from one room to the next, eager to discover good sound. Michael wanted to hear more of a system he thought was quite good and he signaled the Person in Charge (PIC) to turn the volume down (it was so loud he didn’t attempt to speak). Instead he turned it up. Michael had to get up close to him and explain. The man finally turned it down, a disappointing look on his face. In another smallish room, one of the three PIC had chosen to impress the few attendees by playing an LP version of Scheherazade; he carefully lowered the arm on the section he knew, on the black shiny surface, and cranked up the volume. Soon after the solo violin section, the orchestra exploded in a fury, breaking up at the seams, crashing through the floor in the now partly deserted room. “Why do you do this?” I asked, forced to raise my voice considerably, “nobody can tell how good your system is.” He hesitated and then said “It’s too noisy outside in the hall.” I walked out.

Could it be, like, a guy thing, to be able to endure so much loudness? Are we getting into Xtreme sound? I’m not talking about a pop concert, this is a sound show, not a noise show, and if some can’t tell the difference, customers can. Time and time again, visitors I met in hallways told me similar stories.

Jimmy said he really wanted to hear some music in the Mutine room since he had such fond memories of the Gaia speakers he had heard at the show a few years back. There was a line-up at the door, and we decided to reserve our seats for a later presentation. After a very interesting (and ear-opening) introduction on the subject of listening to music by Pascal Ravach, we were treated to a few samples of glorious sound. The wood res-
onated on John Jenkins Consort Music for Viols. Jim Corcoran and his guitar had an uncanny presence, and the Ladysmith Black Mambazo voices, rising in waves, filled the packed room. The music was played on the TL-0X transport by CEC (shown above) paired with the Audiomat Maestro DAC, amplified by the Audiomat Recital integrated amp and delivered by a pair of tall Equation 35 speakers—all linked with Actinote cables. At the end, I watched people leaving slowly, with smiles. “This place is really like an oasis,” Michael said dreamily. “When you close your eyes (as Pascal Ravach had suggested) the speakers disappear, your brain relaxes, it stops being active while the music is playing.” Jimmy felt that there was an effortless feeling to listening and noticed that the bass was remarkably well controlled, without boominess. “An effect of which I’m acutely aware,” he added, “it was almost like listening to electrostatic speakers.”

(My two friends returned to the same room for another presentation, the following day, while I was touring the show with others.) We also enjoyed the adjoining Mutine room with an amusing excerpt of An American Beauty film score and Paul Desmond’s legendary composition Take Five played by the Dave Brubeck Quartet. The superb sound was made possible by a Mimetism 20.1 CD player, the Mimetism 15.2 integrated amp and the Argentera ribbon-tweeter speakers by Atlantis Acoustique. “It’s a similar type of sound,” said Jimmy on the way out, “light, fast and so musical.”

We also enjoyed Michael’s CD of the music of the Cirque du Soleil played through the Metro Ribbon Hybrid speakers by Advanced Ribbon Technologies. The Naim CD player was linked to the I-7 Moon integrated amp by Simaudio. “Oh, I remember this place,” announced Michael excitedly as we entered the large room featuring the large, black and impeccably finished Lohengrin II speakers by Verity Audio, standing quite a distance apart. Between them were an impressive pair of Artemis Labs SP-1 single ended monoblock stereo amplifiers, each with its own SP-1 power supply. To the left of the room, was the Artemis Labs LA-1 line preamp and right up front stood Dean Martin, swinging joyfully through I Love Vegas, live on the Rat Pack CD. We were transported to another time, another place, and loved it.

In a very different room we sat for a while to enjoy the sound of the Mini Exquisite Kharma speakers, a pair of sleek wood-finished Tenor Audio power amplifiers, a 1621A transport with the 1611 DAC and the 6010D preamp Reference series, all by MBL and all linked by Kubala-Sosna cables. I was truly impressed with the superb look of utmost quality that seemed to glow softly around us, as I sat looking at all the components in that room. While I was equally impressed with the sound of Thomas Hampson’s rich and deep baritone voice, something bothered me with another recording, a dynamic interpretation of Sarasate’s Bohemian Airy with violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter. No reservations, though, for Michael and Jimmy who loved the Norah Jones CD they asked to play right after. They didn’t dare ask the price of the system, however.

Price was certainly not a problem with the Omaha Audio system that I listened to, at a later time, with other visitors. Actually it was a real revelation, considering its low estimated price, with a single-ended triode integrated amp, a preproduction CD player with a tube output stage, and a preproduction pair of medium-sized, good looking speakers on stands. Accessories included the 3D stabilizer mat, which was placed over the CD and the components were each resting on three unusually designed feet (made of 87 machined parts, I was told). The resulting sound was amazingly accurate and finely detailed as I listened to the trio of Yo-Yo Ma, Mark O’Connor and Edgar Meyer playing O’Connor’s composition Butterfly’s Day Out from the The Appalachia Waltz Compact Disc.

After another series of noisy rooms, I sat with relief and satisfaction in the good-sized Fidelio Audio room and discovered a special arrangement of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring with famed trombone player Alain Trudel conducting. This future release by Fidelio Audio was smoothly rendered, with an open sound by Verity Audio’s Sarastro speakers helped by the CDP player, the PL-P preamp and a pair of VPA power amps, all by Nagra. I also had a wonderful experience, listening to two more songs by Thomas Hampson, in a large room featuring the fantastic-looking Sonus Faber Elipsa speakers. The sound spread wide, clear and naturally warm, amplified by the new Ayre MX-R monoblocks and played by Audio Research player and preamp.

I finished the tour as I began it, with Gerard, and we were thrilled to discover a small gem just before closing time. We were totally surprised by the rich sound of a small tabletop system playing Down to the River to Pray, a song by Alison Krauss featured in the film O Brother, Where Art Thou. We just sat, listening, mesmerized by the transparent (yes, literally) pair of horn and bass sphere speakers, the iPod Nano placed in an MSB-modified iPod dock and an MSB-made DAC, the small, cube-like class AB integrated amp, and the small, yet effective, subwoofer—all (except MSB) designed by Tim Hill of UK-based Ferguson Hill. We couldn’t believe the richness of the midrange (where the music actually speaks to us and sings) coming out of this diminutive system, as we went through an excerpt of Jazz at the Pawnshop and Pete Seeger’s live performance of The Water is Wide. Such quality and performance at an amazingly affordable price.

It gave me back some hope after witnessing the pathetic and puzzled look on many JARYPACs’ faces, listening to
absurdly priced, yet unsatisfying-sounding systems.

This year, I realized more than ever before, that some manufacturers (influenced, no doubt, by marketing wannabees just landed from a frivolous planet) are pricing themselves out of the lucrative pool of regular audiophile consumers, appealing instead to a luke-warm “music lover” audiophile type who tends to buy his if-it’s-really-expensive-it-must-be-really-good audio gear compulsively, using an all-too-easily accessible home equity line of credit.

However, in view of some very interesting discoveries we made in this year's Montreal show, I'm glad to report that there are still some passionate designers and manufacturers out there, who know how to appeal to most sane and no less passionate audiophile consumers.

We wish them a healthy and prosperous future.

Analog was alive and well at the Festival!
Clockwise from bottom left:
• An ancient but still capable turntable from Well-Tempered
• A massive table from Germany’s Audio Exklusiv
• the MS table
• a massively modified Technics direct drive turntable brought by Son Idéal, which loves classic audio
• the (as yet armless and beltless) Pluto turntable at the Mutine room
• the Funk turntable, which lives up to its name.
The most important element in a quality music system is the source, right? How can downstream components improve a source that is already distorted or missing information. But wait a minute…what is the source? Is it the CD player, the turntable, or perhaps your computer? No, it’s the original recording.

More than three decades ago that was already evident. Audiophiles would trade info (if only the Internet had existed!) about which pressings of Sergeant Pepper, Dark Side of the Moon or Space Oddity were better. But a well-recorded performance was obviously even more important than a quality pressing, and there had to be a way to get more of the music into the grooves.

There were, in fact, several.

Cutting directly

Anyone involved in making recordings was intimately acquainted with the tape recorder’s shortcomings. Dynamics were compromised, squeezed between the all-too-obvious hiss and the harsh saturation distortion. High frequencies were limited by the self-erasure of the recording bias signal. Phase was affected by even the slightest skewing of the tape. Tapes suffered from “print-through,” allowing you to hear echoes of sounds gone by or even pre-echoes of sounds to come. The recorded signal would deteriorate in the presence of a magnetic field, including that of the Earth itself. What if you did away with the tape and recorded directly to the LP master?

Not that this would be easy. In record cutting suites, a “preview” head on the playback recorder would “tell” the cutting lathe what was coming up, so that it could adjust the spacing between grooves. In a live performance, the producer would have to follow along with the score and anticipate changes in level, in order to change groove pitch manually. Because this is difficult to do, direct-cut LPs tended to be shorter than conventional LPs. What’s more, the artists would have to turn in a flawless performance in one go, without a pause. A wrong note in a live concert is quickly forgotten, but not on a recording destined to be played again and again. To make matters worse, a limited number of records could be pressed before the stamper wore out.

As nearly as we can determine, Sheffield was the first company to embrace direct-cut discs. Sheffield was not originally an audiophile label, however. The earliest Sheffield LP, not bearing a “LAB” number, was of classical piano by Lincoln Mayorga, the pianist who would participate in countless Sheffield recordings, but it is in mono.

It was in 1968 that he put out what would become a legendary LP, numbered LAB-1, which few people would ever hear, Lincoln Mayorga and Distinguished Colleagues. It was followed by a second volume (subtitled The Missing Lin), and a third volume, shown above.

Sheffield quickly became known in audiophile circles for its direct-cut discs. Its album Growing Up in Hollywood Town, with Mayorga accompanying singer Amanda McBroom, took the audiophile by storm, and for some years it was hard to tour an audio show without hearing it at least four times an hour.

The album was hailed for the purity of McBroom’s voice more than for its natural stereo perspective. In fact, Sheffield was never a purist label, and it was prepared to use the same multi-microphone techniques as the big studios did. Its ace in the hole was the short path from those microphones to the final recording. Another of its famous products was The Sheffield Drum Record, possibly the most dynamic recording ever released.

The two sides featured drum solos, respectively, by Jim Keltner and Ron Tutt, and ran less than 14 minutes in all, so that plenty of space could be left for groove excursion. It was followed by The Sheffield Track Record, featuring percussion, keyboard, bass and guitar. It too was necessarily short, and the two
would later be combined onto a single Compact Disc.

Though Sheffield would remain the direct-to-disc company — at least until it stopped making LPs — a number of companies imitated the technique.

This direct-cut disc is an “RCA,” but it is from the Japan Victor Company (JVC), and not the US company RCA Victor. It too was a multi-microphone job, by the way. It should be mentioned that, for some years, JVC was the company to see to have high-quality vinyl pressings made.

The virtue of simplicity

In the meantime, however, some producers were finding simpler ways to get higher fidelity than the big labels: just use less equipment. In some cases the discovery was accidental: the producers might have used more microphones and a console, but couldn't afford them. For some reason, these small companies were concentrated in one country, Sweden.

Jazz at the Pawnshop, from Jacob Boethius’ label Proprius. This double LP captured some of Sweden’s top jazz musicians playing a pseudo-British pub in Stockholm called Stampen...Swedish for “pawnshop.” The 1976 two-microphone recording by Gert Palmcrantz was astonishingly lifelike, with a 3-D image you could walk into. Over the years the Pawnshop series (including two sequel albums from the original sessions) would be released in countless form, including a single LP, single and double CDs, plus xrcd, and SACD. Incidentally, it remains one of the very few original audiophile recordings still available on vinyl.

Jazz at the Pawnshop however triggered a lively discussion: should you bother with recordings of mediocre artists just because they are sonically excellent? Were those Swedish jazzmen competent? Would Amanda McBroom have landed a record contract had it not been for the direct-to-disc process?

There is no doubt that some truly deplorable “artists” got recorded in sound that was far better than they deserved. There was even a direct-to-disc recording of Beatles imitators, intended to demonstrate how the Fab Four might have sounded had George Martin been an audio purist.

Another target of the polemic was what was probably the first Proprius recording, or at least the first famous one, Cantate Domino. It was done with two B&K microphones and an old Revox tube recorder (which was all the producers could afford). The critics were especially harsh on soprano Marianne Mellnäs.

But were they right? By and large we don’t agree. Listen to Mellnäs’ rendition of O Holy Night, and see if you aren’t moved. Immerse yourself in the ambiance of the Pawnshop, and see if you don’t feel like applauding with the other patrons (and if you don’t get angry with the drunk at the back who just won’t shut up!). Compare McBroom’s interpretation of The Rose (which she wrote) with that of Bette Middler (who sang it in the movie), and see which you prefer.

In the meantime, another Swedish label got the notice of audiophiles, Opus 3. Started by Jan-Eric Persson and Bo Hansson, the label was as pure as could be. The two producers used only a single pair of microphones, setting them up in what they considered to be the right acoustical milieu, and then recording straight to tape with no intermediate electronics. Their record sleeves, which initially included only Swedish text, were of disconcerting austerity.

Despite the sleeve, however, the Test Record 1 (which was actually more of a sampler) became a favorite demo recording in audio stores worldwide. A number of its artists were justifiably scorned, but several were memorable, such as singer Thérèse Juel, whose Tiden Bara Går was nothing if not overexposed, and the Peoria Jazzband (Ole Miss).

The two founders ultimately split up, each continuing to record under the Opus 3 name, but it’s Persson’s half that has survived. Today he records exclusively in multichannel SACD.

Proprius is still around too, and it has released some delightful music that would never have found its way onto mainstream labels, for instance:

Antiphone Blues was recorded in a church, and features saxophonist

There is no more enduringly famous audiophile recording than Jazz at the Pawnshop.
Arne Domnérus, who was one of the mainstays of the Pawnshop series, doing a duet with a pipe organ. The effect is electrifying for every reason, but no conventional label would have released it.

As for Jazz at the Pawnshop, it is famous in jazz circles, not just in the audiophile world, and the musicians continue to receive sizeable royalties. The picture above is that of vibraphonist Lars Erstrand, last year, talking about how he kept the cover on his marimbas (so that the drunks didn’t put their glasses on them), and played them without looking. The sessions seem improvised because they were. Saxophonist Arne Domnérus would start playing, and the others would follow. That is jazz.

After the initial Swedish wave, more American labels joined the trend, and none more successfully than Reference Recordings. Reference was not founded by the brilliant engineer and inventor Keith O. Johnson, who began his recording career elsewhere, notably at Klavier. When he arrived at Reference, he brought with him a three-channel tape recorder he had originally designed as a high school science project, with its hand-wound “deep focus” recording heads.

The company’s 7th release was this one, a parody of the old-time snake oil salesmen, featuring “Professor” Johnson.

The nickname stuck. Johnson was not a purist, and will use any technique that gets him the sound he want, sometimes even playing loudspeakers with a delayed signal at the back of the hall, to add ambience. His LPs would be among the most respected of the audiophile world. When the CD began to edge out vinyl, he co-invented the HDCD process, which made it possible to use more of the data on the Red Book disc. Reference and a few other companies continue to release recordings encoded in HDCD.

Of course not all of the Reference artists are worth your time, but an astonishing number are.

In Iowa, about a million miles from the world’s entertainment capitals, musician and composer Chip Davis set up an unusual group which played a mix of rock and Baroque, called Mannheim Steamroller. Though Davis probably never anticipated this, his Fresh Aire series of albums on the American Gramaphone label became audiophile icons.

The misspelling of “gramophone,” by the way, is due to the fact that there was already an “American Gramophone” label, since forgotten. Incidentally, David is nothing if not versatile. Aside from his celebrated “Baroque’n’roll,” he also produced C. W. McCall’s country hit album Convoy.

There many new audiophile labels that are specialized in high quality re-releases of original recordings. The now defunct ATR was an example.

The label was launched by a German industrialist who, discovering that his beloved album by singer Esther Ofarim was worn out but was out of production, bought the rights and started his own record company. First Impressions Music is another producer of great re-releases.

It is all done for the love of music... and what better reason is there?
CINEMA

WAITING FOR GODOT

Well, perhaps not Godot. However our home theatre system, code-named Kappa (some of which is shown on this page), will soon be four years old, and we have been looking at possible updates. If you have your own genuine home theatre system, possibly you have too. And if you don’t have one yet, perhaps you’ve been surveying the shifting tectonic plates of technology as anxiously as we have.

First, allow us to put in a good word for home theatre.

It may be obvious that your home screen resolution is not what you’d get in a real cinema, but that may not be a permanent situation, because technologies are converging. You can already get at least four to six times normal DVD resolution from one of the high definition formats: Blu-Ray and HD DVD. At the same time, cinemas are beginning a shift away from film and toward digital projection. If you wanted to be cynical (which is not our thing, as you know), you might be tempted to say they’ll charge you 12 bucks plus parking to watch a DVD. And although some cinema screens are much larger than you would want to watch at home, that is not true of most multiplexes, where the effective size (that is, the area that the image takes up on your retina) may actually be smaller than that of your own HDTV monitor at usual viewing distance.

Size aside, the cinema image you paid good money to see may be unexpectedly dim. Projector bulbs are expensive, and cinema chain owners labor under the (apparently false) idea that turning down the voltage will prolong their lives.

Then there’s the matter of sound. For a cinema to provide a plausible stereo image for everyone, spectators would have to be kept away from the individual loudspeakers. Most cinema owners want to maximize revenue on Saturday night, however, and so seats will be bolted to every square metre allowed by the fire department. The only way to make this work is to turn the centre channel way up (since it carries most of the dialog), and turn the other channels far enough down they won’t startle anyone sitting nearby. The result is something not too far from mono. In many cinemas, the volume from that one channel will be loud enough to cause distortion, not to mention pain.

Shall we mention the grossly overpriced popcorn, laced with hydrogenated tropical oils? Ingest enough of it and there are many fine future films you won’t get to see…because you’ll be dead from a coronary before they are released. Shall we bring up the 20 minutes of loud commercials that precede showings? Yes, many DVDs have commercials too (not to mention threats from the FBI and Interpol), but they’re shorter, and savvy users know how to get around them.

Do we love home theatre? Oh yes! You may recognize our HDTV monitor, shown on this page, as what it is: a cathode-ray tube rear projector. No, they don’t make those anymore, but it was the best we found four years ago when it beat out its competitors. It remains superior to LCD in tonal range and the ability to follow movement. It is also superior to the plasma TVs that were then available in that size, namely 109 cm (43 inches). However some new technologies have been launched since then, and more are on their way. What to choose? Let’s see…

LED-backlit LCDs

Traditional LCD panels (did we just refer to this recent technology as traditional?) are lit from the rear by a fluorescent light. There is a long list of problems with fluorescent bulbs. No fluorescent emits a full range of colors.

At left is the spectrum of a conventional incandescent bulb. Though it favors the “warmer” side of the spectrum (as opposed to sunlight, which is bluer), the color range is continuous. At right is the spectrum of a typical fluorescent bulb. Not only is the red part of the spectrum all but absent (accounting for the ghastly purplish coloring of skin under office lighting), but the spectrum is dominated by spikes, characteristic of the chemicals that are made to fluoresce inside the tube. It is clear that a video...
image produced by fluorescent lighting will not exhibit the full spectrum of a sunlit image.

Can we do better by using light-emitting diodes in sets representing the three primary colors (red, green and blue)? The answer is almost certainly yes, but the LCD has other problems, starting with a low dynamic range. The luminance ratio of blacks to whites might be 10,000:1. The best cathode ray tubes have a luminance ratio that can reach 100,000:1. LCD panels also have trouble showing movement without artifacts.

**DLP rear projectors**

We hope you’ll want to read the rest of this article, available in our print issue or in our paid electronic issue.

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No Blue Movies on Blu-Ray?

Perhaps porn is not what you spend your discretionary income on. Or if you do, you may not want to see every pore on a porn star who has...ahem, done this sort of thing before.

