


HIFI NEWS

MARCH 1993 US \$5.25 £2.20

RECORD & REVIEW



RECORD OF THE MONTH
TILSON THOMAS CONDUCTS DEBUSSY

HIGH-END DSP

THE LEXICON CP-3

BACK TO BASICS
HOW CD PLAYERS WORK

LAS VEGAS
SHOW REPORT

SYSTEM MUTED
BIG TELEVISION



PLUS TESTS ON
ARCAM, MARANTZ,
AUDIO RESEARCH, NAD,
MUSICAL FIDELITY



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HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW

FEATURES

- 26 **LAS VEGAS:** Ken Kessler reports from the 1993 Winter Consumer Electronics Show
- 57 **MEET DR BOSE:** the founder of one of the world's biggest speaker firms talks to Alvin Gold
- 58 **BIT BY BIT:** CD basics. Dave Berriman explains the workings of the digital to analogue converter
- 62 **BUDAPEST/MILAN:** Ken Kessler visits the first-ever Hungarian hi-fi show, and reports from TOP, the Italian high-end show

EQUIPMENT

- 32 **LEXICON CP-3:** the top-of-the-range pre-amplifier/DSP unit is reviewed by Peter J Comeau
- 36 **ARCAM ALPHA PLUS:** CD player tested by Martin Colloms
- 39 **MARANTZ CD52HISE:** after the MkII comes the 'Special Edition'. Ken Kessler listened to it
- 40 **A SWEETER THETA:** Martin Colloms on the Theta DsPro Basic II D/A converters
- 45 **NEW BABY: THE NAD 302:** Alvin Gold reviews NAD's successor to its classic 3020 budget amplifier
- 48 **AUDIO RESEARCH D400:** Martin Colloms tests this big solid-state stereo power amplifier
- 51 **MUSICAL FIDELITY's** The Preamp 8 and MA65 Monoblok power amplifiers reviewed by Steve Harris
- 52 **MARTIN LOGAN CLSIIz:** electrostatic loudspeaker reviewed by Alvin Gold
- 54 **POTPOURRI:** short reviews cover the Denon PMA250 III integrated amplifier, Philips AZ6819 personal 'CD player system', Sony D303 Discman and Sennheiser HD44011 and HD480 stereo headphones

FREE SUPPLEMENT

Make sure that the special full-colour *Home Theatre* supplement has been supplied with your copy of this magazine

MARCH 1993



COVER: Lexicon combines high-end performance to multi-channel home theatre capability, including THX, with the CP-3 pre-amp/processor. Review: page 32. Photography: Tony Petch



Sony D303 Discman, reviewed on page 54



Arcam Alpha Plus CD player: see page 36



A new CD player from Quad: 'News', page 15



Ken Kessler in Budapest with show organiser Istvan Csonotos: see page 62



Las Vegas CES: cable madness and the rest of it, page 26

RECORD REVIEW

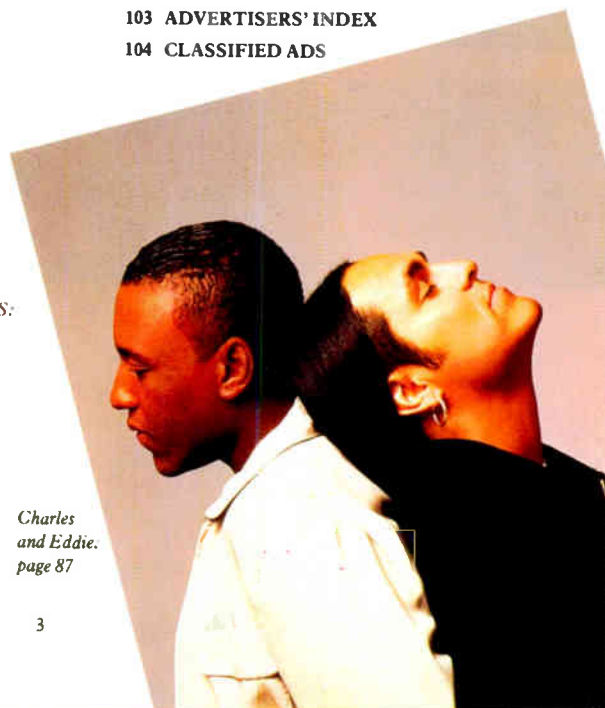


Caron and Tilson Thomas: page 69

- 64 **RECORD REVIEW INDEX**
- 65 **MUSIC NEWS** Yuri Temirkanov talks to David Nice
- 69 **RECORD OF THE MONTH** Michael Tilson Thomas conducts Debussy
- 69 **CLASSICAL REVIEWS**
- 87 **ROCK/POP/JAZZ**
- 106 **FINALE** Dizzy Gillespie on CD

REGULARS

- 5 **COMMENT** by Steve Harris
- 9 **VIEWS** letters to the Editor
- 15 **NEWS** innovations and events
- 21 **TECHNOLOGY** by Barry Fox
- 23 **RADIO** by Trevor Butler
- 25 **HEADROOM** by Ken Kessler
- 56 **SIDELINES** by John Crabbe
- 95 **BACK ISSUES** order form
- 95 **COMPACT DISC SERVICE**
- 97 **ACCESSORIES CLUB** offers
- 98 **REGIONAL DEALER GUIDE**
- 103 **ADVERTISERS' INDEX**
- 104 **CLASSIFIED ADS**



Charles and Eddie: page 87

The new Audiolab 8000T Tuner



The Audiolab product range:

8000A Integrated amplifier

8000C Pre-amplifier

8000P Stereo power amplifier

8000T FM/AM tuner

8000M Monobloc power amplifier

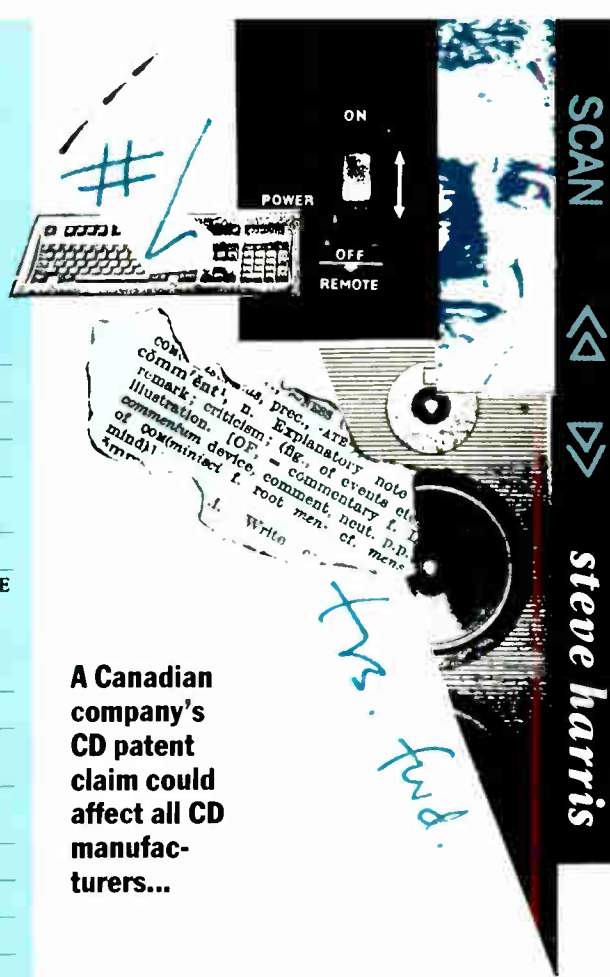
8000DAC digital-analogue convertor

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A Canadian company's CD patent claim could affect all CD manufacturers...

Just a few days after the judgment in the Pavel v Sony case (see 'News') we learned that the trial had been scheduled in the same court in another case with vast implications for the audio industry, this time over a claim relating to a 1976 British patent, which could affect all manufacturers of CD.

The Canadian Optical Recording Corporation is claiming patent rights in all compact discs and players. If successful, millions of pounds in back patent royalties may have to be paid by the manufacturers of CDs and CD players. The prices of discs and players could be forced up as a result. According to a news agency report, a patent expert said, after a recent preliminary hearing in the Court of Appeal: 'The implications of the case are colossal. If it goes against the CD producers it will throw the finances of this side of the record industry into turmoil.'

The joint trial for two separate actions is expected to last at least five weeks. One case is against Hayden Laboratories, subsidiary of Nippon-Columbia, and Conifer Records, the other against Thorn-EMI. The Optical Recording Corporation alleges infringement of its patent in CDs and CD players. A spokesman for London solicitors Stephenson Ha-wood, acting for Hayden and Conifer, said Optical was claiming UK rights to a system of reading and playing digital information which, it was claimed, was used in all CD manufacture.

Similar cases are pending in other

countries, but this hearing will be concerned with alleged infringement of a patent granted in the UK in 1976. The court will be asked to find whether the patent was valid and whether it had been infringed, said the spokesman.

Thorn-EMI said Optical appeared to be claiming that the patent applied to the manufacture of all CDs and players in the country. 'We are contesting the claim and do not think we need a licence,' said a spokesman.

In a preliminary dispute over the number of expert witnesses who should be allowed to be called in the case, the Court of Appeal ruled that the judge who is to hear the matter had been wrong to limit it to one expert for each party.

Lord Justice Steyn and Lord Justice McCowan were told by Mr Andrew Waugh, counsel for Hayden and Conifer: 'The amount at stake in terms of potential damages in the six-year limitation period prior to the issue of the summons on 19 September 1991, and continuing, is vast. The action is thus of considerable importance to the defendants.'

THE HI-FI SHOW: 9-12 SEPTEMBER

Sponsored as always by *HFN/RR*, The Hi-Fi Show this year will be open to the public on Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 September, while trade days are Thursday 9 and Friday 10. Now in its 11th year, The Hi-Fi Show is the only independent national exhibition which caters specifically for the hi-fi industry and the hi-fi enthusiast. Put it in your diary now!

NEXT MONTH: A SPECIAL ISSUE

Inside the April issue, there will be a special 16-page extra devoted to valve equipment, with reviews covering Trilog, Beard, Woodside, Audio Research, Conrad Johnson and many other tube products, plus more on Quad II mods.

But the April cover story is an exclusive review on Quad's very latest product, the Quad 67 CD player (see 'News', this month). Other equipment reviewed in April includes the Naim NAC82/NAP180 amplifier combination, Philips' digital loudspeaker and the long-awaited Marantz 'special edition' DCC recorder.