There are some observers who swear that the reason VHS conquered Beta was that there were more XXX movies available on VHS (silly us, and we thought it was because a VHS cassette had room for a full-length movie and Beta didn’t). Now comes a report that Sony, co-inventor of Blu-Ray and its principal promoter, has threatened to pull the license of any replicator who puts a blue movie on a Blu-Ray disc. Will that seal the victory of HD DVD?

Or perhaps not. Not everyone buys that explanation of VHS supremacy. And Sony has now denied it pressures licensees not to reproduce porn, though it admits it will refuse to replicate any itself.

Is plasma still a good bet?

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Other upgrades

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Waiting for HDMI 1.3

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This might not be quite Linn’s flagship speaker (that would be the Komri), but it is big enough to be a flagship for anyone else. And it is the upscale speaker from this Scottish company best suited to anything resembling a normal room.

It’s a substantial piece, though it is actually smaller than the Reference 3a Supremas that are in our Omega system (and against which we compared the Linn speakers). Any large speaker also needs to be heavy, otherwise it will shake like a five-year old at a midnight showing of *Kill Bill*, but there’s an extra reason for the weight of the Artikulats: there are power amplifiers built right in. Five of them in fact. In each speaker.

For more years than we can count, Linn has favored the use of biamplification or triamplification in its upscale systems, and what’s more it has provided upgrade paths for implementing it. The idea is that you use as many amplifiers as the speaker has drivers. You remove the crossover network from the speaker, and you divide up the frequencies before amplification, so that each amp handles only the frequencies meant for its driver.

You’ll recall that the Aurum Acoustics system that was on the cover of UHF No. 78 worked exactly that way. There are several advantages. Each amplifier has tighter control of its driver, inter-modulation distortion (unmusical interaction among different frequencies) is greatly reduced, and less precious power gets dissipated in a passive crossover. And that’s not even the whole list.

Want more? It’s well known that it is difficult to control woofer cone motion at very low frequencies. It’s not enough to get the cone moving, you also need to stop it when its contribution is no longer required. Linn has used a trick familiar from some upscale subwoofers: servo control. The bottom woofer has a second voice coil, which acts as generator that can “tell” the amplifier what the cone is doing, so that a correction can be applied. Interestingly enough, one of the earliest high end servo-controlled speakers was created by Daniel Dehay, the architect of our Suprema speakers. It was awkward to use, however, because it didn’t have a dedicated amplifier. Linn offers an elegant solution.

The speaker lineup is a long one: there are a twin woofers, a midrange, an upper midrange, a tweeter, and a supertweeter, the latter three housed in an aluminum pod. The four crossover frequencies, if you like to keep track of such things, are 105 Hz, 392 Hz, 3.86 kHz, and 10.9 kHz. Bottom rolloff is at 18 Hz, and Linn claims flat response to 24 Hz.

Heavy as the Artikulat is, it could
be knocked over by a visitor or a playful Labrador. For that reason the speaker sits on a two-part die cast aluminum base, which is itself bolted to a rolled aluminum plate. The spikes (shown at right) are substantial. Their height can be adjusted from the top (what a concept!) and they can then be securely locked with the tool supplied.

Because the Artikulats go so far down in frequency, we took plenty of time to find exactly the right placement for them. There are plenty of ways to make them sound wrong, but we finally settled on a position a very few centimetres forward of our reference speakers, albeit somewhat farther apart, and with slightly more toe-in. At that point we installed the spikes, which is enough to change the balance at the bottom end.

But we weren’t through. Since the Artikulat has a full kit of power amplifiers, you can rebalance it with a trio of three-way switches (shown below). Once we were happy with the placement of the speakers we sampled one of our test recordings and paid attention to what was happening.

Clearly the Artikulats were bass-heavy, though installing the spikes had tamed the boom somewhat. Reluctantly we switched the “Bass Roll-On” (we presume that’s Scottish for “rolloff”) from the default 19 Hz to 40 Hz. That cleaned up the bass wonderfully, without destroying the impression that even the lowest notes could be reproduced. We left the “Bass Shelf” switch at 0 dB, though there are positions to bump it up by 2 or 4 dB.

Was the brass just a little bright? It was nearly right, but switching the Treble Shelf to -1.5 dB made it seem perfect. We played another cut just to be sure, and it was now time for some serious listening. The listening, by the way, could not be done with our usual coaxial cables, since the Artikulats have only balanced inputs. We used the long Linn Silver cables that came with the speakers, and then we pulled out a series of LPs, CDs and SACDs.

The first was our 45 rpm version of Walton’s wonderful Façace suite (RR-16), whose numerous tableaux constitute nearly a complete test all by themselves. We were pretty sure the piccolo at the very beginning would be strident, because it is that way with pretty much any speaker using conventional dynamic tweeters. We were right, but the rest of the music quickly monopolized our attention. From the start there was an explosion of detail, but it didn’t come at the expense of accuracy. All three of us commented on how right the timbres of the woodwinds seemed — clarinet, bassoon and the others. “When the clarinet begins to play,” said Albert, “you can actually hear the air flowing through the mouthpiece.” The cymbals were unusually fine, with a delightful shimmer when they were struck lightly.

Over and beyond the actual instrumental sounds, however, the Artikulats reproduced the atmosphere of this superbly-recorded suite. “The music is involving,” said Reine, “though of course it is with our reference speakers and amplifier too.”

We continued with another Reference Recordings LPs, Beachcomber (RR-62), on which the Dallas Wind Symphony plays a suite from A Chorus Line. There’s a lot of energy in those grooves, and the Artikulats did nothing to tame it. The brass blared, the bass drums roared. Albert compared it to a fireworks display, Reine to a thunderstorm. The space opened up in a huge way.

It would be easy, however, for a speaker to pump decibels into a room, and subtleties be damned. Not here. The faint tinkling of a bell, which occurs in the midst of the high-powered stuff, was clearer than ever.

We had a second wind band recording, which was included for a special reason. The Olympic Fanfare from the Wilson Audio Center Stage recording includes a rolling solo of bass drums that is a challenge for a loudspeaker. Lots of speakers can liberate the energy of the instruments, but they won’t reproduce the sound of mallet against membrane, because their woofers are not properly controlled. Our Reference 3a Supremas are up to the task because of their push-pull dual woofers, but the Artikulats are bass reflex speakers, albeit large ones.

They did fine, probably because of the servo control. Because there was no uncontrolled boom we could hear what else was going on, and we liked it. The massed brass did seem slightly thinner when the higher-pitched instruments were playing, but the bottom end was there when it was called upon, by the trombones, the French horns or of course those bass drums. The balance among the instruments seemed about spot on. Reine admired a solo by several snare drums, producing a sound she likened to the flutter of a butterfly.

Our enthusiasm was growing.
Our final LP was our old standby, *Secret of the Andes*, with its panoply of varied Central American percussion. This recording is included so that it can trip up speakers whose cabinets are louder than their woofers, and of course we knew the Artikulats would pass the test with ease. There was a lot of power in the lower-pitched drums, but no two of them had the same timbre, which meant we were hearing the instruments themselves, not the speaker enclosure. After the exotic introduction to that jazz recording, we admired the plausible timbres of Victor Feldman’s piano and Abraham Laboriel’s Fender bass. The kick drum had a little extra…well, kick, Abraham Laboriel’s Fender bass. The same time Monty Alexander’s piano could hear the fine details of Ray Brown’s bass. The kick drum had a little extra…well, kick, but without exaggeration. The final climax was impressive.

But we had a few more recordings stacked up, and we wanted to hear them, even though by this time we knew what our final conclusion would be.

We put on the Hi-Res (24 bit/96 kHz) DVD version of Ray Brown’s Trio, and listened to *Sweet Georgia Brown*. Right away we had a problem: the thunderous subterranean notes of Brown’s bass were enough to rattle a sliding glass door behind us. A foam pad kept it quiet so we could proceed.

In every other respect we were delighted. Even on the lowest notes we could hear the fine details of Ray Brown’s fingerwork. It was, however, Herb Ellis’s electric guitar that gained the most from what can only be called the Artikulats’ articulateness. It had both weight and detail, and that helped dissipate Albert’s reticence concerning electric guitars. At the same time Monty Alexander’s piano was also superb, and the three instruments seemed knitted together with ease and grace. “It’s really melodic,” said Gerard, “and it really swings too.”

We often use a solo violin recording (well, with piano accompaniment) that is especially revealing, since it isn’t easy for a loudspeaker to do justice to a violin. It’s Dvorak’s *Romantic Pieces*, Op. 75 (Analekta FL 2 3191). When it is really well reproduced, you can tell that James Ehnes is playing a Stradivarius.

And the smooth, silky, yet clear tone left us in little doubt as to the quality of the instrument. The piano was exceptional too, its rapid notes flowing like water, in admirable harmony with the violin. “They are an even more perfect couple,” said Reine.

We don’t often do a major review without including *Now the Green Blade Riseth*, the superb choral recording from Proprius. We put on the SACD version (PRSACD9093), anticipating a fine experience. We weren’t disappointed.

“From the very first notes of the flute I knew this was going to be right,” Reine would later say. And it was easy to follow the flute even when it slipped into the background behind the women singers, and then the men. This recording is wonderfully spacious, and the Linn speakers did justice to it. The voices were smooth yet lively, and they were perfectly coherent, like the strings in a really good orchestra. At the end of the piece, when the volume builds, the textures often harden up somewhat, but that’s the fault of the equipment, not the musician. and Reine in this case noted that in the finale soprano voices, far from being shrill, were especially warm.

Speaking of female voices, how would the Linn’s do with the Margie Gibson recording, *Say It With Music*? We played the lively but intimate *Let’s Face the Music and Dance*.

When it sounds this good, who needs to take notes? Gibson’s voice is warm, and it seemed doubtful it could sound any warmer, but it did. As with the other recordings, the warmth seemed natural, not like some sort of added coloration. Nor did it come at the expense of detail. There is no flattering but inaccurate filtering of what is on the recording.

We had one more CD, bluesman Doug McLeod’s *You Can’t Take My Blues* (Audioquest AQCD1041), from which we selected the lively (and hilarious) *Papa John*.

Well, look, are we going to tell you that, after all we had heard, the Artikulats were going to disappoint us on that final recording? Not likely, is it? McLeod’s voice seemed lighter than with our reference speaker, but not at all thin. The percussive effects (a phone book is involved) were terrific, and Heather Hardy’s violin came out from behind a veil to soar for us. Nice.

Then to the tech stuff. We set up our Earthworks microphone one metre in front of an Artikulat, and we took some readings. We were pretty sure frequency response (measured at 100 dB reference with third of octave warble tones) would be excellent, and it was (you can see the curve above). If you ignore the 63 Hz suckout, which is due to the room, not the speaker, the curve is surprisingly flat from 30 Hz to 20 kHz.

Not all of that bass is pure sound,
to be sure. The graph above shows a sine wave in the frequency band centred around 31.5 Hz. No, its shape isn’t quite right, but when we went up to 40 Hz everything was right on.

The 100 Hz square wave, above right, has a rather doubled-up shape, caused by the fact that the microphone was rather close to the speaker, on axis with the super tweeter, and inevitably farther away from some other drivers. All considered the wave is pretty good, and speaks well for the Artikulat’s coherence.

We should let you know that Linn has a smaller version of the speaker, the Akurate 242. There isn’t room in it for amplifiers, but active amplification can be added externally. It may be a better choice for a smaller room than ours. If you can give the Artikulats the space they need, however, you won’t be sorry you chose them.

Here are three words (or four) for the audiophile who thinks he has everything. You don’t.

You don’t know what your music sounds like if you haven’t heard it with this speaker system. I mean what it really sounds like. Of course you enjoy it now, and you have no doubt gone through endless improvements — to the dismay of your immediate family, whose motto seems to be, “But it sounded good before.”

Wait till they hear some music with these. First, tune them patiently — they need it more than you might expect — and once you think you have them just right, tune them again (since you might find yourself trying to duplicate what your previous amp and speakers did). Then start going through some of your favorite music and notice its remarkable lightness, as layers of coloration you never suspected are shed. Notice the simplicity of the rendition, combined with a natural, vibrant energy and unstoppable rhythm.

And, in the silence between each piece, notice the shy little coughs emanating from the peanut gallery lined up in the hallway.

—Albert Simon

Did I have a certain reticence before listening to these speakers? I confess I did. I have heard speakers that Linn considered the best it could make, and my impression (at shows, in terrible hotel rooms, not in our reference systems) was that they were technically competent, but they were also cold and unable to transmit emotion.

I was wrong. When it comes to technical competence these speakers have it aplenty, but listening to music through them is a visceral joy. They give the music plenty of body, but at the same time they have a transparency that is unexpected. The bottom end is tight yet generous. The top end delivers detail and sparkle, but without the horrible artifacts too many “hi-fi” speakers are plagued with.

Check the price of the super speakers you have on your wish list. Then price the high end amplifiers you would like to drive them with. Add the two figures. Do the Artikulats still seem expensive?

—Gerard Rejskind

I’ve just lived through two events in the space of a few hours. Listening to music through Linn products is already an event. Oh, the experience isn’t always perfect, but satisfaction must approach 99.9%.

Second event: hearing one of our reference components beaten.

A lot of good things happened. There was a mixed choir, a female voice, an orchestra, a trio, a male voice…lots of variety. In every case I was delighted to hear sounds that were even more natural, more beautiful. Look, take the case of an electric guitar in one piece we heard. That particular instrument usually leaves me cold, but that was before…before listening through the Artikulats. Was that really the same guitar?

It was the same with human voices. What can I say about a mixed choir that had never seemed so perfect? What about the piano? And the violin, sometimes languorous, sometimes fiery? And the plucked bass? And the percussion instruments, about which I learned a lot.

Before, I could recognize drumming styles, sure, but I wouldn’t have believed there could be such different nuances of interpretation from one drummer to the next. Percussion can mark rhythm and tempo, but its nuances can actually move you emotionally.

Listen to the snare drum, the rapid beating of the brushes, and now and again a mere rustling, which can provoke surprise and contentment.

Of course the sound is delightfully clean, as it must be for so much detail and definition to come through. The dynamic range is generous. The spectral balance is beyond reproach, with a bottom end that will delight the most demanding. The bass drum, the tympani…such a joyful noise!

This is proof, if proof is still needed, that the quality of any device that transmits music is of first importance. If a musical piece disappoints, it may be wrong to point a finger at the musician or even the sound engineer. This experience confirms it: to do justice to the artists and to satisfy the demanding music lover, the quality of the equipment is important.

Of course I’m talking quality, not price. Then again if you can afford the best, why not?

—Reine Lessard
Too many speakers sound like the country they are from. We all know there is a British sound (smooth, understated, don't you know), a French sound (precise and chiselled), a US East Coast sound (like the British but with a little more midrange punch), and a West Coast sound (definitely in your face).

Of course, it's always dangerous to deal in stereotypes, but we may as well say up front that there is a German sound too: precise, glinty, metallic. When we reviewed the ASW Genius 400 speakers (the top of the line for now) in UHF No. 73, one of several things we liked is that they didn't give away where they came from. They sounded like music, as of course do all of our favorite audio products, notwithstanding their origins.

We had actually taken the Genius 400's to the Montreal show, and they were a major hit. They weren't exactly cheap (C$4900 at the time), but they sounded so amazing that the typical reaction was, is that all?

This slimmer and more affordable speaker from the same series is intended for those who liked the 400 but can't fit it into their budget. The similarity of the two models is striking, with the same cabinetry, the same twin carbon fibre drivers, the same centrally-placed soft-dome tweeter. In both cases the drivers and the so-so binding posts are mounted in heavy metal inserts. What is not there is the Genius 400's oval side-mounted woofer. That woofer delivered a lot of punch, but it also accounted for plenty of extra money.

The cabinet is impressively slim, even slimmer than the top model, which is a plus for proper projection of the stereo image, and it is not as deep as the Genius 400. The black screw-on base adds stability to what might otherwise be a rather tippy speaker, and even so it might not be compatible with, say, a St. Bernard. Cones are included. They are of course adjustable, but there is no locking nut.

Cloth grilles are included as well. We had found that, unlike what we normally expect, the Genius 400's sounded better with the grilles than without, and that would turn out to be the case with this model as well. We found that we also needed to play with the placement of the speakers. Placed where we usually have our Reference 3a Suprema speakers (whose position was carefully marked with masking tape), they sounded just too light. After some experimentation with the first of our selected recordings, we placed them somewhat closer to the rear wall, thus adding a bit of bottom-end emphasis. The port is at the rear, however, so you won't want to overdo this.

Our first recording, by the way, was an LP, as were all of the recordings we had selected for this review: William Walton's suite Façade, on Reference Recordings (RR-16). The piccolo in the opening was rather shrill, as it is with pretty much all conventional dynamic speakers. Beyond that, we admired the abundant detail that was revealed by these loudspeakers. True, despite the presence of the grilles we found the top end a little hot, but the detail we heard was not the result of any tilt toward the highs. Rather it resulted from what was clearly a very low level of distortion. Yet it's not as though we were playing at low level!

Also no doubt because of the low distortion, the rhythm worked very well, and the clever counterpoints on which this music depends came out most satis-
fyingly. The depth was a little shallower than with our own loudspeakers, but it remained satisfying. “These speakers have speed,” said Albert, “and they have agility.”

In our room...

No, this is not one of the complete articles. Of course it is complete in both our print and (paid) electronic issues.

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On the test bench

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### Summing it up...

**Brand/model:** ASW Genius 300  
**Price:** CS3495/US$2995  
**Size (HWD):** 11.8 x 15 x 34 cm  
**Rated impedance:** 4 ohms  
**Claimed sensitivity:** 92 dB  
**Most liked:** Od tat lor sim nisci tat at ut iril eum vullor  
**Least liked:** Rud doloreet wis alit ut lumn in henisictidunt  
**Verdict:** Iquameterat nullamc ommolore con utatuer
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The new Simaudio Moon W-8 preamp, we look at ways you can:

- Atlantis Argentera speaker, Loudspeaker cables: No.72: (almost) like film.
- LP and why they don’t all sound the same, and Audiomat Maestro DAC, ASW Genius 400 why HDTV doesn’t always mean what you think,
- Raysonic SP-100, Cyrus 8vs and Rogue Stereo the rediscovery of a great Baroque composer, and stereo, a chat with FIM’s Winston Ma, and also:
- flagship, and integrated amps from Copland (the affordable Castle Richmond 3i).
- Paul Bergman on room size and acoustics, how to dezone from digital DVDs, and how to make your own 24/96 high resolution discs at home.
- The Simateo Moon P-8 preamp, the successor to the legendary Bryston 20 power amp, the Antique Sound Lab Lux DT phone stage. Additionally, the Reino DAP-77 CONVERTER, an affordable CD player/integrated amp pair from CEC, and five power cords. Also: Paul Bergman on room size and acoustics, how to dezone from digital DVDs, and how to make your own 24/96 high resolution discs at home.

The new Simaudio Moon P-8 preamp, we look at ways you can:

- Atlantis Argentera speaker, Loudspeaker cables: six of them from Atlas and Actinote, in a blind test. Plus: the astonishing Aurum Acoustics Integrats 300B complete system, and its optional CD player/preampreamplifier. Wheel: Also: Bergman on taming reverberation, how to put seven hours of uncompressed music on just one disc, and the one opera that even non-opera people know.

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not everything Linn makes is built like this, its top two-channel preamplifier, and there has to be a good reason. You can only guess at its solidity from the picture. Tap it, and you might as well be hitting a bank vault (which is what Linn refers to it as). The power supply is tucked into another vault like it. The solidity, and for that matter the appearance, recall the wonderful (but, alas, discontinued) Linn CD-12 player. We wish our (also expensive) Unidisk player were built like this, or even had jacks this good.

The unit is surprisingly small, thanks in good part to the switching power supply, which Linn has used in all its products for years.