There will be a packed music section with reviews, classical music news and even a look back at 20 years of Bruce Springsteen. The April issue goes on sale on Friday, 12 March. ↵

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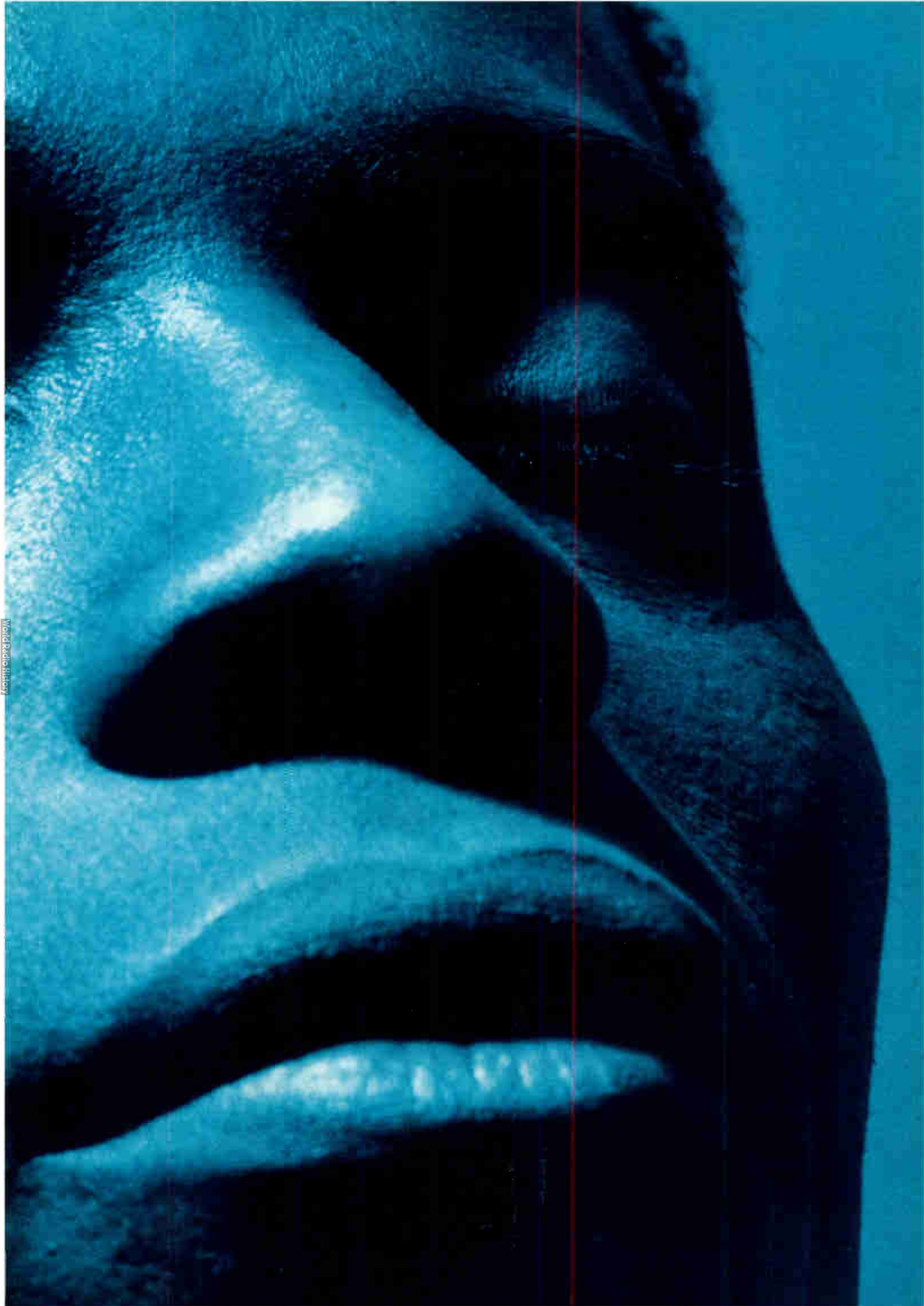


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World Radio History

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ANGELS

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Krell pioneered balanced line working for audiophiles—a technique long used in the pro music industry. Balanced operation gives more gain with less noise for better dynamics and more detail. There is also a decrease in system noise with improved stray field rejection; music from a balanced system is more alive. Enter the Krell **KRC** Remote Controlled Preamplifier—uncompromised audiophile sound with simplicity of operation. Digital logic circuits operate gold-contact relays for positive switching with absolute signal integrity. Power supply and gain stages are refinements of classic Krell Class A complimentary circuits for new levels of transparency and resolution. The **KRC-2**, a stripped version of the **KRC**, will shortly be available.

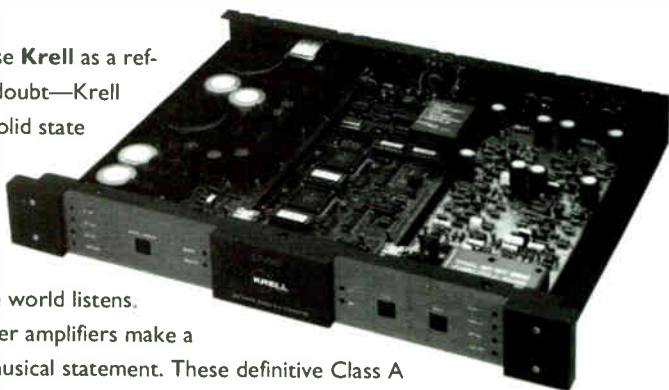
Krell's other company—**Krell Digital**—produces today's source components for Krell electronics. Front and top-loading reference quality CD transports match the all-new 18-bit x32 oversampling **Studio** converter.



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so-called... in your...
produc... from o...



PEBBLES FOR ROCK MUSIC?

Dear Sir, Your journal tells us about equipment spikes, cones and seismic sinks; and the shops try to sell them. However, for my system (Micromega F1 digital, Radford DAC, Naim 01, 32.5/70, 135s, Linn Isobariks), there are six feet for my CD turntable and DAC; 24 feet for the Naim boxes; and eight feet for the Linn Isobariks: 38 feet in all.

Micromega's literature recommends a granite slab to go under its CD player because 'the nature of the support placed under a CD player fundamentally affects its replay'. Enquiries at my local granite supplier indicate that a 1000mm x 500mm slab would cost about £100. My units would need three slabs, and I wondered if I should order my family gravestones early and put them to good use in the interim.

But, being too doubtful about any benefits to launch into that idea, I collected some flat pebbles and put them under the system units one by one; success followed success until every unit now stands on pebbles. The sound has been transformed for radio and CD; it is now as wonderful as the designers must have intended it to be. The difference is so fundamental I wonder if your equipment reviews are carried out on 'standard feet' or 'standard supports', or could some of the variable results you report be accounted for through this effect?
Robert Mills, Devon

HEARING NOT DIGITAL

Dear Sir, In his otherwise-excellent article about data compression (actually data *reduction*, but never mind), Peter Comeau states that human hearing is digital. Like most people, he thinks that data-transmission systems using pulses (pulse-frequency modulation in the case of the ear), are *ipso facto* digital. Nope.

When it comes to digital, 'We don't need no steenking pulses'. It's the *quantization of data* that determines whether a system is digital. (Emitter-coupled logic is digital, but uses sine waves.) There is no quantization in the inner ear; human hearing is wholly analogue.
William Sommerwerck, Bellevue, Washington, USA

HANDS-OFF APPROACH

Dear Sir, Quoting from p52 of *HFN/RR* January, I note that the Velleman constructional manual is '... actually written in Belgish.'

As anybody in Europe should know, the Belgians are divided into French, Flemish (Dutch) and German-speaking tribes and this has proved enough so far to keep us busy both with educational and political problems.

So please, keep your hands off this topic and don't introduce a fourth idiom in this complicated patchwork!

But go on publishing constructional articles, either from scrap or in kit form. Many are we who still own a soldering iron and are eager to employ it.

Gerard Capelle, Belgium

RMcd was referring to a variant of Francais, of course - Ed.

FLASH OF INSPIRATION

Dear Sir, A little happening that I thought might interest *HFN/RR* readers.

A friend, also living in south-west France, rang recently to ask if I had any idea why half of his cassette recordings had become unplayable, whilst his better, commercial recordings were more or less all right.

I remembered his house had been struck by lightning during the summer. It was a really hefty discharge that not only wrecked all electrical equipment, blowing fusebox, switches and water heater off the wall, but also blowing 30 yards of water pipe out of the ground outside. Fortunately they'd been out at the time!

I suggested that the undamaged (?) tapes were probably chromiums and their higher coercivity saved them from being wiped by the electromagnetic pulse. He confirmed this and said that whilst the music was

views

okay, they now all had pre-echo! To finish, I was able to reassure him that the damaged tapes were reusable - just treat them as though they were new, virgin tapes.

I met him yesterday and he said he'd already successfully put a dozen of his old black discs on to these cassettes.

Ralph West, Villereal, France

BENEFITS OF BUYING BRITISH

Dear Sir, Over the past decade I have purchased and enjoyed a wide range of high-end equipment, including items by Krell, Audio Research and Rowland. Recently I have been struck by the manner in which some small manufacturers in Britain have been able to produce equipment which competes with such internationally famous names, both in sound quality and build. Martin Colloms has praised the new range of Chord amplifiers but I wonder how many readers have had the opportunity to hear just how remarkable these units are? Certainly I regard my Chord 1200 as superior to the Krell 150 I used to own.

I would also mention the Ultra Analogue DAC produced by Audio Synthesis and the phono stages of LFD down in Clacton. What each of these items has in common is world-class performance at about half the price of comparable imports.

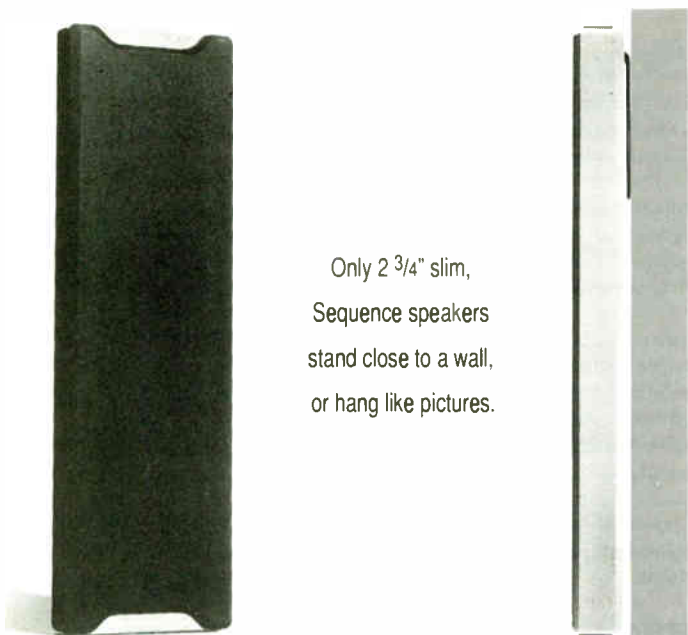
For the first time I feel able to buy British equipment which concedes nothing, except cost, to the best of the foreign brands. Long may this trend continue.

Peter Skinner, London SE20

HIGH-COST CUTS

Dear Sir, There has been much discussion lately on the subject of CD pricing, the prevailing opinion among buyers appearing to be, perhaps not surprisingly, that discs are over-priced, and the evidence put forward in support of this argument being that the cost of pressing each disc is only about 80p.

Of course, anyone who has any knowledge of the business of producing CD recordings realises that there are considerable costs incurred before one reaches the stage of actually pressing the discs themselves - hire of recording venue and instruments, payment of artists, producers' and engineers' fees, transfers, glass masters, design and artwork of inserts, commissioning of sleeve notes, photographs, translations, and so on - so that it is difficult to produce the minimum quantity of 1000 discs of even solo instrumental music for anything less than £6-8000 let alone orchestral or choral recordings; and this is not even allowing for the advertising and



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promotion of the end product or the staff costs and overheads of those who would make their living from producing it. On top of that it is worth remembering that the money the purchaser parts with in the shop does not all find its way into the pocket of the manufacturer. There is postage and packing, royalty payments, a distributor and retailer each taking their cut and, last but not least, 17½% VAT to be deducted.

However, one thing that continues to baffle me is why a two-disc set almost invariably costs twice as much as a single disc, particularly in cases where a single work of 80-90 minutes 'spills over' onto a second disc but is offered without a filler. In such cases, the recording costs are no greater than for a single disc, nor are most of the other expenses, apart from an additional £300 for another glass master, a few pence extra per copy for a double jewel case and a second insert on the front, a little more for postage and packing and, of course, another 80p for pressing the second disc – a total of maybe £1/set.

How then can a company justify charging £25 or so (in the case of full-price releases) for a double CD of, say, a Mahler symphony when the same symphony conducted by someone else, who happens to prefer it to go a little quicker so that it fits neatly on to a single disc, sells for exactly half the price?

Admittedly, there are a few 'special price' double CDs on the market, but these are very much the exceptions that prove the rule. If there is a case for CDs being overpriced, this is surely it.

K Mildenhall, Ipswich

FOUR ON FM

Dear Sir, Are Radio Four listeners a race apart? Listeners to Radios Two and Three have adapted to the change to FM with the minimum of difficulty. So what's different about the vociferous Radio Four lobby? Are they so complacent and conservative – should that be a capital 'C'? – that they thought it would never happen to them?