Once installed the Klimax Kontrol looks particularly neat, thanks to a curved overhang at the rear that conceals the cables (and potentially there are a lot of them). It also makes it difficult to see which jack is which, unless you can actually walk around to the rear of the equipment. Not our case, alas.

We placed the Klimax Kontrol alongside our Moon P-8 preamplifier, figuring we might as well make it the toughest fight possible. Then we pulled out some discs and did a comparison.

We began with Normal Dello Joio’s *Fantasy on a Theme by Haydn* (Klavier K11138), a wind band piece that includes unusually natural brass and woodwinds, not to mention percussion that goes to the pit of your stomach. Could the Linn do it justice?

It did! All three of us were struck by the great *precision* of the sound. “It’s more a matter of definition that actual clarity,” said Albert. “I think we can talk of natural simplicity.” The percussion was exemplary, with fast attacks and equally quick stops, with no trace of smearing.

Did the band seem more distant? Gerard thought it seemed that way, but without loss of detail. We added some 6 dB of volume. It was now rather louder than natural, but the excellent purity and balance of the sound made it nonetheless pleasant.

We turned next to an old favorite, *Now the Green Blade Riseth* in its gorgeous SACD version (Proprius PRSACD9093). This recording is noted for its great depth, and it now had more of that depth than ever, extending well beyond the rear wall. “There are instruments *between* the instruments,” said Reine.

In all other respects the sound was just as it should be, with powerful male voices (not to mention the organ, which sometimes disappears entirely). The rhythm was strong. Albert characterized the sound as being at once clear and smooth.
check! Gerard mused that one might expect the Klimax Kontrol to sound thin because it is so slim. Not so.

We had another female voice in reserve, that of Margie Gibson, singing Irving Berlin’s The Best Thing For You Would Be Me (from Say It With Music, Sheffield CD-36). It sounded about as perfect as we have ever heard it (it helped that we were using Linn’s other prize component, the Unidisk 1.1 player). Gibson’s astonishing voice was gorgeous, her every inflection communication the sly emotion of the song. The texture of her voice seemed unusually clear as well.

Voice aside, the accompaniment — Lincoln Mayorga’s piano, the cello and bass — were the way we imagined they would be in a live concert, and we mean a live unamplified concert.

“It’s as though we could hear the preamplifier picking up the song title,” said Albert, “The best thing for you would be…”

Indeed, but at what price?

That’s scarcely the point. You can, of course, get very good quality for a fraction of the price of this preamp, and indeed a review of such a unit follows this one. At the same time, the Klimax Kontrol is a long, long way from being the most expensive preamplifier on the market. What we can tell you is that, if your budget can withstand the cost, this preamplifier is unlikely to disappoint you.

We can recall a time when Linn electronics didn’t sound anything like this. Oh, they were never close to bad, but their tone was a little too grey, too electronic, and perhaps too lean to allow them to rank with the best. Then, perhaps a decade ago (we could look it up), Linn brought to a show a new amplifier, one that sounded radically different, radically better, than earlier Linn products and a lot of competing products.

The name of that amplifier? Klimax. Since then a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, and it has flowed in the right direction.

**SUMMING IT UP**

**Brand/model:** Linn Klimax Kontrol

**Price:** C$14,995 (equiv. US$13,800)

**Size (WDH):** 35 x 35.5 x 6 cm

**Most liked:** State of the art performance, superb construction

**Least liked:** Awkward rear panel access

**Verdict:** Looks the part, sounds the part

**KROSSTALK**

I’m more convinced than ever that the key to the manufacturers who seek perfection and whose products continue to astonish me is attention to detail.

The Klimax Kontrol gave me three hours of pure pleasure. In the discussion among us, following each selection, sometimes I had a lot to say, but at other times I searched in vain for new words to express what I had heard. As if!

As if there were a thousand ways to speak of beauty. Sure, I can tell you about the definition of timbres, the perfect balance, the spectral coherence, the amplitude of the image. Or perhaps the refinement of the piano, of the natural warmth of the human voice, of the clarity of lyrics, of the multitude of micro-information that define the attacks, of the liveliness, of the vivacity, of the melodies you can follow with delight, of the emotion distilled by expressive soloists. Words and more words.

Words that can only be couched in the superlative, considering the degree of perfection of this preamplifier, if I am to communicate my feelings. Actually, one word will do: extraordinary.

Thanks, Linn.

—Reine Lessard

My first impression was one of control, as they like to spell it in Linnland. Everything seemed so precise, so accurately reproduced, so real, so there, right in front of me.

Then I began to notice the natural simplicity with which the music was developed throughout each piece, the lack of unnecessary fuss in rendering correct timbre and shape of instruments and voices.

When a sudden impact occurred it was jolting, as it should be, with just the right level of bursting energy but without an added woomph or crashbbbb effect — effects seldom heard in a concert hall. I noticed that reproduced music could be tender yet finely detailed, that voices could be mellow and lyrics crystal clear, that rhythms were joyfully involving while the sound remained naturally round and full.

And yet its greatest quality is that it never actually did any of the above. The music did it all, of course, and the Klimax Kontrol did the next best thing. It remained transparent and didn’t get in the way.

—Albert Simon

There’s a saying, favored by lawyers, that the devil is in the details. Well, turn it around for audiophiles: God is in the details.

You might think that the extraordinarily dense and rigid casing on this preamplifier is a mere extravagance, that it can’t have an impact on the sound. But nobody builds Formula One cars from tin cans and soap boxes. The build quality of the Klimax Kontrol will induce envy in competitors who profess to hate Linn.

But can you bear it? Yes you can. Because the details are right, everything else is right too.

—Gerard Rejskind
ModWright SWL 9.0SE

The name gives it away: Dan Wright’s company began its existence modifying other people’s equipment, but that’s not unusual. You may recall that McCormack Audio was once called The Mod Squad. Wright still does mods, but he says he intends to put the emphasis on designing his own equipment. This tube preamplifier has earned him considerable encouragement from the critics. And for good reason, as we shall see.

The front panel is handsome, with a slightly antique look, which brought no complaints from us. Ours was silver, but you can also order one with a brushed black front panel, or in dark blue (which looks great in the pictures). The fit and finish are very good but for a few minor details. For instance, the screws holding the case together should have been countersunk, as they usually are, but actually they have rounded heads. No one is likely to care.

More vexing is the design of the front panel controls. There are three identical switches, each with a dim blue light above it, labelled Mute, Tape/Mon. (so far so good), and...ah, HT/BP. We’re not sure why there is a slash in the middle, but that stands for “home theatre bypass loop,” allowing one of the inputs to bypass the volume control. That allows use of the preamplifier with a surround sound processor, and it is a welcome feature, but it should not be on the front panel! Flipping it by mistake, which is easy to do when there are two identical switches next to it, could damage or destroy your speakers.

The input selector and volume knobs could be rethinking too. Neither is labelled, and the index line is on the front of the deep knob, which means you need to get down on your knees to figure out what it is pointing to.

The jacks are first rate, something we don’t take for granted even in expensive products, and Wright uses top quality parts inside: FRED and Schottky diodes, metal film Vishay resistors, ceramic tube sockets, film capacitors, and an Alps volume control. The power supply uses choke filtering, something that is all too rare today. Bias to the two 5687 tubes is provided by a battery.

The 5687 itself is a twin triode, a medium-mu design that was originally created for use in computers, when computers were rather larger and hotter than they are today! It goes without saying that Apple and Dell don’t keep stocks of these tubes today, but the 5687 is popular with a number of amateur and professional audio designers. Most of these tubes are “new old stock,” new tubes made a long time ago, but there seem to be enough of them that they are not outlandishly expensive, selling (in our brief survey) between US$4 and $35.

A small but functional remote control is included.

We warmed the ModWright up and installed it in our Omega system, next to the Moon P-8 preamplifier. We then stacked up the same recordings we had used to evaluate the other preamplifier reviewed in this issue.

The first was Normal Dello Joio’s powerful (and humorous) *Fantasy on a Theme by Haydn,* which opens with tympani that rolls like thunder, blooming into huge space. The spaciousness was generous, and so was the thunder!

What followed — complex and delightful passages for brass and woodwinds — was...

Well, we hope you’ll want the complete version, print or electronic, to check what we really thought.

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CROSSTALK

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Linn Linto

Yes, the Linto is Linn’s top-of-the-line phono stage...actually its only phono stage, just as the LP12 is its only turntable. It doesn’t look much like the superb Klimax Kontrol, also reviewed in these pages, and it sure isn’t built like it. That can’t be because handling the tiny signal from a phono cartridge is a trivial job, because Linn knows better than that, and so do you.

Like other Linn components, the Linto uses its ubiquitous “Brilliant” power supply, a switching supply that does away with huge transformers and capacitors. It has a single input, intended strictly for low impedance (MC) phono cartridges. There are no adjustments for load resistance or capacitance, though there is a switch for gain, tucked away inside the box.

The input and output phono jacks are rather mediocre, and we were surprised that there were no XLR jacks for balanced lines. The square black box is styled to look like a number of other Linn products: for instance, the Linto and the Lingo power supply of our LP12 turntables can be told apart only by the single letter difference in their names.

If you own a turntable, you probably know that a lot more than music is likely to emerge from the speakers. The output of a low impedance phono cartridge like ours is very low, in the order of a quarter millivolt, and that’s on loud passages. What’s more, LPs are cut with the highs exaggerated and the lows de-emphasized, which means the phono preamp needs to reverse the emphasis according to what is known as the RIAA curve, shown on the next page. As you can see, the circuit needs to boost the lows back up by...oh, 40 dB or so. That’s ten thousand times! Don’t be too surprised if you can hear a bit of hum when you turn the volume up.

The power line itself is a major source of hum (60 Hz in North America, 50 Hz in most other places), but plenty of noise comes in as radio frequency signals, demodulated by the circuit itself or possibly one of its connections. That sort of noise is infuriatingly hard to track down.

That preamble leads to this: when we connected the Linto to our Omega system, we were surprised when we turned up the volume and heard...not much. This is a very quiet phono preamp. If your other phono stages have brought in buzzes and radio signals, that alone might tempt you to take a look at the Linto.

But quietness alone is not enough. We pulled out some LPs and had a listen.

We began with the March from Gustav Holst’s Suite No. 2 in F (from Reference Recordings RR-39). This is a wind band recording with a lot of energy, and you might think the Linto’s quietness wouldn’t mean much. Who can hear hum or hiss over the clash of cymbals or the roar of a full tilt brass section? Yet we were aware at all times that the music was all alone, not needing to share space with extraneous gunk.

That was not, to be sure, all that we liked about what emerged. The Linto sounded rather like our reference, which is a good thing. The brass was brash and bright, the woodwinds smooth. There was detail not only in the higher registers (that’s easy to do) but right across the audible band. Rhythm was strong, the melody easy to follow. There was so much detail that we easily spotted one French horn player who delivered a note way off what must have been in Holst’s score.

The balance was, however, brighter than with our own phono stage. That showed up in the trumpets and the cymbals.

We moved on to the Ray Brown Trio’s take of Take the ‘A’ Train (from Soular Energy). If a component can’t get Brown’s bass sound right, then it has flunked the test. As the name of the trio indicates, Brown is no mere accompanist. We were pleased to hear those opening notes emerge with tremendous body, really moving the air in the room. And yet the balance among the instruments was excellent.

Linn likes to insist on the importance of rhythm and melody, holding them up as the hallmark of a good music system. The Linto did outstandingly well on both counts. Even when Brown’s bass played way down in the nether regions,
it remained melodic, without the tone deafness some products lend it. We were unanimous in praising the precise and stable image. Not only did we hear everything that was going on, but we knew where it was going on.

We were rather less enthusiastic about the sound of Gene Harris's piano. Harris gets his own solo on this piece, and even when he is merely accompanying he hits some chords with considerable power. That's a little jarring, and we know it is meant to be, but we could hear the piano tone harden up noticeably on the higher chords. That was not accompanied by even a hint of distortion, fortunately, nor did we hear any graininess of texture.

We wound up the session with a song despite our inability to understand a single word. The guitar was clean and clear, and hissing behind her, "There's distance between her and the percussion behind her," said Thérèse Juel, famous singer from Opus 3's early days. Her voice was, in any case, nothing less than magnificent, drawing us in to the background.

Once again we appreciated the quiet and some interesting percussion. Once again we were rather less enthusiastic about the voice, a string bass, an acoustic guitar, some chords with considerable power. That was not accompanied by what was meant to be, but we could hear the piano when it is merely accompanying the hits gets this own solo on this piece, and even when he is merely accompanying he hits some chords with considerable power. That's a little jarring, and we know it is meant to be, but we could hear the piano tone harden up noticeably on the higher chords. That was not accompanied by even a hint of distortion, fortunately, nor did we hear any graininess of texture.

We were unanimous in praising the precise and stable image. Not only did we hear everything that was going on, but we knew where it was going on.

And then each reviewer gets to write a "Crosstalk," a personal comment, which may even disagree with the others.

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——— Albert Simon

This is, of course, the perfect mate for the latest version of the Linto. You know how most audio magazines do their reviews: a number of reviewers, some with doubtful "reference" systems, are assigned reviews of individual components.

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——— Gerard Rejskind

The name and appearance haven't changed, but the sound sure has. No one would dare call it bland. In most respects, the Linto will outperform the Big Name phono stages, often by a lot.

But it's a lot quieter. At one time, it seemed to me that only the mass-market phono preamps were this quiet, and of course they were screechy and indistinct (as they still are). That the Linto is so nearly silent and yet that it sounds so musical is some sort of achievement.

——— Reine Lessard

Instrumental timbres are both natural and pleasant, as are voices. Rhythm is flawless. The music sings, rocks, or lifts you up. Bring together tympani, bass drum and brass into an explosion that projects you into an unreal world.

I do have some reservations. The piano can sound somewhat hard, at least when it is played with force, and it is somewhat excessive. That won't happen on many recordings, to be sure, and I can't even swear you won't like it that way.

The rest is nothing less than remarkable, and I recommend the Linto, which will give you much pleasure.
ModWright Phono Stage

You could argue that a phono stage has a tougher job to do than a line stage preamplifier, if only because it has to deal with a signal that is perhaps 10,000 times smaller. That is no doubt the logic behind the ModWright SWP 9.0SE phono stage, which is not only heavier but more expensive (C$3600) than the preamp also reviewed in this issue.

Like the preamp it uses tubes, six of them in all. Its case is similar to that of the preamplifier, and most of the comments apply. The MM/MC mode switch is on the front panel, which is an odd choice, but it’s harmless. There are also small DIP switches accessible from the rear to fine-tune the loading of moving coil cartridges, which is of course what we use. Also at the front is a mono switch, terrific for cancelling out the reverb added as an “enhancement” to mono recordings. There is a front panel mute switch, a feature we don’t recall seeing on a phono preamp. Like its preamp twin, the unit is built with first-quality parts, including Schottky diodes, metal film Vishay resistors, ceramic tube sockets and polypropylene and Teflon film capacitors, as well as the sort of jacks we wish other manufacturers would use.

The review was carried out in our Omega room, where phono stages tend to be quieter than in our more electromagnetically-active Alpha room. A good phono stage should be nearly silent in that room, and we were disappointed to find that it was noisier than we had hoped, with hum dominating the hiss. Of course your mileage may vary, but you should hear this preamp at home before you sign the adoption papers.

And back to our imitation Latin. Sorry!

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CROSSTALK

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Linn LP12, the Final Version?

Has it been just two years since we bought (finally) our Linn Sondek, the legendary LP12? Even Linn admits that sales of the increasingly expensive turntable are sinking, and you might think that research into its development might finally be halted. Not so.

The latest development concerns the subchassis of the turntable, which was at the heart of the LP12 of three decades ago. The new one (known as the Keel, because of a possible resemblance to the hull of a boat) is made from machined aluminum — you can see the photo on the next page — and its arm board is also new. As in the case of other Linn innovations, the Keel can be added to any LP12, at the breathtaking price of C$3795. Installation of the Keel presupposes that the earlier Cirkus upgrade has been installed, or that the turntable is new enough to have it already.

Also new is the tone arm, the Ekos SE, which replaces the original Ekos in the Linn catalog. That arm was made of aluminum, while the new one is titanium. Our own LP12, which is the reference table in our Omega system, still has an arm we have owned for many years, the Alphason HR-100, which is also made of titanium. The Linn arm’s price has risen to C$5700, though Linn still produces the much lower-priced Akito arm, the spiritual descendent of the Linn Basik.

Cynics will reflect on how much the LP12 has appreciated in price from its launch over three decades ago, at $250... or perhaps it was £250, who remembers? But then, as Oscar Wilde once remarked, a cynic is one who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. The LP12 hasn’t changed much in appearance, but it has had more upgrades than we can count, and with each upgrade its sound has changed, entirely for the better. The sonic distance between that very first Linn and the latest incarnation can best be measured in light years.

Linn’s price list puts a basic LP12 at $3250 (in Canadian dollars, currently trading around US$0.93). That’s a little disingenuous, however, because for that price you don’t get a power supply. And the power supply, the Lingo II (without which you’ve bought an expensive door-stop) runs to C$2200.

Want a tone arm with that? The good side is that Linn doesn’t make it a habit to leave customers in the lurch. Got an LP12 but wish you had the latest one? Everything in the new LP12 is available as an upgrade. Well... at a price.

The Akiva cartridge which was included with this new LP12 is Linn’s new top-of-the-line. It is of course a moving coil cartridge, with an alloy body and a stylus of unstated shape. The coils are hand-wound, presumably under a microscope, which no doubt accounts for its C$4500 price tag. The cantilever is made from ceramic boron. Like other Linn cartridges, the Akiva includes a third mounting hole, allowing it to be mounted in a recent Linn arm in perfect alignment, with no need for an alignment protractor.

We evaluated the LP12 in our Omega reference system, which includes an LP12 that was top-of-the-pack when we bought it two years ago. It includes the same Lingo II power supply Linn still offers. As mentioned, it has an Alphason arm, and the excellent but discontinued Goldring Excel cartridge.

We began our listening session with our all-purpose test LP, the Reference Recordings version of William Walton’s Façade (RR-16). Ours is the rare 45 rpm disc, and we were reminded that access to the Linn’s higher speed is less than intuitive. Instead of just pressing the on-off switch, you leave it depressed for some five seconds until the LED glows green instead of red.

This is a delightful recording just on musical grounds, but it is a challenging one too, because there are a good many instruments in the Chicago Pro Musica, and each gets a solo. With such a variety of timbres, it is frequent for one or more to sound more like hi-fi (in the pejorative sense) than like live music. Of course we didn’t expect the renewed LP12 to muck it up.

Indeed, what we heard had a sonic fingerprint that resembled what we heard with our own turntable. The balance among the instruments was very good, and no instrument was left behind. We could listen “through” the louder instruments to hear softer ones (including some subtle percussive effects), and make out the space of the hall where the recording was made. When there was a clacking of the snare drum to separate each tableau of the suite, it was like setting off a flash in a darkened room: for an instant you could see the walls.

That much we agreed on, though were was some divergence on details. Albert liked the added roundness and warmth he heard with the new LP12. Reine, on the contrary, thought some instrumental details were more acidic, and therefore cooler.

(We should warn you that minor differences in tone can depend on arm height, and therefore vertical tracking angle. Because we could not point to a consistent coloration on either turntable, we concluded that our settings were about right on both tables.)

We continued with another of Reference Recordings’ premium LP’s, Beachcomber (RR-62), selecting the...
Listening Room

The way to the back of the hall, where “hi-fi” exaggeration. The main theme it had great impact, but without any accents. Albert commented that, for the 5 ULTRA HIGH FIDELITY Magazine

And so did the tympani, which get an amazing solo part way through the piece. It had great impact, but without any “hi-fi” exaggeration. The main theme was lyrical and melodic.

Though the piece contains important soft passages, it opens with a full orchestral blast that, properly reproduced as our Omega system can reproduce it, pushes you way back in your chair.

And with the new LP12 it certainly did that, but what is more significant is that despite the volume, the many instruments of the Dallas Wind Band remained in excellent balance. From there, things just got better and better.

What can be difficult for any audio component, including amplifiers and certainly turntables, is to reproduce simultaneously two sounds, one of which is much louder than the other. Though Frederick Fennell’s wind band arrangement is memorable for its high-impact passages, it is equally notable for its subtle, nearly inaudible percussive effects. We had little difficulty hearing through the brass and woodwinds all the way to the back of the hall, where castanets, triangle and tambourine were adding soft but important rhythmic accents. Albert commented that, for the very first time, the tambourine sounded right.

And so did the tympani, which get an amazing solo part way through the piece. It had great impact, but without any “hi-fi” exaggeration. The main theme was lyrical and melodic.

We turned next to one of the best LPs in our collection, the 45 rpm version of Eric Bibb’s Good Stuff (Opus 3 LP19603), from which we selected the title song. Once again we had to hold down the power switch until the green LED lights up (why green for that matter?). We don’t own that many 45 rpm records, though we had two of them in the five we ran this test with.

“It makes me think of the very first time I ever heard this song with our new LP12,” said Reine. Indeed, what we heard was much like what we had heard with our own turntable. Bibb’s voice was clear and expressive, the guitar very fine, the percussion clear and realistic. Best of all, it was — to use a word that we often turn to — involving, the way live music can be at its best. The sly humor that is at the heart of the song was evident, as it should be.

But of course it had all those qualities with our older LP12 as well. Was there a significant difference? Albert tried to identify that difference. “The music is warmer, more resonant, more lyrical,” he said. “There’s more music in the midrange, which is where music speaks to you.”

We couldn’t let this test go by without including a female voice, and we pulled out our LP copy of Jennifer Warnes’ Famous Blue Raincoat. The title tune, which (like the other selections on this LP) is a poem by Leonard Cohen, is particularly well interpreted, and we have used it in many a test in the past. This is not an audiophile pressing, and we ran it through our record cleaning machine to reduce the ticks that have built up over the years. The song allowed the new LP12 to show its mettle (or perhaps its metal). The saxophone introduction mesmerized us, so realistic and emotional was it. “The sax seems to be weeping,” commented Reine. The strings emerged from the background with greater clarity.

But then there was her voice. With our own turntable it had a slight “edge” to it, though we hadn’t really focused on it before. With the new LP12 Warnes had more natural presence, more warmth.

The lyrics were crystalline (in the good sense, of course), and the song’s emotional message was well delivered. “Compare this with the CD version,” said Gerard, and we all laughed.

We ended the listening session with another LP we had not used in some time, and which presents a certain hurdle, Paul Simon’s Graceland. The last song on the first side, Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes, contains several challenges. Simon’s voice can easily become harsh and sibilant, since like most pop recording stars he is rather close to the microphone, and the chorale accompaniment of the South African group Ladysmith Black Mambazo can turn to mush, without the deep resonance with which they are associated.

Once again it was the added presence that we noticed, compared with our older LP12, but that presence did not come at the cost of undesirable artifacts. Indeed, the balance among Simon, the orchestra and the chorale was just as it should be, and probably better than it would be at a live concert (which would, in any case, be amplified). The rhythm, with which this song lives or dies, was quick and communicative.

But it was the chorale, which sings some passages a cappella, that amazed us. Excellent with our own turntable, it was nothing less than magical with the new one. The low-pitched chest resonance that make them such a delight (which, to be fair, not all loudspeakers can do justice to) was frankly awesome. The clarity of their individual voices made it easy to pick them out, but without the exaggeration of certain syllables, as we have sometimes heard. The front-to-back clarity gave the recording a 3-D effect we suspect few buyers of this recording have ever heard.

There were, to be sure, some variables in this test: different tone arms, different cartridges. But we would ascribe most of the difference to the turntable itself.

On the test bench

Actually, this was rather interesting, but you’ll need the full version of UHF to read it all.

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**SUMMING IT UP…**

**Brand/model:** Linn LP12, Ekos SE, Akiva

**Price as tested:** C$15,210 (about US$13,700)

**Size (WDH, not counting cover):** 45 x 35 x 13 cm

**Most liked:** Musical talent that just keeps on getting better

**Least liked:** Inconvenient speed switching, limited tracking ability of the Akiva

**Verdict:** Sure it costs, but price the second hand software

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**CROSSTALK**

I’ve always admired the way Linn upgraded the LP12 over the years, and I expected them to continue refining their previous improvements, polishing their work so to speak. Nothing prepared me for what I heard here. Yes, I had a first and happy encounter with the new LP12 at the Montreal Festival, but the test in our reference system was quite different.

From the first hints of music something was drastically changed, a certain roundness to the sound appeared, more like a fullness, as if it was more saturated and juicy. Our reference LP12 is amazingly detailed but this version carved details out of the midrange in a way that was totally unexpected. I had the feeling that the music I was hearing had more depth — not the stage, the music itself — as you might have experienced with a live performance of a piece you know quite well, and discovered that instruments can actually sing.

I had a heightened sense of balance and palpable presence on every single musical selection. The sound went from sweet, warm and velvety when needed to forceful and glorious in the climaxes — and always sprinkled with a light dusting of the finest highs.

—Albert Simon

We’ve been perfectly happy with our own LP12. But here we are, our contentment disturbed by this review of the updated version. To be precise, what I considered impossible happened.

The new LP12 has even more advantages. I could count them, but that would get fastidious, and so let me cut short by making this suggestion. Read our review of the LP12 in UHF No. 72, and crank everything up one notch.

End of story.

—Reine Lessard

If you find the upgrade price of this version of the LP12 startling, I share your sentiments. It’s not my place to tell you whether you should or should not get your turntable upgraded. What I can tell you is what you’ll hear if you do.

Truth is, the LP12 just keeps on getting better and better. You might want Linn to modernize its appearance, or to make setting it up easier less of a job for a surgeon, and so would I. But I have no argument about the music that comes out of this superb device. It’s not likely to disappoint you, and that’s what counts.

—Gerard Rejskind
ASW is one of a number of loudspeaker manufacturers in Germany. The best-known ones occupy the upper price echelons, with prices typically reaching deep into five digits (in terms of US and Canadian dollars). ASW looks to a more moderate price range, offering a balance between value and high performance.

A few years back we took a pair of ASW Genius 400 speakers to the Montreal show, where they impressed a number of visitors to the UHF room. This year we caught up with ASW’s Hans Rietman at the very same show. Rietman is export manager for ASW loudspeakers, another of which (the Genius 300) is reviewed in the current issue.

UHF: Were you with ASW loudspeakers from the start?
Rietman: Almost. ASW has now existed 20 years — it will celebrate its 20th anniversary in September to be exact. I began with the company in 1993.

UHF: Were you involved in high-end audio before going to ASW?
Rietman: No, not at all. I was an insurance salesman, but I did have a job I enjoyed, and it always been a hobby of mine. I don’t know how it happened, but the opportunity came, and I took it. I began in the Montreal office as a production employee, at the bottom, and we worked our way up.

UHF: And now you’re worldwide.
Rietman: Yes, I have dealers in 50 countries worldwide, not counting the German-speaking countries, where ASW distributes directly.

UHF: Is it possible to identify an ASW philosophy?
Rietman: There's often been talk about a German sound, but that's far from the truth. To think that there is a German sound is wrong. There is a British sound, an American sound — both East Coast and West Coast — and a French sound. Is there a German sound?

Rietman: There is a German sound, but we try to avoid it. We have more of what we could call a European sound.

But we have always to combat certain prejudices, that German speakers have a lot of bass, and a lot of highs, and that the middle is forgotten. We try to do our best, to be far away from that as possible. Of course our engineer has a particular emotion about music. Fortunately for us, his way of thinking music has been accepted worldwide.

The Genius series is ASW’s number one product line. Rietman: Yes, at the moment the Genius line is the top line, but our high-end loudspeakers are coming up with a new series. They are designed in-house, at a higher price. We hope to have them ready in time for CES 2008. Or at least we expect to be there with a demo version.

Are the drivers your own, or do you buy them?
Rietman: We get them manufactured in the Far East. They are specially made for us.

UHF: But they are designed in-house.
Rietman: They are designed in-house, yes.

We are in fact a worldwide leader when it comes to that. We offer 16 different finishes, but we can do custom finishes too. If you want a speaker with a pink finish, we’ll make it pink.

UHF: The cabinetry is done in-house?
Rietman: In-house, yes. The cabinets are built entirely in our own facilities in Germany. We employ some 55 people, and we do it all.

UHF: There’s often been talk about speakers having a certain national sound. There is a British sound, an American sound — both East Coast and West Coast — and a French sound. Is there a German sound?

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**ATLAS NAVIGATOR**
Oxygen-free continuous cast (OCC) cable: each strand is a single copper crystal. Two separate internal conductors, plus double shielding (“semi-balanced,” though we prefer “pseudo-balanced”). The double shielding is copper mylar plus close-lapped 99.997% pure OCC copper multi-stranded screen providing 100% RFI protection. The premium “All-Cu” version (shown here) uses solid copper connectors that are also continuous cast. The copper is then silver-plated and double-shielded. We use two in our reference systems. Special-order lengths from the factory.

ORDER: AN-1 pair, 1m, $265, AN-2 pair, 2m, $330
ORDER: ANA-1 All-Cu, 1m, $390, ANA-2 All-Cu, 2m, $450
ORDER: ANAB-1 All-Cu balanced, single crystal XLR, 1m, $699

**ATLAS VOYAGER**
A cable with superior performance at an economical price. Oxygen-free copper, continuously cast, double-shielded with conductive PVC plus close-lapped 99.9997% pure OCC copper multi-stranded screen, for 100% coverage against RFI. Direct gold-plated, non compressing, double-screened, self cleaning RCA plugs. Also available with the All-Cu connectors like those of the Navigator (above).

ORDER: AV-1 Voyager 1m pair, $235, AV-2, 2m pair, $285
ORDER: AVA-1 All-Cu 1m pair, $375, AVA-2 2m pair, $420

**ATLAS QUESTOR**
This could be the world’s lowest cost interconnect with single-crystal copper. It has the same connectors as the Equator (below), and we thought it sounded like a much more expensive cable.

ORDER: AQ-1, 1 m pair Atlas Questor, $125
ORDER: AQ-2, 2 m pair Atlas Questor, $155

**ATLAS EQUATOR**
We figured it was perhaps the best $150 interconnect cable you could buy. Only it costs just $90. And yes, that’s in Canadian funds. Other lengths on order.

ORDER: AE-1, 1 m pair Atlas Equator, $85
ORDER: AE-2, 2 m pair Atlas Equator, $115

**ACTINOTE MB INTERCONNECTS**
These cables use WBT NextGen locking connectors, and they are a virtual match for our own reference cables.

ORDER: MB-130, 1.3 meter pair Actinote MB, $740

**PRISMAL DUAL INTERCONNECT**
This Swiss-made cable is back, at a big discount! The connectors are especially good, with Teflon dielectric. 174 strands of oxygen-free copper, braided shield. Toss out your “free” interconnects!

ORDER: PD-1, 1 meter pair Prisma Dual Interconnect, $599.5
ORDER: PD-05, 0.5 meter pair Dual Interconnect, $299.5

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**TWO CABLES INTO ONE JACK**
Need to feed two preamps into two amps? This solid Y-adapter (two jacks into one phono plug) is gold over brass, with Teflon dielectric.

ORDER: FYA, one pair Y adapters, $20

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**SPEAKER CABLES**

**ATLAS HYPER SPEAKER CABLES**
A big winner in one of UHF’s blind tests of speaker cables is Hyper 2, an oxygen free stranded wire in Teflon dielectric. Inexpensive too. (Sorry, no picture yet). Plus connectors (we recommend Eichmann Bayonet Bananas, $579/set).

ORDER: AH2, Hyper 2 cable, $299/5 metre

Want to biwire? Hyper Biwire is a great way to go

ORDER: AHB, Hyper Biwire cable, $499/5 metre

**ATLAS ICHOR SPEAKER CABLE**
Continuous-cast single-crystal-cable, ready for biwiring. It costs just $235 per meter of double cable (a 2 m pair has 4 meters of wire). We suggest adding the Eichmann Bayonet bananas, $579 per set of 4, or Furutech connectors (at right).

**ACTINOTE LBD SPEAKER CABLE**
We bought Actinote for our Alpha system! With gold bananas.

ORDER: LBD-37, Actinote 3m pair, $1990
ORDER: LBD-530, Actinote 5m pair, $1990

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**SINGLE CRYSTAL JUMPERS**

**NOT BIBIRING?**
Dump the free jumpers that came with your speakers. Atlas jumpers are made from single-crystal copper, gold-plated spades.

ORDER: AGJ, four single crystal jumpers, $99.95

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**DIGITAL CABLES**

**ATLAS COMPASS DIGITAL**
Excellent performance at an affordable price. Single crystal pure copper. The 1.5m version sounds way better than a 1m.

ORDER: ACD-1.5 digital cable, 1m, $120

**ATLAS OPUS DIGITAL**
We dumped our reference cable for this one! And to be at its very best, it has to be this length.

ORDER: AOD-15 digital cable, 1.5m, $360

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**CONNECTORS**

**EICHMANN BAYONET BANANAS**
The Eichmann Bayonet Banana uses a minimum of metal, and tellurium copper at that, but clicks tightly into any binding post with spring action. For soldering or crimping, or both.

ORDER: EBB kit 4 bayonet bananas, $579

**FURUTECH CONNECTORS**
Rhodium-plated banana tightens under pressure. Installs like WBT-0645 banana. The spade’s great too.

ORDER: FTS-R, set of four bananas, $70
ORDER: FTS-R, set of four spades, $70

**EICHMANN BULLET PLUGS**
The first phono plug to maintain the impedance of the cable itself, by using metal only as an extension of the wire. Hollow tube centre pin and tiny spring contact for ground. Two easily accessible contacts for soldering, two-screw strain relief. Gold over pure copper. Got silver cable? Get the unique Silver Bullets!

ORDER: EBP kit 4 Bullet Plugs, $45.95
ORDER: EBPB kit 4 Silver Bullets, $139.95

**EICHMANN CABLE PODS**
Minimum metal, gold over tellurium copper. Unique clamp system: the back button turns but the clamp doesn’t. Solder to it, or plug an Eichmann banana into it, even from inside!

ORDER: ECP, set of four posts, $54.95

**MICHELL BINDING POSTS**
Michell's Big Mother posts are machined to stay tight. Gold-plated. Long, long shank for mounting in speaker cabinets. Limited stock.

ORDER: Big Mother, 4 gold posts for speakers $59

**POSTMAN WRENCH**
Think you can tighten your speaker and amp binding posts with your fingers? Try the Dynaclear Postman wrench (for 1/2” or 7/16” hexagonal posts) and find that yours weren’t tight after all. Retighten often.

ORDER: Dynaclear Postman, $15

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ORDER ON LINE
www.uhfmag.com
WBT CONNECTORS

The unique WBT phono plugs have a collar which you turn so that the plug tightens around and into the jack! The cable would tear before the plug would come out.

The Topline series (heaviest construction, 5-layered gold plating), includes the 0108 (above), which uses reliable crimping technology, not soldering. Slip a gold-plated sleeve over the bared wire, and crimp it on with the special WBT crimping tool. The crimped end is held in the plug with a Torx screw. Buy the tool at the same time as the connectors, and we’ll buy it back at the price you paid when you’re through.

ORDER: WBT-0405 crimping tool (refundable), $125.
The sleeves are shown here, actual size.

- WBT-0431 0.75 mm sleeve $0.50
- WBT-0432 1 mm sleeve $0.50
- WBT-0433 1.5 mm sleeve $0.50
- WBT-0434 2.5 mm sleeve $0.50
- WBT-0435 4 mm sleeve $0.60
- WBT-0436 6 mm sleeve $0.70
- WBT-0437 10 mm sleeve $0.85
- WBT-0438 15 mm sleeve $0.95

ORDER: WBT-0108, kit 4 Topline crimp plugs, $90
ORDER: WBT-0101, kit 4 Topline solder plugs, $190

The 0144 Midline version has “only” three layers of gold plating, smaller and lighter, with the same locking action.

ORDER: WBT-0144, kit 4 Topline solder plugs, $90

NEW! The high-tech minimum metal “nextgen” phono plugs. Easy to solder, with locking collar. Silver version available.

ORDER: WBT-0110, kit 4 nextgen copper plugs, $170
ORDER: WBT-0110Au, kit 4 nextgen silver plugs, $280

WBT makes banana plugs for speaker cables, all of which lock tightly into any post. All use crimping technology.

ORDER: WBT-0644 Kit 4 Topline straight bananas, $90
ORDER: WBT-0649 Kit 4 angled bananas, $110
ORDER: WBT-0608 Kit 4 Topline bananans, $180

ALSO AVAILABLE: a full line of quality binding posts, phono jacks, etc. Plus a spade lug that connects under pressure.

ANALOG PRODUCTS

REGA FONO

We can’t get over how good it is…and how affordable. The Rega Fono is a superb way to add vinyl to your system. MM version and high sensitivity MC version for cartridges with low output. While stocks last.
ORDER: RF-MM Phono preamp, NOW SOLD OUT
ORDER: RF-MC high sensitivity phono preamp, $695

GOLDRING PHONO

Basic MM phono, amazingly good, and especially not shrill. Besides, it’s very affordable.
ORDER: PA-100, $225

LP RECORD CLEANER

Concentrated cleaner for LP vacuum cleaning machines. Much safer than some formulas we’ve seen! Half litre, mix with demineralized or distilled water to make 4 litres.
ORDER: LPC, $19.95

EXSTATIC RECORD BRUSH

Super eXStatic. It includes a hard velvet pad to get into the grooves, plus two sets of carbon fibre tufts. We’ve worn one out already, because we use it every time!
ORDER: GSX record brush, $36

J. A. MICHELL RECORD CLAMP

Clamp your LP to the turntable platter. We use the J. A. Michell clamp, machined from nearly weightless aluminum. Drop it on, press down, tighten the knob.
ORDER: MRC Michell record clamp, $75

TITAN STYLUS LUBRICANT

Amazing, but true: dabbing a bit of this stuff on your stylus every 2 or 3 LPs makes it glide through the groove instead of scraping. Fine artist’s brush not included, but readily available in many stores.
ORDER: TS0-1 Titan stylus oil, $39.95

MORE ANALOG...

ELECTRONIC STYLUS GAUGE

When we got our sample of this new gauge, we discovered that our (discontinued) plastic pressure gauge had been lying to us. Glad we checked!
ORDER: ALM, electronic stylus gauge, $185

ZEROSTAT ANTISTATIC PISTOL

A classic adjunct to the brush is the Zerostat anti-static gun. Squeeze the trigger and release: it ionizes the air, which becomes conductive and drains off the static charge. By the way, it works for a lot more than LP’s. No batteries needed.
ORDER: Z-1 Zerostat antistatic pistol, $94.95

LP SLEEVES

Keep your records clean and scratch free. Replace dirty, torn or missing inner sleeves with soft-plastic-in-paper Nitty Gritty sleeves.
ORDER: PDI, package of 30 sleeves, $30

TURNTABLE BELT TREATMENT

What this is not is a sticky goo for belts on their last legs. Rubber Renue removes oxidation from rubber belts, giving them a new lease on life. But what astonished us is what it does to even a brand new belt. Wipe down your belt every 3 months, and make analog sound better than ever.
ORDER: RRU-100 drive belt treatment, $14.95

VINYL ESSENTIALS TEST LP

This precision-made German test record lets you check out channel identification, correct phase, crosstalk, the tracking ability of your cartridge (it’s a tougher test than the old Shure disc was), and the resonance of your tone arm and cartridge. When we need to test a turntable, this is the one we reach for.
ORDER: LP 003, Image Hifi Test LP, $48.95

IF WE DON’T LIKE IT YOU WON’T SEE IT HERE

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MORE ANALOG...