Would one of them please tell me whether he – or better 'she' – watches television? What happened when television transmission standard changed from 405 to 625 lines, and the frequencies changed from VHF to UHF? I for one cannot recall any great public outcry. No questions in the House. No lobbying of MPs. No! People went out and bought new sets, and eventually embraced colour television.

I would like to bet that a fair number of those complaining about Radio Four are now secretly enjoying Classic FM on, believe it or not, FM!

That a mathematics teacher, from Winchester of all places, is alleged to be leading this revolt is beyond belief. With the Rowridge transmitter virtually on his doorstep, why is Mr MacKinnon whinging?

Chippenham, where I live, was a notorious VHF blackspot until a low-powered filler for BBC channels was commissioned two years ago. For Classic FM I still have to tune to the Rowridge frequency. If Mr MacKinnon would care to look at a road map of southern England he would appreciate how much further from the transmitter I live than he does; and yet I can get acceptable reception even on the 'ghetto-blasters' in the kitchen.

Dennis Chapman, Chippenham

CONFUSED TURN-ON

Dear Sir, Your reviewer Richard McDonald makes a very common mistake in his review of the Velleman K4000 amplifier [*HFN/RR* January] when he assumes that the least in-rush current is taken by a transformer is lowest when it is switched on at the mains zero-crossing. In fact this is the condition under which the *maximum* in-rush current is taken.

The flux in the core of a transformer is the first integral of the applied voltage. In a perfect transformer, switch-on at zero-crossing results in a peak flux of twice the normal working peak flux: in a real one the core saturates before this flux is reached, the primary inductance drops rapidly and the input current rises dramatically. In conventional transformers the fall of primary inductance (and hence the rise in current) is limited by the leakage inductance and the fact that the core is not normally run particularly close to saturation. In a toroidal transformer there is very little leakage inductance, the better flux distribution in the core means that the normal operating point is set nearer saturation, and the in-rush current can reach very high levels.

Mr McDonald got through several standard fuses before missing the zero-crossing by a sufficient margin!
K C Gale, Electronic Design Manager, Ferranti-Thomson Sonar Systems (UK) Ltd

REFLECTIONS ON THE MANA

Dear Sir, I was delighted to read Martin Colloms's report last July on the use of Mana stands with his high-end system, where he reported an improvement of 15-20% in the overall sound quality. I'm surprised that this confirmation of the importance of proper support from such an authoritative source has not resulted in any comment.

The most immediate question must be how this is going to affect his numerical scoring system, and whether he will in future be testing run-of-the-mill equipment (which has even more to gain from proper isolation) on similar stands, so that their scores retain the proper relationship with the high end.

As to Mana stands with their glass shelves, my own experience with wall-mounted slate shelves is that such reflective materials can add a brightness to the sound – which may be due to standing waves between the shelf and the equipment. I had a Luxman 'Brid' amplifier where sliding different materials, like carpet, into the gap between the feet acted just like a treble control; I found that a ribbed rubber mat (with cut-outs for the feet) placed upside down – so that the air pockets acted as energy absorbers – gave the most neutral sound. The same effect is apparent with much other equipment, particularly CD players. Other people may prefer the extra brightness, but it is a cheap and easy experiment to see which you prefer. I would doubt if any designers (if they thought about it at all) intended their products to be used on glass shelves, or tested them like that.

Some manufacturers, like Sony with their 'Gibraltar' base plate or Pioneer with their honeycomb chassis, have tried one approach to these problems, others (particularly the French) have concentrated on damping and 'earthing' equipment through spikes. (I see that Krell has now joined this movement.) Unfortunately, most manufacturers have ignored resonance problems, though they may occasionally make informal recommendations if you ask. But the customer has a right to expect something approaching the best from his equipment without having to explore various expensive tweaks. When you consider how much Martin has been missing all these years, what hope is there for the average buyer?

On the subject of resonance, I discovered some years ago that damping integrated circuits – from op-amps to D/A converters – with pieces of adhesive Sorbothane sheet brought a surprising improvement in fine detail, especially in areas like stereo focus and hall acoustic. Although I confirmed this by an accidental double-blind experience, it wasn't until several friends made independent tests that I ceased to doubt my ears. (One of them who used headphones for his test established that the resonance was internal and not caused by acoustic feedback.) Fresh confirmation has now come from the TGi group; a

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Salisbury Hi-Fi were voted by you the Southern Region Hi-Fi News Dealer Of The Year and were also awarded the Sony ES National Dealer Of The Year in 1991

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press report on Creek products revealed that their demonstration equipment had its integrated circuits and capacitors damped with Bluetack. Now Tannoy's 605LE speaker has its single crossover capacitor wrapped in their own 'Tan-Tak'. Tweak your own equipment if you dare, but let us hope that TGI will set an example to other manufacturers to do the job themselves.
David Foxon, Oxford

NOISE CANCELLING

Dear Sir, With reference to the letter from PW Tarling on 'LF Tinnitus' [HFN/RR February] and his problem with traffic noise, we do manufacture headphones with active noise compensation 'Noise Gard' for home and mobile use. If Mr Tarling would care to contact me I would be happy to give him full details.
John Willett,
Technical Manager, Sennheiser
(tel: 0628 850811)

THANKS WHERE IT IS DUE

Dear Sir, With retirement coming up next year, I set about up-dating my hi-fi equipment. I already possessed a good pair of electrostatic hybrid loudspeakers and my plan was to keep my existing tuner and tape recorder, drop vinyl, and use all the cash available to obtain the best CD reproduction I could.

I approached several dealers who, although polite, completely lost interest when I mentioned a passive controller (no, an LP input would not work!). With no help from dealers it just left me and the writings of Martin Colloms! I had already taken a fancy to the Meridian 605 amplifier he had reviewed in such glowing terms and, after a home audition, I bought one without hesitation. I was also persuaded at the time to listen to a £1500 pre-amp (not Meridian) but, though transparent, it failed to perform in rhythm and timing as well as the one I was about to replace.

I then remembered that my favourite reviewer had also endorsed the findings of Trevor Butler who had earlier reviewed a passive controller – by Audio Synthesis of Manchester. After reading both reviews again, and receiving heart-warming interest and concise replies to my queries from Audio Synthesis, I obtained one on their 14-day approval plan. I received an up-to-date, beautifully finished piece of equipment now called 'Passion' which performed outstandingly in all respects as per reviews, and complemented the 605s as though it was made for them.

Here my dream began to sag a little, when I found that the transport

in my CD player – although of the required Philips heritage – was pronounced incompatible with the newly reviewed Orelle DA 180 DAC. But HFN/RR and Martin Colloms came to the rescue yet again. I remembered that, when approving the Audio Synthesis passive controller, he had also reviewed the DSM (DAC) and at the time had scored it only just below the Accuphase DP-70V, his current top reference.

Again I received a further up-to-date and beautifully finished DSM ultra-analog DAC from Audio Synthesis. Playing all types of music made up my mind for me: I was absolutely thrilled and only needed three days (I could have had 14) to be sure. I am now better set up than I ever thought possible on my budget. My sincere thanks go to all concerned for guiding me in the right direction and particularly to Audio Synthesis, not only for their good-looking, life-like and musical-sounding equipment, but also to their very real interest. If I had been on both ends of the transaction at the same time I could not have looked after my own interest better.

James Hayes, Seaford, Sussex

NAD 'BRITISH DESIGNED'

Dear Sir, Trevor Butler's comments regarding NAD [HFN/RR February] bordered on the pernicious. In his highly subjective and deeply personal review of four tuners, which included the NAD 4225, Mr Butler finds it necessary to ridicule NAD for claiming what is simply the truth – that NAD products are British designed. All NAD products are researched and designed at the company's Finchley headquarters. From then on they are normally built in the Far East. So the NAD 4225 was not 'conceived' in the Far East, as Mr Butler implies.

NAD is not the remotest bit interested in Mr Butler's ramblings regarding the quality of the 4225. His views are his and he is entitled to hold them. It is somewhat surprising, though, in the light of Mr Butler's caustic comments, to find that NAD has been successfully selling the 4225 tuner in huge quantities to satisfied customers for nearly ten years with the lowest return/failure rate of any product in the range. Mr Butler's insulting remarks regarding the internal construction of the tuner: 'Servicing would be a nightmare' surely become nonsense when one looks at the facts. Servicing the 4225 – not very often required, it must be said – is, contrary to the opinion of Mr Butler, quite simple.

Andy Giles
PR Consultant to NAD

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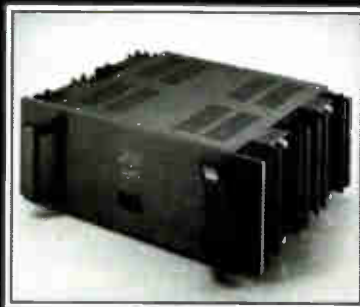
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READERS' LETTERS

We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters for publication, which should be addressed to the Editor and must contain no other material or enquiries. Letters seeking advice will be answered, resources permitting, at our discretion, but we regret that we are unable to answer questions on buying specific items of hi-fi. We cannot answer queries over the telephone.



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Spendor is sold

Mixing console specialist Soundtracs is reported to have paid £300,000 cash for the highly-respected British speaker manufacturer, Spendor Audio Systems. Founded by a BBC engineer, the late Spencer Hughes and his wife Dorothy, in the late 1960s, the company will remain intact following the sale. While Dorothy Hughes has retired as company secretary, son Derek remains, and plans to devote more time to R&D. Spendor made a pre-tax profit of £28,000 last year.

Linn's new lines

Linn Products has announced additions to its range. The Kaim Pro is a simplified version of the Kaim pre-amp and saves £360 by omitting the phono stages. Named after a Scottish dance, the Keilidh is Linn's new £492 floor-standing speaker using the ceramic tweeter from the Kaber and Keltic. Linn, tel 041-644 5111.

Quad replaces its existing CD player model as part of a general reappraisal of its electronics range

QUAD REPLACES PLAYER



One of the country's most famous hi-fi manufacturers has been forced to replace its CD player, introduced just two years ago, after obsolete parts led to a potential maintenance problem. Such is the pace of development in digital technology that only the plastic window from the earlier design remains in the new Quad 67, which will be priced at around £800. The selected chipsets, transport mechanism and even the mother board from the '66 are becoming increasingly hard to source.

Work went back to first principles as an electronics design team of four, overseen by engineering manager Derek Jones, was assisted by two mechanical engineers where computer-aided design played a large role. Mr Jones joined Quad two years ago bringing experience from Plessey and Dowty. His first project was the recent 66 FM tuner and he has now been made technical director.

Jan Ertner from Denmark worked on the CD circuit layout while Andrew Lake concentrated on high-level language custom software, work which also formed part of his MSc course at Hatfield. Designer Sue Hubble was ably assisted by Debbie Rose on the aesthetics and mechanical aspects which were overseen by team leader Rodney Mead.

Although the project was first mooted in December 1991 and approved in February 1992, pressures on the R&D department meant that work didn't start for several weeks. Seven months on, the product reached pre-production status and manufacturing began in January.

The new player uses Philips

sourced components, including the CDM9 engine, to retrieve the signal from the disc. The remainder is Quad designed and built, apart from the Crystal CS4328 D/A converter which was chosen with further products and interfaces in mind.

Quad has continued its simplistic operation approach found on the recent 66 FM tuner. The 67 CD player features just one front panel button for open/close: even this is disguised as it also forms the IR remote window. With a CD in the tray a push will prompt play from track 1, otherwise use should be made of the system remote. Quad has therefore had to supply the 67 with a separate remote to allow it to be used as a stand-alone player. We hope to carry a full technical review next month. In the meantime contact Quad, tel: (0480) 52561.