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ORDER first thing we did after getting ours was phone the

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feeding your music or home theatre system. The

indicate a missing ground, incorrect polarity,

INSTANT CIRCUIT CHECKER

Take $10 off any one of our IEC power cords or cord kits with

plugged into it.

We dumped our

EICHMANN POWER STRIP

Most power bars knock
t voltage to your equipment
way down, and generate more
noise than a kindergarten

class. The Gutwire Stingray

Squared doesn’t. 12 gauge
double-shielded cable,

Hubbell hospital grade connectors at both ends. Indispensable!

ORDER: GSR-2 Stingray Squared power bar, $285

GUTWIRE G CLEF POWER CABLE

Multiple shielding, including external electrostatic shield connected
to a clip… you may get get best performance with or without. Used

by UHF. Now in an upgraded version, with performance “squared.”

Length 17 m, longer cords on order. G Clef- 1 has 195 conductors,

with 3 shields providing 98% shielding. Can be ordered with a 20A

IEC plug (for amplifiers requiring this special plug)

ORDER: GGC-G Clef, Square 1.7m, $385

GUTWIRE/UHF B12

Gutwire’s B12 is a fat pipe, well-shielded, to which we’ve added

a Hubbell 8215 hospital grade wall plug and the Furutech IEC
copper connector. We use one ourselves, and we love it! Optionally

available as an easy-to-assemble kit, with the blue jacket pre-

stripped and shrink-wrapped at one end.

ORDER: GWB12, 1.5 m B12 power cord, $285

ORDER: GWB12K, 1.5 m B12 power cord kit, $240

Need it longer? Add $95 per metre extra

GUTWIRE 16

No budget for the cable you’d like? Make your own!

Double-shielded, to avoid picking up or

transmitting noise. GutWire 16, assembled

or as a kit. (If you are not comfortable around
electricity, we suggest the assembled one.) Both

versions include the

Hubbell 8215 hospital
grade power plug and the

Schurter 15 A IEC 320 connector.

ORDER: GW16-1.5K, GutWire 16 gauge power cable kit, $79.95

ORDER: GW16-1.5 GutWire 16 cable, assembled, $119.95

Need it longer? Add $28 per metre extra

MORE POWER TO YOU

Better access to
electrical power.

Change your 77-cent
duplex outlets for
these Hubbell hospital
grade outlets. Insert a
plug and it just snaps
in. A tighter internal
connection as well.

Possibly the cheapest improvement you can make to your system.

ORDER: AC-DA Hubbell duplex outlet, $23.95

ORDER: AC-DB (more than one outlet), $21.95

ORDER: AC-D20 20A duplex, red color, $28.95

INSTANT CIRCUIT CHECKER

Plug it into an AC outlet, and the three lights can indicate a missing ground, incorrect polarity, switched wires — five problems in all. Some of these problems can be fatal, but none of them is good for feeding your music or home theatre system. The first thing we did after getting ours was phone the electrician.

ORDER: ACA-1, Instant Circuit Checker, $21

HOSPITAL GRADE CONNECTION

When we put a quality
AC plug on our kettle,
boiling time dropped by
90 seconds! The best AC
plug we have ever seen is
the Hubbell 8215 hospital
grade plug. It connects to wires under high pressure, and it

should last forever.

ORDER: AC-P2 Hubbell cord plug, $29.95

Amazingly good at a much lower price are these two cord plugs
from Eagle. No hospital rating, but a rather good mechanical
connection. Male and female versions.

ORDER: AC-P3 10 ampere IEC 320 plug, $9.95

ORDER: AC-P4 15 ampere Schurter IEC 320 plug, $18.95

SILVER SOLDER

This is a lovely solder, from the
company that makes Enacom
line filters (which we also like).

Wakø-Tech solder contains 4%
silver, no lead.

ORDER: SR-4N, 100 g solder
roll, $59.95

IMPROVED CD WITH FINYL

This is the most famous of all the treatments for
Compact Discs. The maker of Finyl claims it reduces
surface reflections and provides a higher contrast
image for the laser cell of your player. Use it just
once. We get a lot of repeat orders on it. One kit can
treat over 200 discs. Or order the refill.

ORDER: F-1 Finyl kit, $49.00

ORDER: F-IR Finyl refill, $35.00

CLEAN YOUR PLAYER

After as little as three
months, your new
player will have more
trouble reading your
CDs. Why? Dust on
the lens. We’re happy
to have found the
new Milty CD lens
cleaner. Unlike some
commonly-available
discs, the Milty is non-
abrasive, so we use it and rest easy. Can be used wet or dry.

ORDER: 2021 Milty CD lens cleaner, $35

ORDER:

ORDER:

ORDER:
SUPPORT SYSTEMS

TENDERFEET
Machined cones are wonderful things to put under speakers or other audio equipment. They anchor it mechanically and decouple it acoustically at the same time. Tenderfeet come in various versions: tall (as shown) or flattened, in either anodized silver or black. Tall Tenderfeet have threaded holes for a machine screw, or for the optional hanger bolt, which lets you screw it into wood. If you have a fragile hardwood floor, add the optional Tendercup (shown above) to protect it.
ORDER: TFG, tall silver Tenderfoot, $15
ORDER: TFGN, tall black Tenderfoot, $16.50
ORDER: TFP, flat silver Tenderfoot, $10
ORDER: TCP, silver Tendercup, $10
ORDER: THB, hanger bolt for Tenderfeet, each $0.80

Do you prefer spikes for your speakers? Target spikes and sockets mount in wood. Available with or without tools.
ORDER: $4W kit, 8 spikes and sockets and tools, $59
ORDER: $4WS kit, 8 spikes and sockets, $50

AUDIO-TAK
It’s blue, and it’s a sort of modelling clay that never dries. Anchor speakers to stands, cones to speakers, and damp out vibration. Leaflet with suggested uses.
ORDER: AT-2, Audio-Tak pack, $10

THE SUPERSPIKE
This is unique: a sealed unit containing a spike and a cup to receive it. It won’t scratch even hardwood floors. For speakers or equipment stands, on bare floors only. Four sizes of threaded shanks are available.
ORDER: SSRQ, 4 Superspikes, 1/4” shank, $75
ORDER: SSRST, 4 Superspikes, 5/16” shank, $75
ORDER: SSR6, 4 Superspikes, 6 mm shank, $75
ORDER: SSR8, 4 Superspikes, 8 mm shank, $75

WHAT SIZE SUPERSPIKE?
A good ruler will let you figure it out. The stated size is the outer diameter of the threaded shank. Then count the threads:
1/4” shank: 20 threads/inch
5/16” shank: 18 threads/inch
M6 (6mm) shank: 10 threads/cm
M8 (8mm) shank: 8 threads/cm

We have also have a Superspike foot (at right) that replaces those useless feet on CD players, amps, etc., using the same screws to fasten them. And there’s a stick-on version (not shown) for other components.
ORDER: SSRF, 4 Superspike replacement feet, $80
ORDER: SSRF, 3 stick-on Superspike feet, $50

AN ON-THE-WALL IDEA
Need to fasten a speaker securely to the wall? Nothing beats the Smarter Speaker Support for ease of installation or for sheer strength. And it holds the speaker off the wall, so it can be used even with rear-ported speakers. Easily adjustable with two holes, not three, tested to an incredible 23 kg! Glass-filled polysulfone is unbreakable. Screws and anchors included, available in two colors.
ORDER: SSFS, pair of black speaker supports, $29.95
ORDER: SSFS-W, pair of white speaker supports, $29.95

FOUNDATION STANDS
Absolutely the best speaker stand known to us. They’re filled with a proprietary material that deadens the stand completely. Matte black, with spikes adjustable from the top. Height 61 cm (24”).
ORDER: FFA, one pair Foundation stands, $129.5

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AUDIOPHILE RECORDINGS, RECOMMENDED BY UHF STAFF

REFERENCE RECORDINGS
30th Anniversary Sampler (HDCD)
A collection of excerpts from recent Reference albums.

Yerba Buena Bounce (HDCD)
The (terrific) Hot Club of San Francisco is back, with great music, well-played, wonderfully recorded by “Profesor” Johnson!

Serenade (HDCD)
A collection of choral pieces, wonderfully sung by the Turtle Creek Chorale, with perhaps the best sound Keith has given them yet.

Nojima Plays Liszt (HDCD)
The famous 1986 recording of Minoru Nojima playing the B Minor Sonata and other works is back…in HDCD this time!

Nojima Plays Ravel (HDCD)
Nojima’s other hit disc, now also in glorious HDCD.

Garden of Dreams (HDCD)
David Maslanka’s evocative music for wind band.

Beachcomber (LP/HDCD)
Fennell and the Dallas Wind Ensemble includes Tico Tico, A Choral piece, and a version of 76 Trombones you’ll remember for a long time.

Holst (LP)
From the composer of The Planets, 3 suites for wind band, plus the Hammersmith Prelude and Scherzo. Fine power playing by the Dallas Wind Symphony.

Trittico (HDCD)
Large helping of wind band leader Frederick Fennell doing power music by Grieg, Albeniz, Nellybel, etc. Complex and energetic.

Fennell Favorites (LP)
The Dallas Wind Symphony: Bach, Brahms, Prokofiev and more. Fireworks on this rare Reference LP.

The Oxnard Sessions, vol. 1 (LP)
Pianist Michael Garson, of Serendipity fame, takes on familiar standards, backed by five fine musicians. Inventive and beautiful.

Dick Hyman - Fats Waller (LP)
Analog version of this famous recording, cut to CD during the performance. Keith Johnson simultaneously recorded the performance on his own hand-built analog recorder.

Blazing Redheads (LP)
Not all redheads, this all-female salsa-flavored big band adds a lot of red pepper to its music.

Felix Hell (HDCD)
The young organ prodigy turns in mature versions of organ music of Liszt, Vierne, Rheinberger and Guilmant. Huge bottom end!

American Requiem (HDCD)
Richard Danielpour’s awesome Requiem is all about war, and about the hope for peace too, with a dedication tied to 9/11.

World Keys (HDCD)
Astonishing young pianist Joel Fan amazes with music from all the world, including that of Prokofiev and Liszt.

Ikon of Eros (HDCD)
Huge suite for orchestra and chorus, by John Tavener. Inspired by Greek Orthodox tradition. Overwhelming HDCD sound.

PLUS THESE HDCD RECORDINGS:
Pomp&Pipes (HDCD)
Requiem (HDCD)
From the Age of Swing (HDCD)
Swing is Here (HDCD)
Copland Symphony No. 3 (HDCD)
Medinah Sessions, two CDs for one (HDCD)
Ports of Call (HDCD)
Tutti (HDCD)
Bruckner Symphony No. 9 (HDCD)
Ein Heldenleben (HDCD)

SHEFFIELD
Say It With Music (CD)
Margie Gibson sings Irving Berlin in what may be one the greatest jazz vocal recordings of all time. And she’s right in your living room!
Like his father, Leon Bibb, Eric Bibb understands the blues. He and his group Good Stuff as much as we do, pick this one up.

20th Anniversary Celebration Disc (HDCD) 
A great sampler from Opus 3. Includes some exceptional fine pieces, jazz, folk and classical. The sound pickup is as good as it gets, and the HDCD transfer is luminous.

Levande (LP/CD) 
The full recording from which “Tiden Bara Går” on Test Record No 1 is taken. Believe it or not, this great song isn’t even the best on the album! A fine singer, doing folklike material. …who cares about understanding the words?

Concertos for Double Bass (CD/SACD)
This album of modern and 19th Century music is a favorite for its deep, sensuous sound. And the music is worth discovering. It is sensuous and lyrical, a delight in every way.

Across the Bridge of Hope (SACD)
An astonishing choral recording by the Erik Westberg Ensemble, famous for its Musica Sacra choral recording.

Musica Sacra (HDCD/SACD)
Test Record No 4 (LP)

PROPRIUS
Antiphone Blues (CD)
This fantastic disc offers an unusual mix: sax and organ! The disc includes Ellington, Negro spirituals, and some folk music. Electrifying performance, and the recording quality is unequalled.

Antiphone Blues (SACD/HDCD) 
This is the Super Audio version, with a Red Book layer that is HDCD-encoded. The best of both worlds!

Now the Green Blade Riseth (CD/SACD) 
Religious music done a new way: organ, chorus and modern orchestra. Stunning music, arranged and performed by masters, and the effect is joyous. The sound is clear, and the sheer depth is unequalled on CD. The new SACD version is the very best SACD we have yet heard!

Jazz at the Pawnshop (LP/CD/SACD-HDCD) 
A double album of live jazz, with nearly perfect sound. It has been famous among audiophiles for years. Also available as double SACD/ HDCD gold disc on FIM label, or single CD.

Jazz at the Pawnshop 2 (CD/SACD) 
From the original master, another disc of jazz from this Swedish pub, with its lifelike 3-D sound. Now a classic in its own right.

Good Vibes (CD)
The third volume of Jazz at the Pawnshop. And just as good!

Cantate Domino (CD/SACD)
This choral recording is a classic of audiophile records. The title selection is stunningly beautiful. The second half is Christmas music, and includes the most stunning version of O Holy Night we’ve ever heard.

Sketches of Standard (CD)

ANALEKTA
Ebybler Quartets (CD)
Even Mozart said he was a genius. The Ebybler Quartet rediscovers some of the works of this forgotten master.

Graupner: Vocal & Instr. Music vol.1 (CD)
Geneviève Soly and Les idées heureuses play music from a lost genius whose reputation once outshone Bach’s.

Graupner: Partitas, vol.1 (CD)
Geneviève Soly plays some of Christoph Graupner’s incredibly rich harschpichor music

Graupner: Vocal & Instr. Music vol.2 (CD)
Graupner: Partitas vol.3 (CD)
Graupner: Partitas vol.4 (CD)
Graupner: Partitas vol.5 (CD)
Graupner: Christmas in Darmstadt (CD)

SPECIAL PRICE ON ALL 8 CDs (see last page)

Violoncello Espanol (CD)
I Musici de Montréal come to Analekta, with a stunning album of Spanish and Spanish-like pieces for cello and orchestra: Glazunov, de Falla, Albéniz, Granados, and more.

Vivace (CD)
Classical or rock? Claude Lambothe plays two cellos at the same time in an amazing recording of modern compositions.

Pauline Viardot-Garcia (CD)

Soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian steps into the role of 19th Century singer and composer Pauline Viardot so convincingly that listening to her is like going back in time. One of the best classical recordings of all time!

Beethoven: Hammerklavier Sonatas (CD)
Anton Kuerti tackles the two impressive sonatas.

Brahms Lieder (CD)

Canadian mezzo-contralto reveals what she truly is: one of the truly great voices.

Beethoven: Symphonies 5 & 6 (CD)

Tafelmusik steps outside its usual repertoire of Baroque on period instruments. Under Bruno Weil, this orchestra turns in a gorgeous rendition of two of Beethoven’s most memorable symphonies.

Mozart: Auernhammer Sonatas (CD)

A double CD of sonatas for violin and piano. It’s Mozart, of course, but it is also gorgeously played.

Bach Sonatas for violin & harschpichor, vol.1 (CD)

Two Analekta superstars come together: violinist James Ehnes and harschpichordist Luc Beausejour. Irresistible

Bach Suites, Airs & Dances (CD)

Keyboard music from J.S. and C.P. E. Bach, arranged for concert harpsichord. Harpsichordist Luc Beausejour. Irresistible

Romantic Pieces (CD)

How does James Ehnes manage to get such a sweet sound from his Stradivarius? Czech pieces from Smetana, Dvorak and Janacek. The playing is as glorious as the tone, and the sound is sumptuous.

Bonus: Analekta’s 10th sampler is included.

Once Upon a Time… (Video DVD)

Violinist Angelo Dubeau et her La Pietà string group with a spectacular video of music inspired by the Underworld… with the devil himself in attendance. Includes other videos plus two CD’s worth of uncompressed music. Superb!

Cantabile (CD)

The Duo Simiolia is made up of striking blonde twins, who play flute
and guitar. Familiar airs from Mozart, Fauré, Elgar, Ravel, lots more. Fine listening.

**Nota del Sol (CD)**
The Labrie twins are back, with a delightful recording of flute and guitar music by Piazzola, Pujol and Machado. Joyous works, wonderfully played and recorded.

**Fantasia (CD)**
A third, gorgeous, recording by the twins, on flute and guitar.

**Fritz Kreisler (CD)**
Possibly the best recording of Kreisler’s delightful violin music. James Ehnes and his Strad bring a new magic to this fine disc.

**French Showpieces (CD)**
Awesome violinist James Ehnes, with the Quebec City Symph. takes on Saint-Saëns, Berlioz, Chausson, Massenet, and more.

**A Los ancesros (CD)**
Cuban-born Carlos Placeres, with influences of Africa and lots of other places. Six musicians in all, and all acoustic.

**Bach: Coffee Cantata (CD)**
The celebrated Tafelmusik ensemble does two secular cantatas (including Peasant Cantata). Fine singers, lifelike sound!

**Mozart: Soprano Arias (CD)**
Soprano Lyne Fortin, with the Orchestre Métropolitain, totally at ease with all three soprano roles from The Marriage of Figaro (including a duet with herself!).

**Handel (CD)**
Superb soprano Karina Gauvin is joined by the Toronto chamber ensemble Tafelmusik in a series of glowing handwritten pieces from Handel’s “Alcina” and “Agrippina.” The sound is smooth and lifelike, with an acute sense of place.

**Little Notebook of Anna Magdalana Bach (CD)**
Over 30 delightful pieces, most by Bach himself. Soprano Karina Gauvin’s voice is mated to Luc Beauséjour’s harpsichord work. The sound is deep, detailed and warm, truly of audiophile quality.

**Vivaldi: Motets for Soprano (CD)**
In this disc by wonderful soprano Karina Gauvin, she tackles the gorgeous but very difficult vocal music of Vivaldi: two motets and a psalm. It is a moving interpretation, on this jewel of a recording.

**Vivaldi: Per Archi (CD)**
Telemann Sonatas for 2 Violins (CD)
Mendelssohn: 2 Violin Concertos (CD)
Opera for Two (CD)
Villa-Lobos (CD)

**AUDIOQUEST**
Mississippi Magic (CD/SACD)
The legendary Blues, Gospel, rock and world beat singer and musician Terry Evans, in an energetic recording we loved.

**Come to Find (CD)**
The first by Bluesman Doug McLeod, as impressive as the second, and no Blues fan should resist it.

**You Can’t Take My Blues (CD)**
Singer/songwriter Doug MacLeod and colleagues present one of the most satisfying Blues records ever made.

**Unmarked Road (SACD)**
The third disc from the great blues singer and guitarist Doug McLeod is every bit as good as the first two.

**Whose Truth, Whose Lies (SACD)**
The third disc from the great blues singer and guitarist Doug McLeod is as good as the first. These songs have powerful rhythm, and can make you smile and cry at the same time.

**Bluesquest sampler (CD)**

**SILENCE**

**Tres Americas (CD)**
A gold audiophile disc of lively Latin fusion music. Irka Mateo and Tadeo de Marco sing and play, drawing their influence from Africa as well as their native Brazil. Clear, close-in sound.

**Djembé Tigui (CD)**
This gold disc features the voice and percussion of African artist Seiku Camara, captured by the famous Soundfield microphone. Camara died just before the disc was released.

**Styles (CD)**
Is this ever a surprising disc! Violinist Marc Belanger worked up these string études for his music students, but they actually deserve to be put out on a gold audiophile disc! The more strings he adds, the better it gets.

**Fable (CD)**
Easygoing modern jazz by Rémi Bolduc and his quartet, on this gold disc. Some exceptional guitar and bass solos.

**Musique Guy St-Onge (CD)**
One-man band St-Onge plays dozens of instruments — scores for fourteen films which never existed outside of his imagination. Fun pretext, clever, attractive music that makes you wish you could see the films!

**HI-RES MUSIC (FOR DVD PLAYERS)**

**Brazilian Soul (24/96 DVD)**
Guitarists Laurindo Almeida and Charlie Byrd, plus percussion and bass, in an intimate yet explosive recording of samba and bossa nova music. Great!

**Jazz/Concord (24/96 DVD)**
It’s 1972, and you have tickets to hear Herb Ellis, Joe Pass, Ray Brown and Jake Hanna at the Concord Jazz Festival. You won’t ever forget it. You can be there, with this high resolution disc that goes in your DVD.

**Rhythm Willie (24/96DVD)**
Guitarist Herb Ellis and Freddie Green, With bassist Ray Brown and others. This is an uncompressed 24 bit 96 kHz disc that can be played on any DVD player. Awesome!

**Trió (24/96 DVD)**
Pianist Monty Alexander with Herb Ellis and Ray Brown. “Makes CD sound seem as if it’s coming through a drinking straw.” Playable on any DVD player, uncompressed.

**Seven Come Eleven (24/96 DVD)**
Herb Ellis and Ray Brown again, but this time with guitarist Joe Pass (he and Ellis alternate playing lead and rhythm), and a third guitarist, Jake Hanna. This is a live recording from the 1974 Concord Jazz Festival.

**Soular Energy (24/96 DVD/ 24-192 DVD-Audio)**
Perhaps the world’s greatest bassist, the late Ray Brown, playing with pianist Gene Harris, whom Brown called one of the greats. The proof is right on this 24/96 recording, made from the analog master. Side 2 has a 24/192 DVD-A version.

**KLAVIER**

**Poetics (CD)**
A superb wind band recording which includes a breathtaking concerto for percussion.

**Ghosts (CD)**
This haunting(!) wind band recording features a suite of music that could be the soundtrack to a film that will keep you awake nights. A recording of astonishing dynamics and depth.

**Caprice (CD)**
Can harp be spectacular? Believe it! This famous Klavier recording features Susann McDonald playing Fauré, Glinka and Liszt, is a pow-erhouse! Engineered by Keith Johnson, a great transfer by Bruce Leek.

**Sonatas for Flute and Harp**
These same great artists with sonatas by Krumpholz and Damase, as well as Spohr and Glinka. Oh yes, and a spectacular solo harp version of Ibert’s hilarious Entr’acte.

**Norman Dello Joio (CD)**
This contemporary composer delights in the tactile sound of the wind band, and the Keystone Wind Ensemble does his music justice. So does the sound, of astonishing quality!

**Carmina Burana (CD)**
The celebrated Carl Orff oratorio sends chills down your spine, thanks to the huge orchestra, gigantic choir, and of course the clarity and depth of the Klavier sound.

**Obscenity (CD)**
The Trio Amade plays Piazzola, Berstein, Copland, and Emilion Colón… who is the trio cellist. The Colón and Piazzola is definitely worth the price of admission. Lifelike sound.

**Misbehavin’ (CD)**
The superb Denver Brass does Gershwin (Cuban Overture, Porgy and Bess), plus On the Town, Sweet Georgia Brown, and of course Ain’t Misbehavin’ Great sound.

**Hemispheres (CD)**
The North Texas Wind Symphony with new music by contemporary composers who know how to thrill. Some of the best wind band sound available.

**Illuminations (CD)**
Absolutely great chamber musicians take on music by Villa-Lobos, Malcolm Arnold, and some composers you may not know but you’ll wish you did. Sublime sound, nothing less.

**Mozart Serenade and Divertimenti (CD)**
Lowell Graham (of Center Stage fame, Wilson Audio) conducts a glowing version of these pieces, including the famous “Grand Partita.” The engineering, by Bruce Leek, is absolutely first-rate.

**Kickin’ the Clouds Away (CD)**
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Orchestral versions of music from great movies. Easy to love!

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The Music Teachers

by Reine Lessard

Nadia Boulanger is born in Paris on September 16, 1887 in a family where music is queen. I want to take a closer look at this totally unusual family that is often called mysterious. It is, at the very least, fascinating. So let us go further back in time, to 1797.

That year Frédéric Boulanger, Jules Massenet and Gabriel Fauré. In 1871, he is appointed as voice teacher at the Conservatoire. There, at the age of 62, he falls madly in love with a gifted student, Raissa Mischetzkaya, an 18-year old Russian princess. They are wed with great pomp in St. Petersburg, and the young aristocrat becomes quickly known as a singer.

Living in the 9th arrondissement of Paris, the Boulanger couple gives birth to three girls: Nina-Juliette (who will die young), Juliette-Nadia (born on her father’s 72nd birthday), and Marie-Juliette-Olga, who will be better known as Lili.

Need I emphasize that the family environment favors the musical development of the two young sisters, whose musical aptitude astonishes one and all? Nadia begins her studies of the organ and composition at the age of nine. By the time she turns 16, she is a student at the Conservatoire and has already picked up a shelf-full of first prizes, for harmony, composition, piano and organ, and she is named assistant organist at the Madeleine (where the principal organist is Gabriel Fauré!). In 1908 she wins the Second Grand Prix de Rome for composition, and indeed she might have won the Premier Grand Prix but for her insistence on bending the rules and writing an instrumental fugue rather than the vocal fugue that was the assigned exercise.

The names of Nadia and Lili are intertwined. Lili is six years younger, and it is with her sister that she will begin her training in piano and composition. In 1913 Lili will become the first woman to win a Premier Grand Prix de Rome. I shall return to that event presently.

Social engagement

In 1915, while the Great War takes millions of victims, Nadia, with Lili’s aid, sets up an association in aid of

Nothing can compare with music. When music shields us from time, it has accomplished more than we had the right to hope. Music has broadened the borders of our sad lives. It has illuminated the sweetness of our hours of happiness, erasing the pettiness that can only diminish us. Music brings us back to everything that is pure and that is new.

Thus spake the illustrious pedagogue Nadia Boulanger (1887-1969). The great American composer Ned Rorem said of her, “So far as musical pedagogy is concerned — and by extension of musical creation — Nadia Boulanger is the most influential person who ever lived.” Rorem, once dubbed “the world’s best composer of art songs,” knew of which he spoke. He spent several years in Paris, where he had opportunity to know her, as well as to meet her students who went on to brilliant careers.

Who was this woman? What qualities made her into an undisputed champion in what was traditionally a man’s domain?

Born under the right star

The scion of a long line of musicians, Nadia Boulanger is born in Paris on September 16, 1887 in a family where music is queen. I want to take a closer look at this totally unusual family that is often called mysterious. It is, at the very least, fascinating. So let us go further back in time, to 1797.

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French musicians who have been drafted. The Boulanger sisters are its inspiration and its leaders. Through the Gazette of the Conservatoire, of which copies are sent to the front, the association establishes links among the greatest possible number of current and former students of the Conservatoire. Through its pages they can express themselves, and establish contacts among themselves and those at home.

A number of eminent Americans use their prestige to bring the sisters precious help. That’s the case of the renowned architect Whitney Warren and composer, businessman and diplomat Blair Fairchild. Centres are set up in several American cities to gather funds for the organization. Encouraged by the unstinting support of Gabriel Fauré, who is now director of the Conservatoire, composer, businessman and diplomat for the organization. Encouraged by the several American cities to gather funds the organization. Encouraged by the unstinting support of Gabriel Fauré, who is now director of the Conservatoire, the Académie des Beaux-Arts joins in the effort. Nadia Boulanger becomes the ambassador of French culture abroad.

The picture below shows Lili Boulanger, winner of the Prix de Rome, with three other winners, Claude Delvincourt, Marc Delmas et Edouard Mignan.

And then...tragedy
Lili Boulanger has suffered since childhood of an illness that is known to be incurable. In 1918 she dies at the age of 24, leaving behind a small body of compositions that are admirable.

It has been much written that Lili Boulanger suffered a great deal because of the tyrannical love of her older sister. This is no more than idle talk, in my view, to be classified with the many attempts to overanalyze paintings and speculate on what might have moved the artist to do this or that.

What is certain is that Nadia was Lili’s first teacher, that Nadia idolized her, that she recognized in her a unique talent, and that her untimely death caused her inconsolable grief.

After Lili’s death Nadia never composed another note, giving herself over entirely to conducting, to the popularization of Lili’s music, and above all to teaching. It is, then, for her teaching that she will be known, though she will nonetheless leave a few works of note: a Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra, a cantata titled Sirène, organ works, and Les heures claires, a piano cycle created in collaboration with pianist Raoul Pugno.

“Remember,” Lili had told Nadia, “that your pupils will give you when you are older all that I have given you right to the end.”

“And that is a fact,” said Nadia. “My pupils arrive, and I think about what Lili told me, and I give them an idealized love that is not of this world. In my eyes they are of the greatest importance, and they make of my teaching something sacred.”

A final word about Lili.
Contestants for competitions at the Conservatoire are required to use pseudonyms in order to ensure impartiality. Lili enters the competition under a masculine name, and when it is discovered that the winner of the Prix de Rome is a woman it comes as a shock. But where will they house her? Will she be living at the Villa Médicis among the men for three years, like Joan of Arc with her troops? After much inflamed discussion, alternative lodgings are found for her.

The American Conservatory
Let me say a few words about this prestigious establishment and those who created it.
Wanting to improve the quality of American military music, General John Joseph Pershing created an art school at Chaumont, in the Loire valley of France, where the US Expeditionary Force has its headquarters. Pershing selects as collaborators the composer and conductor Walter Damrosch, as well as Francis Casadesus. Before the Great War all of the teachers at the school are French, but one in particular stands out for her teaching of composition and orchestration. She is, you will have guessed, Nadia Boulanger. She will become the soul of the school, and she will become its director in 1949, until her death 20 years later.

So successful is the school that after the war it becomes the American Conservatory, housed in the Château de Fontainebleau. Its objectives remain the same: to provide promising young musicians, during summer sessions, the best possible French music training. It also produces free concerts and shows. With the coming of World War II and the Nazi occupation, the Conservatory is moved to the United States under the direction of Robert and Gaby Casadesus. The two brothers will return to Fontainebleau in 1946, and some of the most illustrious names in music will teach there.

Nadia the pedagogue
Of all world capitals, it is Paris that is the greatest magnet for painters, writers and musicians from all corners of the world, and particularly the United States. The City of Light is an obligatory stop on the grand voyage of their artistic education.

Over the course of a long career, the splendor of Nadia’s erudition and her strong sense of musical ethics draw to her orbit renown composers, conductors and soloists who are already famous, and many hundreds of students from the world over. Many have grants from their governments, to come and seek a complement to their stock of musical
knowledge. In nearly every case, their contact with Nadia Boulanger causes them to rethink their manner of composing. That is the case, for instance, of Piotr Moss. I shall return to him shortly.

During World War II she teaches in the US.

Nadia on the podium

She wields a baton for the first time in Paris in 1912, conducting her own works. She is quickly recognized as a maestro (maestra?) to be reckoned with, and she will conduct some of the world’s major orchestras in France and the US, notwithstanding those who believe a woman’s place is in a domestic role.

In 1936 she is the first woman to conduct the London Philharmonic Orchestra. A little later she will also conduct, among others, the Boston Symphony, the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and in England the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester and the BBC Symphony.

Nadia the woman

Like her sister Lili, Nadia Boulanger is strikingly beautiful. Her dress is classically austere, and she insists on being addressed as Mademoiselle. She attends Mass each morning. To her talents as a musician and teacher, we can add human qualities that may seem surprising.

One might be tempted to suppose that the passion she puts into her work and the hours she devotes to it — her day begins at 6 a.m. and continues until late evening — allow her to compensate any regrets at never having had a home, a husband and children. Actually, it is her pupils who are her children. She offers them food and money when they are in need, or simply to please herself by pleasing them.

History is discreet on whatever love life she may have had, though there are signs of her need for love and tenderness. Certainly she maintained lifelong friendships with, among others, Aaron Copland, Jean Roger-Ducasse and Stravinsky.

She sympathizes particularly with those who have lost a loved one. Each year, throughout her life, she will hold a memorial service for those who died the previous year.

She was an extremely shy young girl. Her clothes were always dark. She had outlived most of her family. She also had outlived her parents. There was a tempest in her life. As her strength faded, her body shrank, and her face wore a pallor. She would not leave her house. Her once bright hair turned gray. Her once smart clothes were now so old, and so shabby, that she would mock herself. She was so shy, that she would not go out in public, which was unjustified.

She was the last in a line of preserving that was kept in Nadia’s family. She was the last to be born. It is the last, the uncial, the extraordinary, the perfect, that is preserved in Nadia’s work. And Nadia preserved those qualities in her work. It was not a question of style. It was a question of knowledge. In nearly every case, their contact with Nadia Boulanger causes them to rethink their manner of composing. That is the case, for instance, of Piotr Moss. I shall return to him shortly.

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benefited from the artistic GNP of the City of Lights.

Robert Russell Bennett (1894-1981) is best known for his orchestrations for over 300 shows from 1920 to 1975. Yet so prolific and dynamic is he that he finds time to compose operas, chamber music, choral music and wind band music, some 200 original works in all. A demanding conductor and music critic, he never loses his taste for serious music. In 1926 he leaves for Europe to complete his training. He visits Berlin and then Paris, where Nadia Boulanger encourages him to pursue his musical ideal.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) was born in Brooklyn. Still young, he studies piano with Victor Wittenstein and Clarence Adler, and then with Ricardo Viñes at Fontainebleau. It is there that he meets Nadia Boulanger. Initially he resists the unheard-of idea of a composer having a female teacher, but on the counsel of a friend he finally agrees to a course with Mademoiselle. His life is transformed. She becomes his mentor, but also his lifelong friend.

This photo shows a young Leonard Bernstein, with Copland.

Nadia Boulanger. It was the beginning of a long friendship between two exceptional women.

Jacques Chailley (1910-1999) is a French composer and teacher with a track record that speaks for itself, and who studies harmony with Nadia Boulanger. “I remember,” he said, “as a young student our astonishment when my teacher Nadia Boulanger, around 1925, would invite us to her home every Wednesday to analyze and discover the wonderful madrigals of Monteverdi, the existence of which the Conservatoire then remained ignorant. How much water has flowed under the bridge since then! The glory of Monteverdi is today recognized internationally.”

Jean François (1912-1997) was a celebrated neo-classical composer much influenced by Stravinsky. Born of famous musicians, he writes his first compositions before reaching adolescence. In private lessons, Nadia Boulanger teaches him the sense of form and living architecture, and he goes on to the Conservatoire de Paris. Brilliant pianist, he wins the Premier Prix. He wrote chamber music, ballets, film music, concertos for numerous instruments, and a comic opera. L’apostrophe, a charming satire with caustic and hilarious musical passages, has delighted even spectators who cannot follow the French text.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1992) was a talented pianist, a fiery conductor and an eclectic composer, and was until his death in New York one of the most famous musicians in America. Trained at Harvard, he studies piano and conducting with Fritz Reiner and orchestration in Philadelphia. In 1953 he is the first American conductor to be invited to La Scala, and he spends 11 years as music director of the New York Philharmonic, before being named its conductor for life. His compositions, for the concert hall, Broadway and Hollywood, are countless. He studied with Nadia Boulanger, who had a great influence on him.

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992), in the early 50’s is obsessed by the idea of developing the tango. His first ventures into his new style of composition provoke outrage, and he considers abandoning his idea. Then a life-changing event occurs. Winner of a prize from the Sinfonia de Buenos Aires and obtaining a bursary from the French government, he goes to Fontainebleau to study with Nadia Boulanger. The photo shows them together.

Mademoiselle looks carefully at the classical compositions he has brought with him. Though she compliments him, she is less than satisfied. He tells her he has made his living writing arrangements for tango orchestras, but opines that his future is in classical music. She asks him to play her one of his tangos, despite his protests that he is not a good pianist. He has scarcely made it halfway through his tango Triunfal, when she stops him. “Astor, that is beautiful, I like it very much. That is the real Piazzolla. Never abandon it.” That was a revelation, another indication of the respect she had, faced with genuine talent.

Elliott Carter (b. 1908) is an eminent American composer. After studying English literature and music at Harvard, he becomes a member of the American avant-garde. In 1920 he discovers the old masters, and from 1931 to 1935 he studies with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Under her influence, he adopts a more neo-classical style.

Michel Legrand (b. 1932), born in France, has known a phenomenal career that shows no signs of ending. When he is 12 he tells his piano teacher he wants to meet Nadia Boulanger. He will study with her for four years, starting in 1949. “She reigned over the world of music,” he says of her. “She taught us not only music, but how to lead our lives.”

He has an anecdote concerning her generosity. Legrand was making his living writing sonatas and asked her for an hour of her time the following week for some advice. She summoned him for five o’clock the following Wednesday...five in the morning! “Her day began at 6 am, and she simply got up an hour
earlier for me. Such love. What a woman! Such gratitude I have in my heart and in my spirit, but whom I literally bated, because she was so hard. I hated her as much as I have loved her. She taught me rigor and discipline, and when I left her at the age of 20, I was ready for anything.”

**Don Campbell**, composer and author of the book *The Mozart Effect*, speaks of Nadia Boulanger’s capacity for citing musical examples. “At one of my first lessons, she said to me, ‘Don, you are young and for you everything is easy. Do you think you could memorize just one measure a day?’ Sure, I said. Unfortunately I wasn’t up to her high standards, but I did begin a long and enriching path toward knowledge of music.”

**Philip Glass** (b. 1937) is an American composer whose story is most interesting. He discovers music on the radio in his father’s repair workshop. In the same workshop is a display case with records. If some records don’t sell, Philip has permission to take them home. Wondering why no one wants to buy them, he listens to them with friends. It is thus that he becomes familiar with the quartets of Beethoven and the sonatas of Schubert, but he wants more.

After a BA in math and philosophy, he spends his free time practicing the piano, and at the age of 19 decides to be a composer. Knowing that the best Juilliard students have gone on to study with Nadia Boulanger, he leaves for Paris, studying with her from 1964 to 1966. He speaks of how uncompromising and hard she could be, but also of how he adored her.

**John Eliot Gardiner** (b. 1943) is an English conductor. After studying at Cambridge, and then in Paris with Nadia Boulanger in the 60’s, he founds the Monteverdi Choir in 1964. In 1990 he founds the Revolutionary and Romantic Orchestra. His repertoire is mostly Baroque: Jean-Philippe Rameau and Bach. He received scores of Rameau works transcribed by Nadia herself.

**Piotr Moss** (b. 1949) wins first prize for composition at the Superior National Music School in Warsaw. Receiving a bursary from the French government, he pursues his training in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, who has been warmly recommended. The meeting of the 27-year old artist with this living legend is a momentous occasion. Moss says that Nadia Boulanger radically altered his way of thinking and his artistic ethics. Her influence was of a spiritual order, making him aware of his responsibility as an artist. Through her, he came to understand that talent is not a gift for the creator alone, but that he has the obligation to practice his art with rigor in order not to waste a gift “that is not his alone.”

After his year with Nadia, Piotr Moss wins the Lili Boulanger prize.

**Emil Naoumoff** (b. 1962) begins studying piano at the age of five in his native Bulgaria, and is composing a year later. Meeting Nadia Boulanger at the age of eight, he will be her last disciple, and will remain with her until her death. Through her he meets such luminaries as Igor Markevitch, Robert and Gaby Casadesus, Nikita Magaloff, Jean Francaix, Leonard Bernstein and Yehudi Menuhin. Menuhin conducts the premiere of Naoumoff’s piano concerto, with the ten-year old composer himself at the keyboard.

After Nadia’s death he becomes a teacher in his own right, with posts at Fontainebleau and then at the Conservatoire de Paris. A talented composer and remarkable musician, he teaches today at the University of Indiana in Bloomington.

Two months before her death, Nadia Boulanger wrote to her pupil:

> I don’t want to leave without saying goodbye. I have too many things to tell you that you know already. I don’t bring them up so that you can thank me, for I know that you are aware of all I have done for you. But please never lose sight of the fact that you have given me far more than I have given you.