● Quad took the opportunity to redesign its famous 606 power amplifier when the original pressure die-casting tool wore out after producing more than 25,000 units. The appearance has been altered to match the 66 series, while a thorough design



Quad used the latest computer-aided design and measurement equipment (top right) to develop the 67 CD Player (centre). The design team (bottom) comprised electronic and mechanical engineers, including Sue, Debbie and Jan

review has resulted in a toroidal mains transformer to replace the ageing C-core type, larger reservoir capacitors, plus some changes to the high-pass filter front-end. However, Quad does not feel the changes warranted existing 606s being returned to them for modification.



B&W REWORKS 600 SERIES

Customer feed-back and the availability of new technology have been incorporated in a re-launch of B&W's 600 series of loudspeakers. Originally intended solely for the UK market, the designs soon found favour in export markets world-wide.

Crossovers are hard-wired and bi-wire terminals are offered on the 'new' DM600 (£170) and £220 DM610. The improved floor-standing DM620 (£370) features a

new bass unit with injection-moulded cone/surround assembly. Adjustable carpet-piercing spikes are also fitted here. Full details from B&W UK Sales, tel (0903) 750750.



MORE ACCUPHASE DIGITAL

The latest additions to the Accuphase range of digital products are now available in the UK. Distributor MPI announced the arrival of the DP-90 CD transport at £5099 and the £7499 DC-91 D/A converter-cum-signal processor just before last Christmas.

The transport is supplied with comprehensive digital connections including HPC balanced and ST optical from Hewlett-Packard. An RF amplifier incorporated in the laser pick-up generates large signals to eliminate noise interference in the minute signal path.

The D/A converter relies on a multiple multi-bit system, employing 16 selected 20-bit converters per

channel in parallel configuration. There is also a digital audio interface to transmit signals up to 24 bits, and a provision to automatically lock to one of the three sampling frequencies for CD, DAT, DCC, MD and DSR. An absolute phase switch is provided, operating in the digital domain, for those who feel so inclined. Full details from MPI in Manchester, tel: 061-777 8522.

More from KAR

Having launched the Figaro loudspeaker last year [*'News' March '92*], Keswick Audio Research announces new models. Dean Hartley has produced two-way designs: the £209 compact Aria is intended for bookshelf placement, while the Alto, at £359, is a 900mm-tall floor-standing transmission line. Both are constructed from 18mm MDF throughout, using 160mm mid/bass units and 19mm soft dome tweeters. Details from KAR, tel: (0924) 870606.

PAVEL PATENT 'INVALID'

The Patents County Court has rejected Andreas Pavel's long-running legal battle against Sony over alleged infringement of his personal stereo patent. Had it been successful, he would have received royalties on every Walkman. Following a trial lasting 95 hours, Judge Peter Ford handed down a 63-page written judgment on 13 January. While it concluded that there had been minor infringements, the Court found that the patent itself was invalid and may not be amended, so infringement is only theoretical.

The litigation began in the High Court in 1988 and was transferred to the specially created patents court in 1990, making it one of the longest cases of its kind.

Solicitors Baker & McKenzie said Sony was pleased that Mr Pavel's case had been completely dismissed and that their position had been vindicated, stressing that Sony had maintained throughout that the claim was groundless. At Sony's UK headquarters, communications director Bill Vestey did not wish to crow about the outcome, saying only: 'it is all finally over, we've won'.

Mr Pavel, 47, was at his Milan home when the judgment was issued and told *The Guardian* that he planned to appeal, saying: 'the Walkman came out of the blue and was a big surprise to the industry'. He remained convinced that it was an invention rather than an 'evolution'.

Mr Pavel has 28 days in which to lodge an appeal.

Celestion Leprosy aid

Celestion SL12Si loudspeakers were first prize at a charity ball held on 31 January in aid of World Leprosy Day. Lepra, an international charity dedicated to education about the disease, is based in Chelmsford, 12 miles from Celestion.

AMSTRAD's sales and technical directors sold their company shares minutes before a board meeting, suggesting they have no confidence in the future of the company which reported a loss of £71m last year. Shareholders earlier rejected Alan Sugar's plan to buy all the shares.

AD BLUMLEIN's papers may be turned over to the Royal Society following 'delicate negotiations', allowing the long-overdue biography on the man who invented stereo to be written.

DIXON announced a 19% fall in pre-tax profits for the six months ending November '92, down to £14.2m from £17.5m the year before. The results were slightly better than forecast

EVENTS

20-21 FEBRUARY: *Hi-Fi '93, Marriott Hotel, Bristol (formerly the Holiday Inn). Further details from Audio T, tel: (0865) 60844.*

12-15 MARCH: *Le Salon de la Haute Fidélité, Palais des Congres, Paris. SPAT, tel: 010 33 1 4557 3048.*

12-14 MARCH: *Stereophile High End Show, San Francisco Marriott. Tel: 010 1 914 476 3157.*

16-19 MARCH: *94th AES Convention at ICC, Berlin. UK contact, tel: (0628) 663725.*

16-18 APRIL: *Academy for Advancement of High End Audio Awards Weekend, New Orleans. Tel: 010 1 707 542 7040.*

17-18 APRIL: *Chesterfield Hi-Fi Show. Tel: Wentworth Audio (0709) 873667. NB new date.*

30 APRIL-3 MAY: *3rd Video Show, Olympia. Now cancelled.*

31 MAY-5 JUNE: *Audio-Video '93, St Petersburg. Contact Lenexpo on fax 010 7 812 22 348.*

1-5 JUNE: *SIAM '93, Seoul Int'l Audio Show. Tel: 010 82 2 551 0114.*

MARANTZ DCC WINNER

Winner of our Marantz DCC competition held in December is Michael Hensbrey from Dunstable. Mr Hensbrey will be receiving his DD92 digital recorder shortly. He correctly identified the answers as being 1.b; 2.c; 3.d; 4.d. Congratulations to him and thank you to all who participated in our Digital Compact Cassette competition.

Erasable CD, when?

Philips has side-stepped an earlier suggestion that it was planning to sell erasable CD discs within four years. The announcement, made by a Philips executive in an unguarded moment during a DCC conference, was for a system ready for sale by 1996. CD-erasable would offer the compatibility of compact disc without the write-once problems of existing CD-R technology.

Philips's head office in Eindhoven said the disclosure of any such date was premature. Angelique Hoogakker said the format was coming, but it was 'a bit too early' to talk about a market introduction.

Several proposals exist for re-recordable CD systems, based either on crystal technology where the disc is heated or on Magneto-optical systems similar to Sony's MiniDisc.

BOX OR PANEL?

Rooms up to 30m² are ideal for a new loudspeaker from Steve Hutton. Xenophon Acromat is the result of over three years development involving computer simulation and exhaustive listening to incorporate the advantages of both panel and conventional box loudspeakers.

The main driver is a 20cm² dipole radiator with dynamic mass under 2g. Low frequencies are augmented by a reflex-loaded 180mm moving-coil bass unit. An unusual quasi first-order crossover obviates the need for bi-wiring, while the design is said to be relatively insensitive to cable type. UK dealer and consumer enquiries (0793) 881240.



ROGERS REVAMPS 1A MONITOR

Work is underway at Rogers to develop a successor to the famous Studio 1a loudspeaker created by Richard Ross. The new Studio 7 will be launched later this year and, while housed in a bitumen-damped medite cabinet similar to the old 1a, uses a 25mm soft dome tweeter from Scanspek. This has a rear-loading cavity and is mounted on an aluminium front plate. The design is currently front ported – although work is underway to evaluate the effects of a rear port. A price 'well below £1000' is anticipated. A new crossover network has been designed using metallised polyprop capacitors. Swisstone, tel: 081-640 2172.

BRIEFING

and based on a £873.4m turnover, up from £871.1m in 1991. The group said it would close 45 shops in its Silo US chain.

FM ACOUSTICS is moving to Horgen on Lake Zurich at Seestrasse 5A, CH-8810 Horgen, Switzerland. Tel 010 41 1 725 7777.

HIT FACTORY New York has purchased a DCS 900B A/D converter featuring 24-bit AES/EBU, SDIF-2 and SPDIF digital interfaces, noise shape truncation to 16-bit, and remote overload monitoring. Tel (0223) 423299.

LINN has introduced a freephone telephone service for use by end users and to support direct mail advertising. The number is 0500 888909.

MAXELL has added magneto optical Mini Discs to its range using technology developed for its 5.25in and 3.5in MO computer memory discs. Contact Maxell, tel (0923) 77710.

JAMO has been awarded ISO9001 European quality standard after considerable investment over two years.

ROKSAN's operations have come together to create Roksan Digital Ltd. The company has moved to new premises in West Drayton, Middlesex, bringing manufacture and administration under one roof. Telephone (0895) 436384, fax 436385.

SILTECH announces a new type of cable, the FTM-4 gold. The signal is conducted through specially

treated wires made of pure gold (purified 24carat) and pure silver, combined with a dual silver ribbon ground and PTFE insulator. Contact UK agent Absolute Sounds tel 081-947 5047 for details.

TEAC UK has confirmed the price of van den Hul's metal-less interconnect ['Pot Pourri' Feb '92]. A 1m stereo pair of The First is £170, and 0.8m lengths are available for £140. TEAC, tel (0923) 819630.

TGI, Tannoy's parent, sold its remaining investment in Goodmans Industries for £1.55m, £1m over book value. Goodmans, the subject of a management buy-out in 1991, returned pre-tax profits of £432,000 at year end January 1992.

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See review *HFN/RR* 3/92.

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-*Hi-Fi World* 9/92.

See also *Audiophile* 1/93

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A new reference standard DAC is now available in its improved 1993 edition, with a new toroidal power supply, ALPS switch and higher standard case and fascia finish. The resulting sound is a genuine breakthrough at £549.

See review *HFN/RR* 11/92.

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AIR TOMORROW

The famous Air Studios, founded in 1970 by George Martin, left its Oxford Circus site after 21 years to move to new multi-million pound facilities in north-west London. A Victorian Congregational church in Hampstead has been transformed into one of the world's most advanced multi-media recording studios.

Rebuilding the 27,000ft Lyndhurst Hall, built in 1884 and an impressive example of Victorian architecture, was made possible only after financial aid from Chrysalis Group and Pioneer.

Many features have been carefully preserved under the guidance of English Heritage. The main hall is a grand domed structure, hexagonal in plan, with seating on the upper floor which extends out in three bays and is surrounded by a massive stained glass window. This hall



The control room (above) features a Neve Legend mixing console and digital multi-track recording. Monitoring is by Andy Murray using Dynaudio drive units. The domed hall (top right) seats 600 and offers fine acoustics for classical and contemporary recordings. Moving in are studio manager Malcolm Atkin, chairman George Martin, managing director John Burgess and project leader Dave Harries



was used late in the building programme for a gala performance of 'An Evening with Dylan Thomas' in aid of the Prince's Trust and in the presence of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. The programme included *Under Milk Wood*

sung by Tom Jones before an audience of 600 and was recorded on a 48-track digital machine.

Air Studios is officially opened on 4 March when it will also have post-production video and editing facilities plus artiste

accommodation. Chairman George Martin said Lyndhurst Hall would offer clients from around the world something that either hasn't been offered before or can't be offered elsewhere. 'It is truly a studio for the 21st century,' he said.

SOUTH WEST SHOW PREVIEW: HI-FI '93, BRISTOL

There's increased optimism about this year's Bristol hi-fi show which takes place at the renamed Marriott Hotel in the city over the weekend of 20 and 21 February. There is no Friday opening this time, reportedly at the request of manufacturers who successfully prevented a transfer of the event to Cardiff last year, when the regular Bristol venue was unavailable due to the hotel's rebuilding programme; this has resulted in extended conference and banqueting suites that now incorporate the adjacent former cinema.

Opening hours for Hi-Fi '93 are 9am-6am on Saturday and 10am-6pm on Sunday, with an admission charge of £5 adults, accompanied under 14s free.