> With all my tender affection, Nadia

**Before Nadia**

Some years before Nadia Boulanger will burst onto the musical scene, there is another woman who will influence generations of artists. Marguerite Long (1874-1966), née Cécilia Dunoyer, is born in Nîmes in the south of France (the town that gives denim its name). Exceptionally gifted, Marguerite receives her first lessons from her older sister Claire who is, at the age of 16, already a professor at the Nîmes Conservatoire.

Like other gifted young girls, Marguerite must overcome the fears and objections of her parents. Were it not for the determination of Théodore Dubois (composer of operas and the celebrated oratorio *The Seven Last Words of Christ*), we might never have heard of her, and the world of music would have been much the poorer.

After brilliant studies in Paris, she develops in the company of the great composers and musicians of the time: Camille Saint-Saëns, Gabriel Fauré, Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy. It is from Debussy that she learns how to
interpret piano music in her own style, an impressionist style she herself loves, though Debussy detests her technique.

Lefébure transformed the interpretation of music. She rejected the idea that there are only good and bad ways to play a work. You should hear her discourse on how Ravel’s Jeux d’eau should be played according to the instructions of the composer himself. And how she understood Debussy! “Since Debussy,” she said, “one must play in a completely different way, for he has given the piano a new sound.”

There are, unfortunately, few recordings of her playing, and that makes existing ones all the more precious. In 1951 she recorded Mozart’s Piano Concerto in D Minor, K.466, with Pablo Casals. Columbia released it only posthumously, because at the time it could find no other recording of adequate quality to couple with it onto an LP. Her recordings at the end of her life on the Solstice label were not always up to the standard one might expect and desire. Despite its sonic failings, one of them, of works by Ravel, won the coveted Grand prix du Disque Charles Cros.

The heritage

Four years after Nadia Boulanger’s death in her 93rd year, was inaugurated the International Nadia and Lili Boulanger Foundation, by Annette de la Baume Armagnac, Doda Dufraisseix, François Dujarric de la Bédoyère, and Enrica Prati. It was decided to represent the international heritage of the two sisters.

A few years younger, Yvonne Lefébure (1898-1986) is one of the most remarkable pianists of the 20th Century. She studies with Alfred Cortot when she is but nine, and she quickly becomes the favorite soloist of a long string of unforgettable conductors. Possessing great sensitivity and exceptional artistic intuition, she is a priestess, a servant of God, and it is as such that I salute her.

After Nadia

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Lupu/Previn & London Symp. Orch. Last Impressions Music XR24012

Lessard: L.I.M went back to an original 1960’s master tape to choose this recording for its artistic and sonic virtues, and to do the most faithful possible transfer to xrcd.

The Schumann Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 54 is inspired and difficult to play, a mature work that is a testimony to Robert Schumann’s genius. Schumann had initially set out to create a piece which would have the title Phantaisie. As often happened he set the project aside, but returned to it later, adding two more movements, to be played without interruption. The original Phantaisie, then, serves as a first movement.

This music of varying atmosphere is so well rendered by pianist Radu Lupu that it gives the impression of having been composed without effort, as though by enchantment. It is magnificent! A remarkable colorist, with a palette of myriad nuances, Lupu has a light but precise touch, by turns effervescent or lyrical, expressive and always involving. He plays in perfect symbiosis with the orchestra, under the baton of André Previn.

After a powerful attack, the opening Allegro Affettuoso deploys a superb theme, which develops with tenderness and sometimes with power. This moving melody will return to haunt us in the other movements as well, with its tangle of delicious motifs.

The Intermezzo opens on an intriguing dialogue between piano and orchestra. The cellos pick up the melody, but the piano resumes its magnificent flights, with the orchestra adding remarkable energy. The Allegro vivace brings back the theme of the first movement, leaving the soloist full liberties with it. Strings, brass and percussion come together in a gorgeous tutti, to end with a roll of the bass drum you can feel deep inside you. The sonic quality of this concerto is beyond reproach.

I can’t say as much of the Grieg concerto, which opens the CD, and I have deliberately left it for last. Here the piano has taken on a brittle quality that cannot be blamed on the pianist. As for the celebrated London Symphony Orchestra, here it is distant, and some passages lack precision. Same transcendent pianist, same superb orchestra, same maestro, but a lot less talent at the controls. The producer for the two recordings was not the same. Was that the reason?

And yet, how gorgeous this concerto is! From the opening one is struck by the firm chords of the piano, followed quickly by a multitude of lovely flourishes that color the movement with gaiety. The second movement is filled with musical phrases tinged with irresistible lyricism. As for the final movement, the flights and the ornamentation of the piano are supported by rich and lovely chords. In short, it is a masterpiece, one of the best-known and most often played piano concertos of all time.

Grieg was himself a talented pianist. Although he gives the piano the lion’s share of attention, he doesn’t neglect the orchestra. In the original orchestra, incidentally, he wrote parts for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets and three trombones, plus tympani, violins, violas, cellos and double basses.

Note that my somewhat sour comments are not meant to discourage you from buying this disc. The Schumann is extraordinary, and notwithstanding some weaknesses in the sound, the Grieg is not exactly a failure either.

A Portrait
Thomas Hampson
EMI 5 72037 2

Lessard: Charles Gounod, Jules Massenet, Giuseppe Verdi, Cole Porter, Franz Liszt…and other acclaimed composers are on the menu of this “best of” recording by baritone Hampson. There’s something here for everyone, though speaking for myself I liked them all. If you’re sufficiently eclectic there are few barriers to happiness. I enjoyed listening to Stephen Foster’s Beautiful Dreamer as much as Wagner’s troubling Wie Todesahnung and Lehár’s charming O Vaterland, du machst bei Tag.

What can be said of the first piece in this collection, Korngold’s Mein Sehnen, mein Wäbchen, which reveals from the opening notes the magnificent voice of Hampson, the most famous dramatic baritone of his generation? I couldn’t help thinking of the legendary but long-retired Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

It is in a number of deathless arias that I was able to appriciate without reservations the timbral beauty of Hampson’s voice: Avant de quitter ces lieux from Gounod’s Faust, and Carlos, écoute from Don Carlo by Verdi, who wrote so much gorgeous music for baritone.
La lan la lera and Largo al factotum from Rossini's Barber of Seville, he is a model of virtuosity, with an effortless high C rendered in the midst of an unexpected cadenza. That section was recorded live, and the sustained applause indicates the delirious joy of the audience.

For his voice, his admirable tessitura, the art of his phrasing, his uncontested dramatic abilities, and his absolutely involving performances, Hampson made me think of Tito Gobbi (1913-1984).

The recording continues with Schumann, Jerome Kern...but why choose?

However I have sinned. I may be an audiophile, but I was so captivated by the beauty of the music and Hampton's vocal performance that I glossed over some faults in the sound. The excerpts were recorded at different times, in different settings — sometimes live sometimes in the studio — with different accompanists. The sonic quality, inevitably, is variable.

Urban Concertos (David Chesky)
Symph. Orch of the Norrlands Opera
Chesky SACD326
Rejskind: The Chesky brothers, David and Norman, set up their audiophile label in 1986. It was David who was the musical half of the team, and he has had his feet in two different camps. The nascent company was known for re-releases, with better sound, of classical recordings from major labels. However David grew up in Miami, surrounded by jazz (he studied with the Modern Jazz Quartet’s John Lewis), and especially Latin jazz. As a pianist himself, he often played on his own recordings, and he brought to prominence a number of Latino artists, such as Brazilian singer Ana Caram.

But his fascination with the classics stayed with him, and several years ago he began writing in a style he refers to as neo-impressionism. His tone poem The Agnostic indicated his surprising mastery of the tonal nuances of a large orchestra. Since then he has recorded Three Psalms for String Orchestra, and concertos for flute and for violin, among others. As his classical career has developed, he has demonstrated that he is no mere dilettante. He is a master of tonal color and atmospherics, and there is nothing haphazard about the way he weaves together the different orchestral sections.

The word “impressionism” calls up images of the pastoral landscapes of Debussy or Ralph Vaughan-Williams, but that isn’t exactly what Chesky is up to. He lives in New York City, and his environment is more Manhattan than the virgin countryside. Hence the name of this album.

There are three concertos recorded here, one for piano, one for bassoon, and one labeled a Concerto for Orchestra, a title borrowed from Bartók.

It is difficult for a reviewer to review this music in a vacuum. Readers will ask, quite understandably, whose music does this sound like? Well, no one’s really, though of course some comparisons are inevitable.

The piano concerto (with soloist Love Derwinger, not the composer himself) at times called up images of Bartók, and especially his masterpiece, the Miraculous Mandarin. Chesky is able to evoke the chaos of big city life, though without the music itself being chaotic. The piano dashes hither and yon, though without ever seeming lost (it made me think of another possible influence, Gershwin’s An American in Paris). Each section of the orchestra seems to exist independently, as city dwellers do, yet picking up each other’s themes, and now and again coming together more coherently. In the midst of the first movement Tin Pan Alley is evoked with a quotation from How High the Moon.
The second movement evokes the nighttime, with lonely piano chords and a bittersweet theme against a background of strings, woodwinds and percussion. There is a delightful section for piano and pizzicato strings that becomes a fugue. The third movement begins softly then builds up to a frenzy, with percussion and even hand claps, finally ending as softly as it had begun. It could make one think of Berstein if one is still searching for references.

The bassoon concerto, with Martin Kuuskmann as the soloist, is the most jazzlike of the three works, with extended melodies for the bassoon that exploit its considerable range. The bassoon is thrilling to listen to for anyone taken with tonal color. In this concerto it goes very far down into its range, with delicious (and humorous) results, but it also swoops up further than we usually hear it, taking on a tone that evokes the saxophone. There is a particularly extended solo in the second movement, and a playful, almost frenzied interplay in the final movement.

The **Concerto for Orchestra** opens with a consciously minimalist atonal section, which ends with a crescendo from the full orchestra, never to return. From there on it is rhythm that dominates the piece rather than melody. “We are a nation of rhythms,” says Chesky in the (unfortunately sparse) booklet notes. The different sections of the orchestra take turns being the “soloist,” but all of the sections are permeated by the often syncopated rhythms of jazz, Latin American music, and world beat. “I play African drums on the weekends in Central Park,” says Chesky. You can enjoy spotting the influences, and even some quotations from much earlier music. I shall say no more.

The Swedish orchestra, conducted by Rossen Gergov, is uniformly excellent, and clearly understands what must be, for these musicians, very foreign music. The sound on this SACD is sober, without in-your-face flashiness, by which I mean that it is natural. I recommend it warmly.

**Nojima Plays Ravel**

Minoru Nojima

*Reference Recordings* RR-35CD

**Lessard:** Many people know Maurice Ravel primarily for his *Boléro*, a work he himself never took very seriously. This archetype of Spanish-style music continues to conquer all who hear it for the first time, which would come as a surprise to him were he still among us.

What do we know of the Ravel legend? Was he an Impressionist? Did he copy Debussy? Is his music tinged with neo-classicism, or is it an extension of Lisztian virtuosity? Did he have a secret? Was he in love? There is a thick blanket of mystery about him.

We do know that he put on a mask of coldness to hide his great sensitivity. We know he had an innate aesthetic sense and a characteristic notion of rhythm. We know his standard of perfection was high. And we know that his contribution to piano music was immense, not so much by the abundance of his work, but by his absolutely personal style.

What first captivates the listener is the feeling of weightlessness, a limpidity, like a flow without great passion, resting the senses. His writing — tonal, evocative, cleverly dissonant, with sometimes unbridled rhythm — is in his image: elegant and refined, but cold, some say. Don’t be fooled. Listen for a bit, and you will be surprised to discover a sensuality and a scent of tenderness delicately distilled throughout his music.

If it is true that Ravel was himself but a mediocre pianist, we can but be astonished that he was responsible for some of the most pianistic music ever composed. It offers numerous challenges to the performer: an avalanche of repeated notes, bursts of arpeggios for the left hand as well as the right, deviations, passages with irregular double notes, glissandi...all requiring a touch that is alert, nuanced and very precise, requiring a piano that is also technically perfect. Notwithstanding these challenges, or perhaps because of them, pianists love to add numerous works by Ravel to their repertoire.

It should be noted that Ravel’s success continues to be among those continuing to pull in the greatest amounts in royalties (in part, no doubt, because of the *Boléro*).

There are two parts to the music included on this album: *Miroirs*, written in 1904 to 1905, all dedicated to his companions in the Apaches group, and *Gaspard de la Nuit* from 1908.

On the first track is the *Noctuelles*. The title refers to night moths, as free as the fingers that move graciously across the keyboard, which flit chaotically before finally sticking somewhere.

Then follows *Oiseaux tristes*. A crystalline bell is heard, followed by octaves, arpeggios, cascades and airy sounds, evoking birds seeking cool shelter in a dark forest in the hottest part of the day.
Next, *Une barque sur l’océan*. The dancing of a skiff on the sea, the ceaseless movement of the waves, and their lapping at the shore. There is a tremolo in the right hand, while the left hand delivers formidable arpeggios. It all ends in boisterous cascades of notes.

On the fourth track is the *Alboarada del gracioso*, one of the best-known of Ravel’s pieces. In the story behind the piece, one of the characters plays a dawn serenade, which is derided with the adjective “gracioso” because he expends so much effort to do it correctly that in the end he looks like a clown. Opening with evocative pulsating rhythms, the music is the essence of Spain. It was perhaps influenced by the songs of Ravel’s mother, who was Basque and who had spent several years in the Iberian peninsula.

Next follows *La vallée des cloches*, but no one can agree as to where this valley might be found. In France, or perhaps in Switzerland? Ravel evokes the sound of different bells with variations in resonance. At first the bells are small and high-pitched, followed by counterpoints and subtle melodies. It should be said that Ravel adored bells, and used them in other compositions too.

*Gaspard de la nuit* is a triptych for solo piano. Based on three poems by Aloysius Betrand, the originator of prose poetry, it is from 1909. It demands considerable artistic prowess from the pianist.

The overture, *Ondine*, evokes a water spirit who seeks to attract passersby to her castle situated at the bottom of a lake, in a triangle formed by the three classical elements of air, fire and earth. The listener is captivated by the babbling of a brook, braided with shimmering cascades, and sparkling double notes played with regularity, maintained with prodigious technique to the end.

In *Le gibet* (the gallows), a repeating B Flat octave evokes the death knell for a man hanged at the outskirts of the town and reddening in the light of the setting sun. Despite its apparent technical ease, it contains snare that only a musician who is patient and in perfect control can overcome.

The triptych closes with *Scarbo*, the name of a little monster that is half goblin half phantom, who turns pirouettes, disappears and reappears, frightening the inhabitant of the house. For the pianist, this is the toughest challenge yet.

I appreciate the generosity of Reference Recordings, which always includes precious information in its booklets, in this case Betrand’s poems. I encourage you to read them. They are moving and magnificent, and look at the music they inspired!

This is of course a re-release of Nojima’s excellent 1989 recording, but this time remastered from the original analog tape in HDCD. I can say only good things about the sound. It is impeccable, with a stable image, and all it takes to please the most demanding audiophile.

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**Evolution**

Graham & US Air Force Band

*Klavier* K11161

**Rejskind:** The last time I ran across Lowell Graham, he handed me a collection of CDs of the US Air Force Band, and they were a delight. However I didn't review them because, although they must have cost a pretty penny to record, they could not be sold. The USAF is a non-profit organization, and the Pentagon would have frowned on its personnel in uniform joining the musicians’ union!

Fortunately Colonel Graham, a brilliant wind band conductor, got to make recordings of numerous civilian bands, mostly for Klavier and Wilson Audio (Center Stage, notably). Now one of his USAF recordings has made it into the wild.

I was eager to hear what he had done with a pair of suites by Gustav Holst (of *The Planets* fame), because the same suites are found on Reference Recordings RR-39, and we often use the *Suite No. 2 in F* in some equipment reviews. Holst is said to have written the suites as simply as possible, on the assumption that military boot camps didn’t cover the fine points of instrumental playing. I don't know about that. I hear no sign that either suite was “dumbed down” to compensate for second-rate musicians. Indeed, neither Colonel Graham’s ensemble nor the Dallas Wind Symphony (under Howard Dunn on RR-39) shows any sign of not being up to pretty much any challenge.

There are considerable differences. The USAF ensemble is probably smaller and makes the suites seem more military, as they were intended to be. Graham argues that a piece written to be a march should be *played* like a march. The Dallas Wind Symphony gives the suites a more flamboyant and dramatic reading.

The Reference disc is also a lot more dynamic, though I have to add that I am used to hearing the LP.

Also on the album are Vaclav Nelhybel’s brash *Symphonic Movements*, which explores the exciting tonal textures of the wind band. It is a delight. Other music by Peter Mennin, Howard Hanson and Walter Mays complete the album.

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**Dvorak Violin Concerto**

Peinemann/Maag & Czech Philh. *HDTT* unnumbered

**Lessard:** This is a re-release of a Deutsche Grammophon recording, remastered not from the original, but from a commercial four-track tape of the time.

Like so many music works this
concerto has a story behind it. Antonin Dvorak composed a first version in 1879. The great violinist Joseph Joachim, whom Brahms had introduced to him, made several suggestions for revising the orchestration. I should add that a number of violin concertos were influenced by and dedicated to Joachim, and that includes this one.

It is difficult to understand why the concerto got such a cool reception at its premiere, and indeed Joachim never did play it. Perhaps it was because Dvorak had refused to eliminate the transition between the first and second movements, which are played without a pause. Or perhaps Joachim was put off by the somewhat unconventional style. Whatever the reason, generations of violinists and music lovers have since disagreed. Incidentally, the transition that Dvorak refused to abandon is gorgeous.

The concerto is impregnated with the Bohemian spirit of Dvorak’s native land, and it offers the violin a fine occasion to shine. Edith Peinemann seized the occasion. Born in Germany in 1937, she was very young when she made this recording, but she shows a surprising maturity. Her velvety tone, the suppleness of her bowing, her brio and her expressiveness are among the undeniable qualities that made her famous on several continents.

As melodic as one could wish, filled with poetry, the opening Allegro ma non troppo is sprinkled with lyrical flashes of Bohemian inspiration, and proceeds without pause into an Adagio that is no less lyrical. The final Allegro gracioso, which is twice as long as the first two movements together, include a traditional Czech dumka, which Dvorak had often used in his famous Slavonic Dances. Its counter-rhythms and its constant harmonic surprises make it irresistible.

This recording (a high-resolution DVD, playable only on DVD players), with Peter Maag on the podium of the Czech Philharmonic, sounds very pleasant. It doesn’t really sound as good as the original LP (DGG 139 120) which I compared it to. That LP is today a collector’s item, however, and if you can’t find one this is the next best thing. The Slavic spirit that will invade your soul, and its melodies will resonate long after you have shut off your player.

Favorite Chinese Instrumentals
Jin Ying Soloists
First Impressions Music FIM019VD

Rejskind: It goes without saying that this music, performed on traditional Chinese instruments, is an acquired taste. This is not Chinese classical music, however, and the Western influence is evident. Even the instruments are not all that exotic, and at times I easily imagined I was hearing a flute, a classical guitar or a violin.

The melodies themselves are identifiably Chinese in the way that an instrument will sometimes warble about a note, or in the way that a melody will develop, returning to precisely its opening phrase, whereas a Western composer would have introduced a variation. Even the percussion is not as unfamiliar as you might expect. Happy Reunion, adapted from an operatic intermezzo, has an extended solo for what sounds like all the world like a vibraphone. After a first listen you find yourself in surprisingly familiar territory.

I have my favorites. Love Song of the Grassland is a heartbreakingly nostalgic arrangement for what sounds like a flute, from a folk song of northwest China. Ducks Quacking, also from a folk song, is a joyous percussion number. The Fishing Song is a tender barcarolle for what could be guitar and bassoon. And Autumn Moon Over the Han Palace alternates between full-sized orchestra and a very Chinese nostalgic melody.