With a number of manufacturers still to commit to the event as we go to press, the line-up so far promises a host of exciting new products, many seeing a UK debut after being previewed at the CES in Las Vegas. Predictably enough there will be DCC and Mini-Disc, a strong audio-visual presence from Denon, Marantz, Sony and Yamaha, plus a showing of THX by recent licensee, Celestion. Pioneer plans Dolby Pro-Logic on a stunning large-screen projection TV.



Mission's new Cyrus electronics line will be seen, including this two-box CD player, on show after a world premiere in Las Vegas

Valve fans will welcome a host of new products from Audio Note including the £999 DAC2 and DAC3 at £1650: both with valve analogue output stages. Acoustic Research is using the event to demonstrate Holographic Audio Visual, a home theatre system featuring the baby M.5 speaker and the bigger M4.5. Also featured by Entel will be additions to the AKG headphone range plus models from AR's Classic series.

A new tuner heads the Arcam line-up at Bristol. The £350 FM-only Delta 280 features 20 pre-sets, signal

strength meter and choice of narrow or wide IF bandwidth. It is designed to partner the company's new Delta 290 amplifier, and a forthcoming system remote control at £60 may be used to operate both.

Chord Company promises Codac digital link and solid Chord cable plus a 180CD storage rack.

A new RDS tuner is expected from Denon, the TU-580 (around £200). Accessories feature strongly at Goldring, which represents Disc-washer and Mitty. Introduced will be CD Hydrobath, CDL-2 lens cleaner. Perfect Sound's Crystal

cones and CDC treatment.

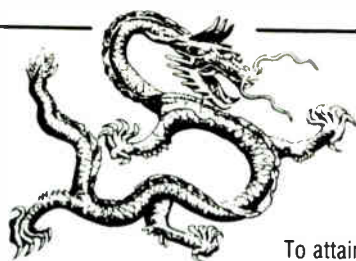
NAD Marketing is taking the opportunity to show products which will form part of an entire new range of audio separates: the £159 302 amplifier, 502 CD player at £199, and the 505 CD multi-player with a five-disc drawer (at £269).

The Bristol event is well timed for the UK arm of Revox which is breaking with hi-fi tradition. Evolution has been seen at European shows last summer, but Hi-Fi '93 will be its first UK appearance. There are no trailing wires or obtrusive controls on a product which is aimed four-square at the Bang & Olufsen customer. A large LCD panel shows operational status. Facilities provided include CD player and RDS-equipped tuner in a basic £2000 package.

New from Sennheiser will be the HD1000 Charleston headphone with a 1920's art-decor styling, plus the latest IS490 infra-red system.

TEAC, distributed by RAM, has concentrated on products designed using its vast Tascam professional experience.

Yamaha will major on its DSP-A100 with Cinema DSP Plus S-bit CD players and the company's cassette decks. ♪



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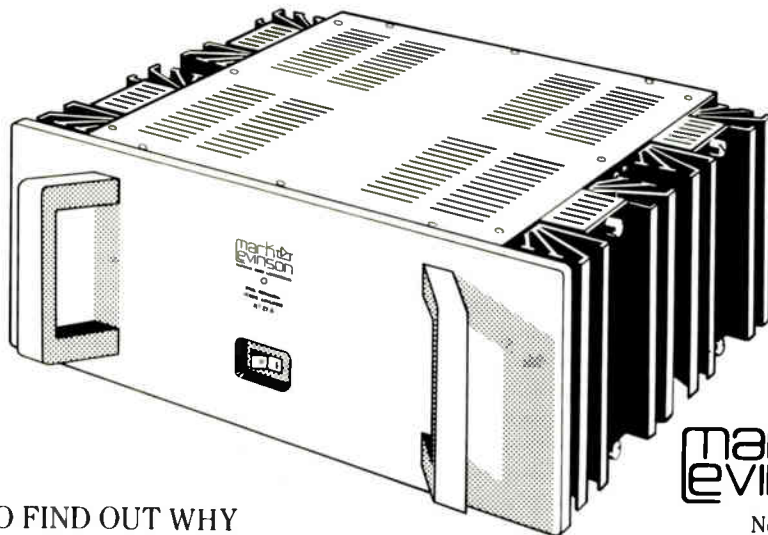
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FMX, the CBS system designed to extend the FM broadcasting range, looked to be dead in 1989. But it won't lie down . . .

Two interesting points on technology emerged when, recently, the Bose Corporation flew reporters from the UK to its base near Boston for a briefing on the company's plans.

The first dates back to January 1989, when the Bose Corporation flew journalists from US cities to Boston for a technical conference on a paper published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where Amar Bose is a professor of electrical engineering. The paper was on the FMX radio transmission system.

FMX was a system developed in the 1980s by CBS, to extend the range of FM stereo by companding the stereo subcarrier for noise reduction. When the CBS Labs closed, a consortium called Broadcast Technology Partners took over FMX.

Said Amar Bose during the recent briefing, 'We were using the MIT transmitter to research digital audio broadcasting and used it also to test FMX. The measurements were made by MIT, not the Bose Corporation. They showed that FMX transmissions sound worse on a regular radio receiver and they sound worse on an FMX receiver too. We proved that FMX was *theoretically* worse, too. The paper was published by MIT, because we thought it would deflect flak from the Bose Corporation. But it caused a lot of controversy.'

So much controversy, in fact, that Bose later published a resumé document, telling what had happened before and after the MIT seminar in 1989. To cut a long and juicy story

short, BTP threatened legal action against all the main critics of FMX. Bose referred to evidence against FMX gathered from 15,000 measurements and challenged anyone who disputed them to carry out their own A/B listening tests.

'Faced with extensive theoretical and experimental evidence that is in direct conflict with the advertised claims of FMX,' wrote Amar Bose and research colleague William Short, 'it is incumbent upon any manufacturer contemplating the sale of FMX receivers to independently conduct at least the minimal set of listening tests described above.' This challenge was published in advertising space in the *Consumer Electronics Show Daily*, in June 1989, paid for by the Bose Corporation.

MIT, Bose Corporation and Amar Bose then went into self-imposed silence. Everyone thought FMX was dead. But no, said Amar Bose at the recent meeting: 'Unfortunately FMX is not dead. The National Association of Broadcasters, which has taken a 10% interest in the system, is trying to revive it, even though communication theory shows that FMX is worse than FM.'

If the NAB is trying to revive FMX, then it is certainly not having much success. Denon planned to sell a super-tuner which included FMX, but abandoned the idea. Very few radio stations adopted FMX. Now the US and Europe are moving towards digital audio broadcasting. The BBC should by now have run secret DAB tests from its Crystal Palace transmitter, using frequencies at the bottom of the UHF TV band. The BBC wants a permanent allocation towards the top of the VHF TV band. For the NAB and BTP still to be pushing FMX in the 1990s makes a close parallel with the situation in the early 1980s when CBS pushed the CX noise reduction system for LPs as an alternative to compact disc.

NOISE CANCELLING

Bose has just won a contract with the US military to make equipment which removes excess sound.

Said Amar Bose: 'The US government pays out \$200 million a year in compensation for hearing loss caused by military service. Hearing loss is a common reason for early retirement of pilots, second only to psychological stress. There will also be an enormous market in industry for the noise cancellation system.'

People who work in a noisy environment can wear ear plugs, but then they cannot hear what is said to them. Ear plugs do not shut out low frequency, throbbing noise of the type suffered by light aircraft and helicopter pilots, drivers of tracked

vehicles or people working close to heavy industrial machines. Very large mufflers are needed to block low frequencies.

Attempts at actively cancelling low frequency noise in a room or cabin by generating an exactly matching, but out-of-phase, noise signal have so far failed. The generated sound may start off exactly 180° out of phase with the unwanted noise, but as the sound-waves reflect off the walls, their phase relationship changes. Overall reduction is only around 5dB. The subjective effect may even be worse because the human ear identifies the source of the anti-sound as a separate noise source.

'Once sound escapes into the room,' says Amar Bose, 'there is very little you can do to reduce it. The answer is to work on it before it escapes into the room. The best place is in a small cavity by the ear.'

Five years ago Bose engineers developed noise-cancelling headphones for the pilots of the Voyager aircraft. This headphone set has now been modified to make it suitable for industrial use and will be built in to military helmets.

The headset has a conventional miniature loudspeaker for feeding wanted sound into the ear. Close by the loudspeaker a small microphone picks up the mix of wanted sound with any unwanted sound which has penetrated from the outside.

An ancillary circuit processes the signal from the microphone to subtract the wanted sound and thus isolate the unwanted noise. It then reverses this noise signal in phase, amplifies it and adds it to the wanted sound signal which is being fed to the loudspeaker. So the unwanted sound is cancelled as it enters the ear.

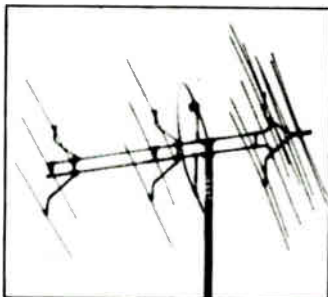
Because the headset cavity is so small, internal reflection paths are short and have no disturbing effect on noise with a relatively low frequency and long wavelength. At frequencies above 1kHz the noise wavelength is short enough to be affected by reflections. But passive noise blocking is feasible at mid and high frequencies. The walls of the headset are made from heavy damping material, and the headset has a rim made from a sack of silicone fluid, similar to the material used for breast implants. This sack mates neatly with the user's ear and head. So noise below 1kHz is actively cancelled and noise above this frequency is passively blocked, with the headset a manageable size.

Bose now sells a noise cancelling headphone set, attached to a microphone, for around \$1000. The company also plans to develop a battery-powered version for airline passengers to use. ✦

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At our studio, we offer a wide selection of the basic components, ranging from modestly-priced systems like the delightful Denon D-70 and 'separates' by JVC, Pioneer and Yamaha to the renowned products of Quad (not forgetting their world-famous Electrostatic speakers!), but what we really care about is our small handful of lovingly selected loudspeakers. Our famous three-way system, featuring the BBC's long-established LS3/SA speakers and the Audio Pro Sub-woofer (which we alone import from Sweden), has been further enhanced by the alternative choice of the Harbeth HLP3 speakers and by the fact that the new Audio Pro model, the B1-20, is much, much smaller than its predecessor, while its performance remains equally sensational.

Excitingly new to our range, however, is the Sequence 30 – a loudspeaker of remarkable originality which not only represents superb value for money at £200/220 per pair (depending on finish) but also solves many a domestic problem by being only 2.7in deep (its other dimensions are 33.5 and 10in) and thus able to hang flat on the wall. The Sequence 30 can be used in a free-standing mode, but we suspect that most people will share our delight at its 'flatness' on the wall.

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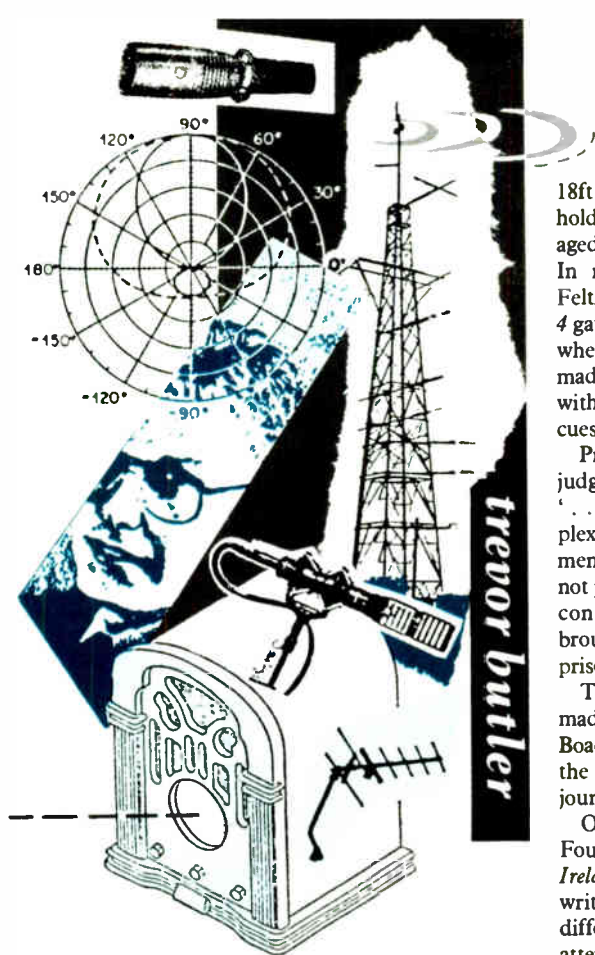
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trevor butler

BBC regions will play a more prominent role as centres of excellence: just one response to the government green paper

Responding to the government discussion document on the future of the BBC, the Corporation's own, high gloss reply *Extending Choice: the BBC's role in the new broadcasting age* repeatedly states that the BBC is the British Broadcasting Corporation, not the London Broadcasting Corporation.

Centres of Excellence are to be created in the BBC regions which hitherto provided a base for journalists working on localised news output. These network production centres, which currently contribute a few gems to the wealth of London-sourced material on BBC network radio, are to become teams of specialists concentrating on subjects as diverse as natural history and light entertainment.

Award-winning material is already being produced by some regions. Just before Christmas, the Radio Four current affairs series *File on 4* received the Howard League's media award, an accolade established to encourage responsible media discussion of the penal and criminal justice system. The 1992 award was given for a programme about Feltham young offenders institution, sited just to the west of London.

The visit of reporter Mark Halliley, who had access to inmates for a week, came after a damning report on Feltham by chief inspector of prisons, Judge Stephen Tumin.

Halliley explored the two-storey red brick units whose surrounding lawns and gardens gave the appearance of sheltered accommodation for the elderly. Instead Feltham, with its

18ft fencing topped with razor wire, holds 300 young offenders and 500 aged between 14 and 21 on remand. In nine months four prisoners at Feltham hanged themselves. *File on 4* gave a chilling account of thug rule, where it was common to see coshes made from bed frames or socks filled with batteries, and where use of pool cues had to be rigidly supervised.

Produced by Ingrid Kelly, the judges said they felt the programme '... accurately portrayed the complexities of life in a penal establishment and showed that bullying was not just an individual problem'. They concluded that the programme brought home the iniquities of the prison system for young people.

The success of the Manchester-made series delighted editor Helen Boaden. She said it was a tribute to the hard work and high standards of journalism in the team.

One new year treat was the Radio Four commission *Wide Awake in Ireland*, a three-part series by Irish writer John Walters. It provided a different view of the country while attempting to pinpoint a more useful way of looking at itself. Ireland, we are told, has a wild enthusiasm and exhilarating possibilities if only it could shake off the poor opinion it has of itself.

The first programme, 'Stuck in the Groove', looked at whether Ireland's Sixties' generation will ever give way, while 'The Unexpected Crossroads' asked if Ireland's political system can be as modern as its people. The final programme, 'The Irish "Thing"', concluded that, in order to move forward, Ireland needs to appreciate what it is now.

Birmingham probably contributes more to BBC networks than any other single region, with Bristol coming a close second. Apart from the obvious like *The Archers*, there's also a wealth of musical output from Pebble Mill, including the R3 *Lunchtime Concert* series, which moved

away from its studio base to the Adrian Boulton hall in Birmingham Conservatoire for a concert on their recently acquired Javanese gamelan. Not just one instrument, the gamelan is a whole orchestra which originated in Indonesia, including tuned single bronze gongs, metallophones, drums, flutes, and small cymbals.

A new year means a new set of broadcasting schedules, although it seems like old times on Radio Two as Terry Wogan returned, after a seven year absence, to fill his old breakfast-time slot. Other moves mean Brian Hayes appears thrice weekly, on Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday. Sarah Kennedy gets her first regular spot, on the early morning weekday show, while David Jacobs takes over Saturday night's *Easy Does It*.

Over on Radio One, the Sunday lunchtime oldies slot is hosted by reggae presenter The Man Ezeke. He takes over the show vacated by Alan 'Fluff' Freeman. Ezeke joined the station in October 1990 with a Wednesday night reggae hour. His new programme, *The Number One Show*, features charts not only of music, but also of the most popular films, television, fashion and videos from particular years.

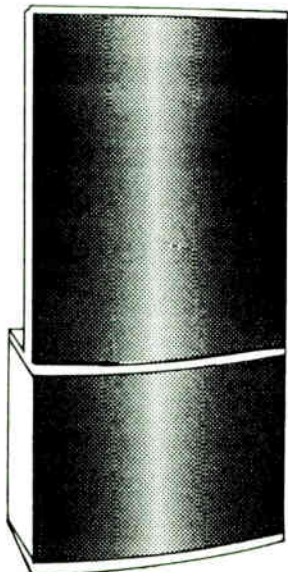
STOCKING FILLER

One of the more useful gifts I received at Christmas was the 1992/94 edition of George Wilcox's handy guide to European radio broadcasting. *Dial Search*, which is now in its 7th edition, is aimed primarily at home listeners.

Set orientation is made simple by two unique maps: Europe and the Mediterranean, and the British Isles; and, while the booklet majors on medium-, long-wave and VHF, a selection of the world's short-wave is given along with a timed list of broadcasts in English. In an A5 format, the 45pp publication sells for £4.25 through booksellers or £4.70 by mail: call (0323) 482419. ↵

Ingrid Kelly (left), Helen Boaden and Mark Halliley pictured receiving the Howard League's Media Award from president, John Mortimer, QC, (centre) for their programme on Feltham young offenders which uncovered the menace of thug rule





QUAD ESL 63 LOVERS

Please Note !

(K J West One are sole U.K. distributors for Gradient)

In our experience owners of Quad ESL 63's are a devoted bunch and not parted easily from their speakers when looking for an upgrade path. If

you like the sound they give where can you go for improvement? Up to now there hasn't been much on offer but Gradient (the Finnish distributors for Quad) have come up with a sub-woofer system (model SW63) to give extra bass extension that many ESL 63 owners would regard as the only real shortcoming of the speaker. If you want to know more you don't need to take our word for it, just read on for independent opinion.

HI-FI NEWS - MARCH 1992 sold in conclusion....

The Gradient woofer has not transformed the ESL 63 - rather it has released it from restrictions determined by a need to make the standard speaker a full-range device. With the SW63 the electrostatic blossoms into a true high end speaker of such integrity and ability that no sensible criticisms are worth voicing. This is a most graceful performer which again shows the fundamental quality of Peter Walker's marvellous creation. It comes strongly recommended.

I can think of no better upgrade path for a '63 owner with ambitions, while as an all-in-one purchase the high review rating equally applies.

TESTIMONIALS FROM SATISFIED OWNERS

Dr. Robson of Manchester

"Put simply, the Gradient sub woofers improve the sound of the Quad ESL 63's.... the bass is perfectly integrated and the crossover point is not audible."

Mr. Davidson of Co. Durham

"It really is a delight to listen to this combination of ESL 63's and SW 63's. The music seems to be more solid and I find the imaging properties of the Quads are enhanced. The extended bass is a boon when listening to large orchestral and organ works, yet the treble is clearer. Altogether a most successful marriage."

Mr. Tyler of Basingstoke

"With the SW 63's raising the Quad ESL 63's some 15 inches from the floor, the effect is to create an excellent tonal balance with a truly authoritative firm bass combined with an opening up of the sound which is wholly beneficial.... the results are really beyond criticism over a whole range of material."

Mr. Hastings of Oxfordshire

"The subwoofers and crossover have clearly been designed by somebody who knew and loved the ESL 63's. The upgrade is more sympathetic to the original than any previous attempts.... the speed and dynamics of the system as a whole should open up a new market for Quad among lovers of pop music and jazz."

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headroom



Mike Nesmith exploits the evolution of Dolby Surround on his latest CD

Tue, some readers would rather suffer boils, frogs and famine than glance at the rock reviews at the back, but do me a favour: look up my review of the latest Mike Nesmith CD. Write down the catalogue number (or wait for the pending UK release). Order a copy. And listen to it as it's meant to be heard: surrounding you with sound.

The review was written a week before Christmas; as I write, it's New Year's Day. And everyone – not just Clive James, Rory Bremner and the couch foliage on breakfast TV shows – is rendered contemplative at year's end. You're entreated to reflect on the previous 12 months. And on what does a hi-fi scribbler reflect? My January 1st mind game involved cataloguing the year's launches, and one item stood out like no other. Not DCC, which I think is a shamefully backwards step perpetuating recording as a contact sport. Not MiniDisc, which I think is the most clever, elegant system yet but, like Betamax, will probably die for all the wrong reasons. Like not being given a chance. And not home theatre, which is hardly new; 1992 merely saw its popularity reach critical mass through the availability of inexpensive surround-sound decoders and affordable LaserDisc players offering NTSC as well as PAL.

Nesmith's disc was the 11th hour reprieve during a gloomy year. So awful was 1992 that even the joy of Krell's best-ever electronics, delicious CD hardware from Wadia, Vimak and Marantz, the Harmonix

accessories, Trilogy's debut and other delights couldn't provide me with a shred of optimism for '93. Then, in dark December, I found the former Monkee's country-rock CD, recorded in Dolby Surround.

So what's the big deal? you're thinking. After all, there have been numerous audio-only Dolby Surround CDs, straight off the soundtracks. Aah, but there's the rub. Aside from film music using known works or new soundtracks made up of songs, why listen to soundtracks for musical pleasure? Ninety-second bursts of blaring brass which mean nothing without the visuals? Gimme a break. However much I adore the music of Hermann, Williams and Schifrin, I'm hardly likely to listen to the stuff on its own. It's the same for most people. So, aside from soundtrack addicts who are entitled to the fetish, no one has ever used their Dolby processors for anything other than decoding the rear channels on tape or LaserDisc.

Dolby Surround works, and works well, and there are now audiophile-calibre processors (Lexicon, to name but one) for those who wouldn't dream of listening to (visuals-free) music with a mid-fi black box in their otherwise-purist systems. So why not apply it to studio recordings which don't accompany a film? I can only dream about how my hippie days would have been enhanced if I'd been able to hear *Sgt Pepper*, *After Bathing At Baxter's* and all those Firesign Theater LPs through four speakers instead of two. Wouldn't have needed to roll up a single leaf . . .

But Nesmith's brave step isn't an exercise in psychedelic self-indulgence, or just some Pink Floydian head trip with sound effects, channel swaps and the kind of sonic gimmicks that were used to sell SQ and QS. Then again, those systems only worked properly with four-channel open-reel tape, so few will ever know of their possibilities. And the British, true to form, were incapable of bringing the brilliant Ambisonics to the marketplace. But we do have Dolby Surround, which has evolved to a state of true viability, and Nesmith exploits it with understatement.

I don't know if Nesmith is an audiophile in the civilian sense. Rather, I'll assume that he – like Frank Zappa – is a clued-up, seasoned studio veteran. And yet he's recorded a semi-acoustic set using the rear channels for atmosphere rather than as a gosh-wow-pass-the-bhong, whatthellwasthat!!! sideshow. For once, a musician/producer has pandered not to the lowest common denominator but the highest, knowing fully that the music-in-the-home experience has nothing to do with

making an ears-only version of Sonic The Hedgehog. Nesmith has returned to the original concept of high fidelity: faithful reproduction of a musical event. And, as everyone knows – even Amar Bose – sound surrounds us. What Nesmith has issued is a recording that, while just dandy in two-channel form, becomes so much more convincing in Dolby mode you'll wish all of your cherished recordings offered the same degree of realism.