The sound is very good on this, a “Black Vinyl CD,” made to look like a 45 rpm record that has shrunk in the wash. It is, however mislabeled. The booklet bears the HDCD mark, but there is no HDCD code.

Personal Favorites
Fred Hersch
Chesky SACD324

Rejskind: Fred Hersch is not only an accomplished jazz pianist, who has garnered enthusiastic praise for years, but he is also a noted jazz composer. On this album he mostly plays the music of others, which he has arranged, along with bass, drums, tenor sax and cello. These are, as the title indicates, personal favorites, including pop music standards (Secret Love, I Fall in Love Too Easily), jazz compositions (Thelonious Monk’s Played Twice and Wayne Shorter’s Iris), and just one of his own, Nostalga.

Something has gone dreadfully wrong with this album. Hersch’s arrangements, which feature a good deal of syncopated rhythm, could be interesting, but his drummer, which out of compassion I shall not name, is so frequently off the beat that he induces confusion or even seasickness. The bassist, who does not deserve to be named either, is dreadful.

The sound is a puzzlement as well. It is so distant and reverberant that I assumed it had to be a live recording, and I was surprised when there was no applause at the end (I know what you’re thinking, but try to be nice). Hersch plays a Steinway, but it doesn’t sound anything like that legendary instrument, or indeed much like an acoustic piano. When the bassist sets out on an ill-adviced solo, the sound of his instruments seemed to have been cut off at the knees.

Not for me.
For the first years of its existence, Mutine Inc. was little more than a room in the home of founder Pascal Ravach. After several iterations, it now has real headquarters, which can better be called a factory. From an importer of various (mostly) French hi-fi brands, Mutine has become an actual manufacturer.

Not that Pascal is anything like a newcomer to hi-fi. After his studies in humanities and sciences, not to mention classical piano, he built his first loudspeaker (“competitive”) and an amplifier (“best forgotten”). In 1975 he became an advisor in an actual hi-fi store in Switzerland, and that led to acquaintance with several names in that domain, such as Philippe Zumbrun, then distributor of ESS and McIntosh, and a pupil of legendary sound engineer André Charlin. It was Philippe who gave Pascal the definitive demo: a two-microphone (Neumann DM89) recording using a method of his invention, later known as the “Jecklin disc” method, made on a Nagra IVs, played through a Mac amp and ESS speakers. That experience launched Pascal on his lifelong career.

In 1981 he became an independent consultant, meeting such notables as Yves-Bernard André (who was with Vecteur, but would later found YBA) and Pierre Lurné (who would later found Audiomeca), as well as psycho-acoustician Didier Loth. The group developed such refinements as coax cables dedicated to audio, AC line filters, and spikes for speakers and other gear. Pascal claims it was he who told Linn’s Ivor Tiefenbrun about the spikes, and got laughed at for his pains, though Linn would eventually add spikes to all its speakers.

(Pascal also describes riding with Tiefenbrun in a souped-up Peugeot 205, and with his eternal rival Naim’s Julian Vereker in his equally souped-up Jaguar. “With either one you needed strong nerves,” he says.)

In 1984 Pascal set up his own store, Présence Audio, in Lausanne. One day, Nagra’s Stefan Kudelski dropped by with a prototype of a new machine that could play a revolutionary digital disc with a laser. After a comparison with a Vecteur turntable, Kudelski was so shaken he cancelled the launch (which finally occurred…in 2007).

Pascal talks about Oskar Heil, designer of the evolutionary speakers bearing his name, a modest man with a marked resemblance to Charlie Chaplin, who would tap on anything at hand to listen to its resonance, from an elevator door to his receptionist’s head! Pascal then owned two pairs of his Transar 1 speakers. An invitation for Pascal to join him in his research led nowhere unfortunately. And when sound engineer André Charlin died, Pascal transcribed six of his LPs from his Vecteur table onto a Nagra T, and Philippe Zumbrun then edited the tape (to eliminate clicks and pops) for new LP release.

In 1986 Pascal was ready to leave it all behind and spend time, perhaps a year or more, on a sailboat, but events intervened. Under the name of Lys SA, he became the Swiss distributor of Jean-Marie Reynaud speakers and of Vecteur and CEC. Then came a German division, and the addition of another loudspeaker brand, Equation. Subsequently the Lys group bought Oxford Distribution, and then its manufacturing arm, Oxford Acoustics. By 1990 Lys was active across much of Europe.

It all came to a halt in 1991, when both Pascal and his British partner went through divorces. Pascal returned to his studies (sinology, musicology and linguistics). He couldn’t stay away from audio, however. He discovered Audiomat, and he left for the New World, specifically Montreal, a life-long dream that had led him to use Quebec’s iconic fleur de lys in his company trade name.

Mutine Inc. was set up in 1997, as was Mutine Corp., the US division. The name indicates Pascal’s enduring rebel spirit. His philosophy remains that of his
previous enterprises: uncompromising purism, passion for music rather than products, and a determination to build a retail network that would operate on the same principles. That network would be marked by mutual respect and cooperation rather than maximizing of revenue, on perpetual education, and ultimately on the enrichment of the lives of the final customers.

Not surprisingly, few dealers measured up, and Mutine’s retail network remains small. Despite that, the company itself continued to grow, and became more than just a distributor.

Mutine imports, notably, CEC (belt-driven CD transports, players and electronics), Mimetism (amplifiers and a CD player), Mosquito (speakers) and Actinote (audio cables). However its new larger quarters are allowing it to expand its own manufacturing. Above left, technician Mohamed Ibouchichene is completing the assembly of an Audiomat Réci tal tube amplifier. In the same space Equation speakers will be assembled, including the “holophonic” Equation Gaïa. A US electronics brand, Berning, will soon join them.

The team Pascal had put together is, like the distribution network, compact, composed of just five, including Pascal himself. Above right is the administrative area, with Sylvain Montreuil and Jean-François Gravel seated at their computers. And it goes without saying that if you’re looking for one of Mutine’s hand-picked products, the dealer may be just down the street...or a plane ride away. Be assured that is just the way Pascal Ravach wants it.

Audio powerhouse sold

Harman International

The company that owns even older brands such as B&O and Levinson, Infiniti and more is looking to sell. That’s an all-star lineup, even if some purists prefer the stars burn brighter than others. That’s an all-star lineup, even if some purists prefer the stars burn brighter than others.

The buyer? Covid-19 will soon join them. Another is Terra Firma, a company, not one in the music business at all. That company is Terra Firma, an equity firm that picked up EMI for... dare we say a song? Okay, it was for £3.2 billion, a lot more spare cash than we have on hand, though possibly less than it was once worth.

Should we be waiting for the other sectors intended to confuse ripping software. Trouble is, they also confuse computers you may want to watch the film on, not to mention some actual DVD players.

Sony initially admonished the makers of those players to be more careful about following standards...until it was revealed that some Sony players were among the offending models.
So here's another promise for a free exchange: call Sony at (800)860-2878. Your call is important to us…

Where now for the T.H.E.Show?

That, you'll recall, is the rebel high end show that has been a thorn in the side of CES, among others, siphoning off business. CES was especially irritated by the fact that, in recent years, it set up shop at the St. Tropez hotel, right next door to Alexis Park, where CES’s own high end exhibits were hanging out.

Last year the CES high end show moved to the Venetian, right on the Las Vegas Strip, leaving T.H.E.Show all by its lonesome. What next? Would T.H.E.Show need to find room on the Strip too? No, in fact. Next January it will be at the St. Tropez and at Alexis Park. It says it needs the room.

KEF wireless speakers

You can buy wireless speakers from almost anyone but dollar stores, and they all sort of work. Put a signal in, and out the remote speaker comes a sound that is almost, but not completely, unlike that signal.

Can KEF do better? The company has announced a standalone wireless kit, which can be used with any powered speakers, for C$700.

KEF seems to be aware how horrible most wireless speakers sound, and it has developed a “leading edge 2.4 GHz wireless transmission technology that uses the most advanced error-protection and sophisticated adaptive frequency-hopping to ensure an interference-free signal.”

Wait a minute…2.4 GHz? Is that the same band your cordless phones work on, not to mention your home Wi-Fi network? Isn't it the same band that gets saturated when you touch a button on your microwave oven?

KEF says that “CD-quality audio won't be affected by microwave ovens, cordless phones, or (Wi-Fi) routers,” apparently because of the system’s frequency-hopping talent. No word on interference the other way: the KEF box taking out your phones and computer network.

The UHF Reference Systems

Equipment reviews are done on at least one of UHF’s reference systems, selected as working tools. They are changed infrequently.

The Alpha system

Our original reference is in a room with special acoustics, originally a recording studio letting us hear what we can’t hear elsewhere.

Main digital player: Linn Unidisk 1.1
Additional CD player: CEC TL-51X belt-driven transport, Counterpoint DA-10A converter with HDCD card.
Digital cable: Atlas Opus 1.5m
Digital portable: Apple iPod 60 Gb
Turntable: Audiomeca J-1
Tone arm: Audiomeca SL-5
Pickup: Goldring Excel
Phono preamp: Audiomat Phono-1.5
Preamplifier: Copland CTA-305
Power amplifier: Simaudio Moon W-5LE
Loudspeakers: Reference 3a Suprema II
Interconnects: Pierre Gabriel ML-1, Atlas Voyager All-Cu
Loudspeaker cables: Pierre Gabriel ML-1 for most of the range, Wireworld Polaris for the twin subwoofers
Power cords: BIS Audio Maestro, Wireworld
AC filters: GutWire MaxCon Squared, Foundation Research LC-1
Acoustics: Gersman Acoustic Art panels

The Kappa system

This is our home theatre system. As with the original Alpha system, we had limited space, and that pretty much ruled out huge projectors and two-metre screens. We did, however, finally come up with a system whose performance gladdens both eye and ear, with the needed resolution for reviews.

HDTV monitor: Hitachi 43UXW10B CRT-based rear projector
DVD player: Simaudio Moon Stellar with Faroudja Stingray video processor
Preamplifier/processor: Simaudio Moon Attraction, 5.1 channel version
Power amplifiers: Simaudio Moon W-3 (main speakers), bridged Celeste 4070se (centre speaker), Robertson 4010 (rear)
Main speakers: Energy Reference Connoisseur
Centre speaker: Thiel MCS1, on UHF’s own TV-top platform
Rear speakers: Elipson 1400
Subwoofer: 3a Design Acoustics
Cables: Van den Hul, MIT, GutWire, Wireworld
Line filter: GutWire MaxCon Squared

All three systems have dedicated power lines, with Hubbell hospital grade outlets. Extensions and power bars are equipped with hospital-grade connectors.
By now you’re probably aware that 2007 is our Silver Jubilee, which is to say *UHF* was born a quarter of a century ago. Is 25 years a long time in high end audio? It sure is, and a lot of companies of 1982 didn’t live to see that particular birthday. Some, on the other hand, have lived even longer than we have, and are still going strong.

Like 30 years!

Among the companies celebrating a 30th anniversary is Thiel Audio. Unlike some companies that age, which have been sold and become mere name plates in global conglomerates, Thiel is still in the hands of its two founders, namely designer Jim Thiel and company president Kathy Gornik (they’re still right with the new CS 3.7 speaker).

Thiel began in a garage, like some technology companies. The original Model 01 speaker, shown below, is nothing like his present day creation (but it was more unusual than it looks – note the little active crossover box).

By 1978 Jim Thiel had built the Model 03, with a slanted front that would characterize his later work. He continues to look for solutions in unusual places. His CS 3.7 speaker uses aluminum for all of the cones and membranes, and even for the black dome atop the enclosure. As in other recent models, the drivers have shallow voice coils moving through very deep magnetic fields, the exact opposite of the usual practice. Jim Thiel is no advocate of just sticking drivers into a box.

Harbeth’s philosophy was and is light years from that of Jim Thiel. The founder, then newly retired from the BBC, was Dudley Harwood (the company is named for himself and his wife Beth). He later sold it to Alan Shaw, who has kept the philosophy the same. No massive cross-braced boxes for Harbeth. On the contrary, the cabinet sections are thin-walled and "tuned," sort of the way a violin maker would create an instrument.

That, by the way, was the way the BBC wanted its monitors.

Another famous name from exactly 30 years ago is Vandersteen. Surprisingly enough Richard Vandersteen doesn’t trumpet his longevity on his Web site, but he has certainly been around. The anniversary is marked by a special version of the famous IICE speaker, the Signature II. It doesn’t look wildly different from the model II we’ve known all this time, but then that’s perhaps a good thing.

Conrad-Johnson is also 30 years old this year. William Conrad and Lew Johnson were professional engineers, but that gave them an edge in figuring out how to launch a business. The first c-j was the PV1 preamplifier, launched in 1977. The CA200 has no active preamp section. Evolution Audio Video (the Canadian distributor of such brands as Monster and Definitive Technology), sporting a "30 year" banner below his show badge. Yes, it was his thirtieth CES.

Happy birthday to each and every one, from a magazine that is a "mere" 25 years old!

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The amplifier puts out “nearly” 200 watts per channel into 8 ohms. C-j avoids the term “integrated amplifier,” because the CA200 has no active preamp section. It has no system loop feedback, either.

Spotted at CES: Saxe Brickenden of Evolution Audio Video (the Canadian distributor of such brands as Monster and Definitive Technology), sporting a “30 year” banner below his show badge. Yes, it was his thirtieth CES.
News From the Front

Are you among the early adopters who ordered an Apple TV? And are you pleased?

We’ve had a look, and we suggest waiting for version 2.0, or possibly 3.0, if there ever is one.

The Apple TV is not, of course, a TV at all, but a small box that connects to your HDTV by (not included) cables and to your computer wirelessly. It can copy over and play movies, music and even photos. Of course it comes with a remote control.

It is emphatically not for anyone who cares about quality, and that is not what we expect from Apple. Don’t count on viewing high-definition video, or even DVD-grade movies, because there’s far too much compression for that. Don’t count on 5.1 channel sound, except for the just-pretend Dolby Surround version.

In its first incarnation, then, the Apple TV is all about convenience, not quality. The **TV** in its name is closer to **TV dinner** than to **HDTV**.

Speaking of Apple...

Notwithstanding the sharp drop in year-after-year CD sales, it is in CD form that most music is still sold. Paid electronic downloads, dominated by Apple’s iTunes store, have captured just 6% of the market.

Might that be about to rise sharply? Last Winter Apple’s Steve Jobs wrote an open letter to the Big Four record companies, telling them that consumers hated the Digital Rights Management (anti-copying measures) attached to the downloads, and that it was all pointless because CDs come without DRM. If the companies would let him strip off the DRM, he said, iTunes would embrace DRM-free music “in a heartbeat.”

And so it came to pass. On April 1st, Apple and EMI reached a deal to distribute premium versions of EMI music (Angel, Capitol, etc.) with double the usual bit rate, and **without DRM**. True, the songs would cost 30% more, though full albums would remain at the old $9.99 price.

Some news outlets billed that as exciting news for “audiophiles.” Really? As audiophiles, we can’t get too excited about paying money for music with lossy compression. True, AAC at 256 kilobits per second is bound to sound better than AAC at 128 kbps, the iTunes store’s usual bit rate. A CD, however, has a data rate of some 1400 kbps. Use reversible Apple Lossless or FLAC compression, and you’re still at 700 kbps.

And let’s see now, the bit rate for an LP would be...

More bad news from Circuit City

This US electronics chain is a competitor of Best Buy, and it also owns the Canadian chain The Source by Circuit City (the stores once known as Radio Shack). Though Circuit City appeared to be doing better than Radio Shack (whose sad saga we have covered in these pages), it too has now fallen on hard times.

And so have its salespeople...sorry, its “associates.” Circuit City has fired (“separated” in corpspeak) 3400 of them, specifically the ones with the most experience, the ones most likely to be able to help customers. They are, need we add, the ones with the highest salaries. They will be replaced by new “associates,” who, we presume, will be paid what McDo pays to flip burgers. The fired staff can apply for those jobs, but only after 10 weeks, and of course they too will get bottom pay. In *The New York Times*, Donald Carr called that “domestic outsourcing.”

The About Circuit City page on the company’s Web site still includes the proud phrase shown above. Our guess is that the person in charge of keeping that part of the site up to date was among those “separated.”

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Gossip & News

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If it ain’t broken, don’t fix it. Every proverb, however, has a counter-proverb. In this case it’s: If it ain’t broke, break it.

Perhaps that’s the thought behind class T amplification.

Class T? The letter stands for the company that popularized it, Tripath Technology, whose amplifier circuitry is widely used. Your computer almost certainly uses something like class T, as does the stereo in your car, and your subwoofer does too. More recently, however, a number of high end audio manufacturers have been dumping class AB and even class A operation in favor of class T. Why is this? Was conventional amplification somehow “broken?”

Regular readers are probably familiar with other “classes” of amplifiers, but a quick summary may be in order. Most utility amplifiers operate in the highly efficient class B, in which each transistor or tube conducts current during half a wave. Only one hi-fi company (McIntosh) actually uses class B. Most hi-fi amplifiers operate in class AB, in which devices conduct current more than half the time but not all the time. And in class A each device conducts all the time. That’s not very efficient, but a class A amplifier can be very linear. It definitely ain’t broke.

What about the other letters of the alphabet? Class C amplifiers do exist, though they are most suitable for reproducing Morse code. And then there’s class D.

The “D” is sometimes assumed to mean “digital,” though in fact there were class D amplifiers around back when “digital” had to do with fingers (the alphabet runs all the way out to class H). The typical class D amplifier produces pulses, with the input audio signal modulating the width of the pulses rather than the amplitude of the output signal. Harmonic distortion is extremely high, but since the pulses are generated at a frequency far above the audible band, the harmonics can simply be filtered out.

The result is a very “green” amplifier, with perhaps 90% efficiency.

Although some supposedly hi-fi class D amps were marketed some decades back they never caught on, perhaps because if it ain’t broke… However as this ultra-efficient amplification found its way into subwoofers and consumer products, it caught the interest of many a designer looking for something new and different. What’s more, at least two companies began making class D circuits aimed at audiophiles. One is Tripath Technology, which says it reinvented the principle, thereby justifying the class T designation. The other is Bang&Olufsen, which developed what it calls the IcePower module. Several manufacturers who have adopted the B&O module are referring to their amplifiers as “class T,” though that seems to be stepping on a Tripath trademark.

There are some obvious advantages to this. As we unscrew our old tungsten bulbs and screw in compact fluorescents, we can’t help being attracted to an amplifier that burns up only a fraction of the electrical energy we’ve been burning until now, throwing off only a fraction of the heat. As electronic gear threatens to take over our living space, making it smaller can only be an advantage. And if the cost can be lowered too…what’s not to like?

That last point, however, doesn’t appear to be working out. I’ve seen amplifiers that contained a couple of B&O modules and a power supply, which nonetheless carried a five-digit price tag. Indeed, whatever price advantage is promised by class T operation doesn’t appear to be percolating to the retail level. Like you perhaps, I’ve found myself wondering whether we weren’t been taken for a ride.

Nor am I alone in suspecting that. Numerous other critics have written about their discomfort faced with the all-too-distinctive sound of class T. The highs in particular — as frequently happens — are anything but natural. There is a hardness, even a steeliness, that can be heard in far too much audio gear, though not in the equipment we love most.

Well, I don’t want to exaggerate that, because I have issues with a lot of things I read elsewhere. And I have heard several class T (and other class D) amplifiers which sounded really quite good, good enough that I could hear “through” them and get some idea of the sound of the source and the loudspeakers. None that I have heard had that “take me home” sound, and at this moment I’m not certain that such a level of quality is attainable. At the same time, the price of some units built around off-the-shelf modules frankly shocks me.

And, oh yes… Tripath Technology is in bankruptcy protection.

But I don’t want to end this column by condemning class T as hopelessly anti-music. It is my job as an audio journalist to approach new technologies with an open mind, and lord knows we’re being crowded by a lot of new technologies. Time will tell whether class D/class T turns out to be (and this is my own proverb) a remedy for which no disease has yet been invented.
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