This one's gonna be a hard idea to sell, precisely because Nesmith opted for subtlety rather than drama. I can picture the CD demo'ed in hi-fi shops with the salesperson switching off the front channels to 'show the effect'. The listener will hear what amounts to a drastically reduced version of the front channels, complete with a slight phasey-ness, a version of the recording which does not work on its own any more than does the sound of the rear channels in a film's Dolby soundtrack. But put it all together and you hear something richer, fuller, bigger than before. It's all-embracing. It puts you there with the performers. Which is all anyone can want of sound in the home.

Just in case some of you are either too anti-rock or too lazy to turn to the 'Rock, Pop, Jazz' section, here are the details so you can order a copy from the USA, though Awareness should have the UK version out later this year. The disc is *Tropical Campfires*, Pacific Arts PAAD-5000. The address is 11858 La Grange Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90025, USA. Don't waste your time with Our Price, which charges just under £20 for imported CDs from the USA, but do try Virgin, HMV or Tower, which may be more aware of the £=\$ relationship. I bought my copy in Canterbury from Parrot Records for £11.99. And it's the best £12 I spent in 1992. ↕



An extremely youthful Mike Nesmith, pictured here before his split from the Monkees

*Will Home Theatre
carry all before it? Yes,
but there is still hi-fi life
in Las Vegas . . .*

by **KEN KESSLER**

LAS VEGAS



Is this really a speaker? Martin Logan's ESL Hybrid Centre Channel

Okay, so I stayed in a terrific hotel, ate like a king and won a bit on the slots. Yet I left Las Vegas wondering 'Whatever happened to hi-fi?'. Was I attending one of the hi-fi industry's most important events, or had I accidentally wandered into Comdex, the computer world's main hardware fair? Maybe I had stumbled upon a toy convention. Or flown for an hour too long and landed in Hollywood. Whatever my warped recollection of the past three days' events, all I can say for certain is something was happening here. What it was ain't exactly clear. While there may not have been a man with a gun over there, something was telling me to beware. And it all started with the otherwise innocent-looking CES pocket directory, the guide to the thousands of exhibitors.

There it was on page 9, where you find the floor plans of the various hotels and the Convention Center. Next to each little map is a category description; the Sahara Hotel bi-level complex, for example, is dubbed 'Specialty Audio/High End Audio'. But next to the map of the Mirage, which I knew hosted the bulk of the British audio contingent, were the words 'Home Theater' and 'Custom Installation'.

What's so ominous about that, you might be thinking. For the past five years at least, those categories have been integral subdivisions of what we know as audio. But not anymore. Now they are audio.

The only conclusion at which I could arrive, after seeing how Tannoy and KEF and even Linn had joined 'em rather than be beaten, was too obvious to

ignore: recorded music as a stand-alone source of pleasure as we know it is dead. If a pure hi-fi-only brand is to survive into the next century, it must be involved in either the A/V sector or the multi-room market. And that confirms my fears that music on its own is no longer enough. Today's consumer just can't listen to music minus embellishments. This pathetic creature, with the attention span of a two-year-old, needs visuals or push-button convenience. Better still, a joystick. Whatever you think, there's no goin' back to LPs.

Judging by the overall feel of CES, home theatre didn't simply grow during 1992. It emerged as the salvation of the home entertainment market, while presupposing that everyone is a film buff. But lest you think I'm on a real downer about

this, I find great joy in noting that the British hi-fi industry is in on it at the start; this is not merely a Japanese/American revolution. Celestion already had a home theatre offering; in Las Vegas, sister company KEF joined in with magnetically shielded versions of the 101/2, 102/2 and 103/4 speakers and the Model 90 and Model 100 'centre channel' speakers. Both feature 6.5in Uni-Q drivers and either will nestle nicely on top of or below the monitor in your surround sound set-up.

Even more indicative of the company's commitment to home theatre are the forthcoming THX speakers, already granted provisional approval by LucasArts. KEF's demo room was all A/V, with a system incorporating a Denon 3030 A/V Surround Receiver, the ubiquitous and unanimously revered Faroudja LD100 Line Doubler, a Kinergetics surround sound processor and the like.

Tannoy's contribution to the home theatre market is almost more pro than audiophile, because the company has opted for 'cinema-style dynamics' as its goal. Shown was the biggest centre-channel speaker I've seen yet, the £1000 D350 'dialogue' model employing a full-range driver rather than one which only covers the midband; a sub-woofer will follow. Behind the screen were enough woofers to satisfy an HM bass-player. And in the more domesticated Definition range, the company has what amounts to a complete battery of Dolby Pro-Logic speakers in the guise of the D700 floor-standing system with a 10in dual concentric driver, the smaller, shielded D100 with a 6.5in dual concentric speaker and the D100S - yes, a shielded version of the D100 in a 'lying on its side', faceted cabinet.

The move to A/V doesn't really place too great a burden on straight hi-fi manufacturers, aside from qualifying for THX suitability. NAD showed amplifiers ready for the format, but most are content with what they've been doing for years: labelling one line input 'video' and leaving it at that.

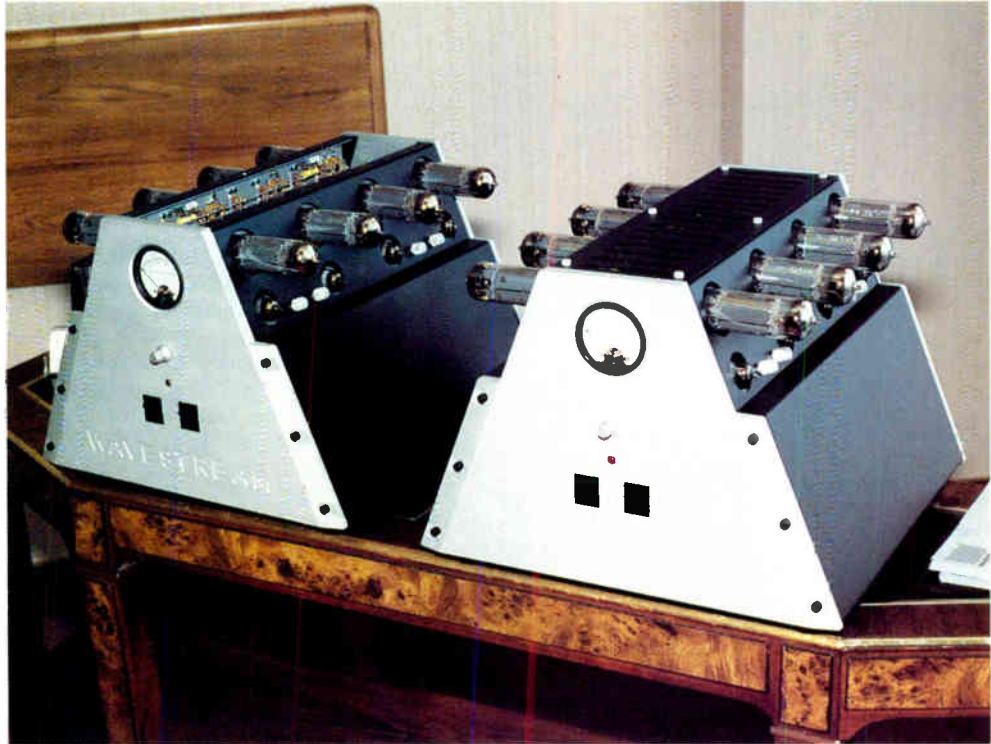
But before we get to the hi-fi, digitalia, multi-room and the rest, let me finish up with a few observations about this move to turning everyone's living room into the Roxy.

First, you must accept that this trend is US-led, even if you

can afford the stuff, tiny lounges do not a Gaumont make. The hottest projectors used by exhibitors not manufacturing their own light throwers – **Ampro** and **Vidikron** for the high-end, major Japanese brands for the rest – are bulky things which need either a back-room set-up like a projection booth, coffee-table style placement or ceiling mounting, and they are not easy to hide in a small room. Vidikron is one of the few attempting to prettify its projectors; the new VPF 40 HD was styled by Pinifarina and owes much to the look of the Ferrari Testarossa, so much so that it's available in the right shade of rosso. The screen to own? Probably a **Stewart**. But one thing on which everyone agrees: you must employ a Faroudja line doubler, as featured in the **Cello** system in our *Home Theatre* supplement.

I have no qualms in crediting **JBL** with the coolest A/V demonstration of all. The Synthesis system really is a complete home theatre system, featuring true THX capability but with a twist. Having recognised that conventional stereo music playback is incompatible with THX, and that you must install THX speakers if you want the system to work, JBL has found a way to spare the consumer of having to buy two sets of front left-and-right speakers. The Synthesis system automatically switches in or out certain drivers as applicable, one set designed for cinema-style listening, the other for purist stereo. What made the JBL demo so convincing was the display, which I gather you can actually purchase. Complete with a ticket kiosk, motorised red velvet curtains in front of the screen and 14 genuine cinema seats, the set made you feel like you were in a genuine if tiny movie house, not a converted lounge, and it enhanced what was a stunning experience even without the dressing. A clip from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* proved enthralling, the sound spread was seamless and enveloping. There are lots of complete home cinema systems on the market; JBL's is the only one which could actually justify the hiring of usherettes.

The speaker builders have, of course, been laughing all the way to the bank because of home cinema: it means the purchase of extra (especially rear-channel) speakers. It also means a double



V8 power plant (above) from Wavestream and (right) the whisky-still-style Tri Torr speakers

market for a single design. One pleasant offshoot is a revival in satellite systems, originally designed for space-saving purposes. In A/V terms? You get your compact left and right speakers plus a centre bass system which just so happens to fit under a TV trolley. Latest to join the fold is **Monitor Audio** with an affordable three-piece suite which differs from the rest in one key area. Instead of cheap'n'cheerful black ash boxes, Monitor Audio's babies look like what they are: smaller versions of the immaculately-clad larger siblings [see the review in *Home Theatre* – Ed]. The set on show was finished in rosewood and looked expensive rather than desperately 'budget'. Natch, there's a metal dome tweeter, and the veneer looks like Mo Iqbal himself did the polishing. Cute.

SPEAKERS

If I arrange the brochures collected at a CES in piles stacked according to component type, the speaker pile always equals all the rest combined. There was no shortage of new designs, most of them with some application for the 'install' sector. And the slickest item I saw was a prototype from **Martin-Logan** which you would probably mistake for an oversized, indoor, floor-standing aerial. Finished in





New Cyrus electronics from Mission included this CD player (above) and the new Cyrus III amp; Acarian had the baby Alon I (right) as well as a fem-dom monster (see text); Tara Labs offered its Passage line stage (below) and (bottom) Mark Schifter of Audio Alchemy with the bare bones of his new room correction system. (Note that Mr Schifter is not wearing the watch sold to him by Mr Kessler.)



black and consisting of a plinth and a chunky pillar from which sprouted two curved panels, it's an electrostatic-hybrid (here we go again) audiophile-calibre centre-channel speaker. The ESL Hybrid Center Channel, to give it its clumsy name (why not Electro-Lux? Statistic?), is simply gorgeous, the kind of speaker which will be mistaken for anything but a speaker. Yet its real potential is something else entirely. If the company can be persuaded to develop it further, the two 'wings' could represent left-and-right speakers, the curve being severe enough to allow the signal spread to convey reasonable stereo separation. At \$1500 in mono form, it's a steal. Even upping the price by another third for making it a single-chassis 'satellite' system, it would be the answer to every electrostatic lover in a cramped flat. Also on show for city dwellers and those mean with floor space is the Wall Mount ESL Hybrid, which is probably the world's first hang-on-the-wall electrostatic. And it looks like every other gorgeous M-L masterpiece, only in 2-D instead of 3-D. Price is circa \$3000, so now there's no excuse for not having a dipole.

Weirdest speakers I've ever seen, designs which make Acapellas and Plasmatronics seem common, are the Tri-Torrs, available in three sizes and therefore differing only in scale, from 45in tall up to 82in. Imagine you're in a distillery. You see large, onion-shaped brass vats. Take three of them in small, medium and large, with the smallest at the top, hanging on springs, Roksan-tweeter-style, in an open tubular frame. The drivers are mounted at the top and bottom of each onion, firing inward. My powers of description stop there. But I loved 'em, because these are exactly what Jules Verne would have listened to had there been high-end audio in the 19th-century. Speaking of weird, The Kind Horn Co has restyled its organic-looking horns, due to popular demand. Speaking of weirder, yet another company showed speakers disguised as rocks for outdoor placement. Only Stereostone made one small mistake if camouflage is the goal: rocks don't have rows of slots along the front. That aside, they look like, well, rocks.

As if to prove that you don't have to learn from others' mistakes, Sierra Audio Systems showed speakers disguised as paintings and photographs. The drivers are conventional, yet the 'enclosures' are still only 7cm deep. As for the matching sub-woofers, they're disguised as coffee tables. But whatever shape comes along, the look of the show was pyramidal – tall and pointy, or truncated, or dumpy...but pyramidal none the less. Close behind came the followers of Avalon, which originated the angular, faceted look. Then come the Clonus Fabers, lots of compound curves and gorgeous wood, speakers which proliferated alarmingly since the last CES.

The real Avalon launched the new Radian, a three-way design

SOFT WARES

Over two dozen CDs were pressed into my hands at this show, including one which represents what might be the dawn of a new era. Reference Recordings' HDCD Sampler (RR-S3CD) is a showcase for new digital technology. The abbreviation stands for High Definition Compatible Digital™, a process created by Keith Johnson and Micheal Pflaumer which is used in both recording and playback. It's said to cancel additive distortions while providing additional data to restore the losses created by subtractive distortions. The process is a secret, but word on the street is that the good Professor and his colleagues have worked miracles. And while it will be some time before CD players contain the necessary decoding chip, note that the name features the word 'compatible'. Apparently the sound quality gains can be heard even when the CDs are played on conventional machines, though the gains are not as great. Work is already under way to assign licenses for use of the circuitry. The sampler CD uses HDCD technology and is said to be an ear opener.

Reference has issued another Dick Hyman CD, following his popular Fats Waller tribute. This time, it's *Dick Hyman Plays Duke Ellington* (RR-50DCD) and – like the earlier volume – it's

with dual 9in Nomex/Kevlar woofers, a 3.5in Nomex/Kevlar cone mid-driver and a titanium dome tweeter. Although slightly less angular than the Ascent, it's still unmistakably an Avalon.

Among the copycats, I preferred the Odyssey EE from **Spectrum Dynamics**, which looks like someone cut an Ascent into its constituent bass and mid/treble halves. Among the pyramids, I noted the **Chateau Research Reference Monitors** which resembled Wilson WATTs but with less front-to-back depth, **Vella Research's** VR-1 two-section pyramid with a whacking great 15in passive as well as a 12in woofer in the plinth section, and the **Green Mountain Audio Diamante**. This deserves special mention for Mimickry Beyond the Call of

Duty: overall a pyramid, but with recessed sections and faceting, or Avalon Goes To Egypt.

My fave launch, speakerwise, came from **Acarian**. The Alon Phalanx is the new flagship, a monster of a speaker using the same sealed-box/open-baffle architecture featured in all the company's designs. But this monster has its five upper section drivers arranged on a baffle which is shaped, well, er, like a female torso, with uh, two drivers placed mammarially at the top. And no points for the wag who suggested a port at the front just above the woofer. But that wasn't the speaker which dazzled me, as top-end wonders are a dime-a-dozen at CES. The thrill was the Alon I, the baby of the range and looking exactly like a pre-shrunk Alon IV. The

price is low, the sound staggering, and it begs to be shipped to the UK. These are among the most open-sounding of conventional-driver'd designs.

Other notables in speakerland included **Mavrick's** Ebony Ribbon System, a satellite featuring ribbon drivers in the 8x16x10 in (whd) enclosures, **Newform Research's** ribbon hybrids, with slim ribbon arrays perched on top of sealed bass enclosures, **Hales' System Three** featuring a proprietary metal dome tweeter (made in Europe) in a small enclosure and priced at circa \$2300 per pair, another ribbon in the form of **Eugenex's** elegant Waveguide series of hybrids in wood, metal and stone enclosures, and the long-awaited smaller models from **Oracle** – available as either the single-cabinet Thalia or the equivalent of the upper half of the Thalia called the Mentor, which can be upgraded by the addition of a subwoofer.

Paragon Acoustics' Jubilee places a 19mm Dynaudio tweeter in its own round enclosure atop a cubist sealed woofer cabinet containing a 7in driver. **AR** took time out from the Limited Series launch to introduce the Classic series, featuring tightly configured drivers for near point-source operation. The speaker for the Limited Series has been fine-tuned and is now in finished form. **TC Sounds** showed a range of models featuring flat drivers in nicely sculpted, 'soft-look' cabinetry. New from **Magnepan** is the MG10/QR at the lower end of the price table. Measuring 5ft 6in tall and 10½in wide, the MG10 is a hybrid, but emphasis has been placed on a lower crossover point to minimise the effects of a mixed-technology design by crossing over from cone to dipole at a low 80Hz. A blast from the past: **Bozak** is well and truly back with nine models, ranging in price from \$395 to \$5000. **Rush Sound's** Monument II is a small monitor containing two 5in woofers above and below a horn-loaded compression driver with a diaphragm made of vapour deposited beryllium on copper. A subwoofer is available containing two 8in drivers.

The hot news at the show for speakers had to be the greening of DSPs. **Sigtech** and **Audio Alchemy** offer 'universal' room correction systems, while **Snell** demonstrated the Concept IV

hybrid DSP speaker, actually designed to work only with a DSP, an intrinsic part of its basic design. The session was remarkable, the tall column producing superb sound in a room I can only describe as 'sonically challenged'. The partnering CQ-10 Digital Loudspeaker and Room Correction Processor can be fitted with 'personality modules' to allow instant suitability for any Snell speaker past or present. Snell also introduced a THX set-up designed for proper small-scale private cinemas in the 10,000-20,000 cubic feet range, as opposed to rooms in domestic homes of typically 18x24x8ft dimensions or roughly 3500 cubic feet.

Meridian, meanwhile, seemed nonplussed, having beaten everyone to the finishing line with a DSP-controlled speaker. Meridian's new goodies included the 604 tuner with digital output – a big deal since one of the major buzzes at CES is the pending launch of digital broadcasting in America. Latest generation CD transports from Meridian include the 200 at £850 and the 602 at £1750, while a new Delta-Sigma DAC, the 263, has been introduced at £495. Perhaps the most important info to be collected in the Meridian suite is the news that the company has opened Meridian America Inc in Atlanta, Georgia.

DIGITAL TO . . . YAWN

DACs up the kazoo. That's what you get now at a CES, and I find it something of a yawn. A couple of years back, a new DAC with novelty elements would make you sit up and take notice because CD was so desperately in need of tweaking; now CD is good enough to mean that we're at a stage where the gains arrive in smaller degrees. And, despite a plethora of DACs at both ends of the price spectrum, there's a continuing battle both to lower the entry fee, and see who can be the first to top the ludicrous pricing of certain current high-end converters.

Theta didn't merely launch a surprisingly inexpensive DAC, it also launched a new company called **Cobalt**. And the kick-off product, the delightfully-named 307 Disclaimer (or maybe that was the title of the press release), is a smart little device selling for a mere \$599. And yet it features 'the lowest jitter data recovery IC in the industry', the highest-grade of the latest Burr-Brown

direct-to-CD. And it's recorded with HDCD. New from DMP is another big band extravaganza by the Bob Mintzer Big Band, *Departure* (CD-493). Unusual for a specialist label, this CD features artists you've heard of before, including Michael Franks. Sheffield Lab has issued another Pat Coil CD, *Just Ahead* (CD-34) and Michael Ruff's *Speaking In Melodies* (no cat. no. yet).

All too rare are releases from Kavi Alexander's excellent Water Lily Acoustics label. At CES, Kavi was handing out not one but two new discs, including *A Gathering of Elders* (WLA-AS-25-CD) and *A Meeting By the River* (WLA-CS-29-CD) featuring no less than Ry Cooder.

Audioquest continues its run of knockouts with Victor Lewis's *Family Portrait* (AQ-CD1010) and the Bruce Katz Band's *Crescent Crawl* (AQ-CD1012), while Wilson Audiophile has issued a 500-copy-only limited edition in gold of the National Symphonic Winds' *Center Stage* (WCD-8824).

Unbelievable are new CDs from VTL which I'll actually listen to more than once! Yes, dear readers, they've taken a breather from self-indulgent, dull, audiophile jazz. Enter a brace of bluesy, torchy discs from the charming Vickie Lee, *Vickie* (VTL 012) and *More Vickie*

(VTL018), former-Seeker Karen Knowles' *Moonglow* (VTL-017) containing luscious standards, Jim Dawson's *Independence* (VTL 016) containing real songs, Josh Sklair with *Josh* (VTL 013) – Sklair being Etta James' musical director and a mean blues guitarist – and Jim Christopher & Brown Burnett's *Main Liners* (VTL 019) with a mix of Delta and Chicago blues material.

Chesky Records has gone into overdrive with no less than nine new titles plus another sampler. On the classical side, there's the Connecticut Early Music Festival Ensemble/Igor Kipnis performing Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* (D78) and Kipnis again with *The Virtuoso Scarlatti* (CD75).

A number of Chesky regulars, including Ana Caram, Phil Woods and Paquito D'Rivera appear on *JVC Jazz Presents A Night of Chesky Jazz Live At Town Hall New York City* (JD82). Other new items include Lumumba and Rabello's *Shades of Rio* (JD85), Red Rodney's *Then and Now* (JD79), another Orquesta Nova release, *Salon In New York* (JD86) and *Caribbean Circle* from Monty Alexander (JD80). Full marks to Chesky for a new Peggy Lee recording *Moments Like This* (JD84) and – at last – a blues disc, John Cephas and Phil Wiggins' *Bluesmen* (JD89).

hybrid DAC, a computer-fabricated chassis with an elegant 1/4in thick fascia, blue LEDs to indicate power on and lock, Vishay resistors, two transformers and more.

Bitwise Audio Technologie showed the stylish Musik System Zero and the AT&T equipped Musik System Zero Plus using 20-bit co-linear DACs, 20-bit filtering and 8x oversampling, short signal paths, phase inversion in the digital domain, etc, plus the CD-1 transport which operates in synchronous clock and data mode with the matching DAC for lower jitter. One of the rising stars is the **Forsell Air Reference CD Transport**, a huge black machine with gold accents, intricate hardware, a massive lid and a matching DAC. The main feature of this transport which distinguishes it from all others? The disc rotates on an air-bearing . . .

Vimak celebrated the release of the finished version of its transport with MK II editions of the DS1800 and DS2000 converters, and I could only gaze in amazement as Mike Koulopoulos turned the transport on its side while in use and then upside down while the disc was playing, without it skipping even once. **Melos** showed the latest stage of its MAX-1 two-box, tube converter with balanced outputs and the MAX-1 single-bit, single-box tube DAC, while **NAD** unveiled the 010D 'Digital To Analogue Interface', an 18-bit, 8x oversampling design with superior regulation, class-A internal circuitry throughout and a newly developed receiver to minimise jitter – all for £399.

At the other end of the Universe, **Howie Hyperfy** of **Altis** was haranguing all and sundry with lurid details about his admittedly gorgeous Reference, Signature and Ultima Bitstream processors, which looked hewn from solid. The Ultima boasts a price tag not unadjacent to that of a Levinson No. 30 with an extra two grand added on top for effect. At \$15,000 is this the new King of the Bank Balance Busters? Anyway, the key ingredients include latest generation SAA-7350 from Philips, a Signetics SM580AP filter, three dual-triode tubes in the analogue section, MIT output caps, extra high gain to drive any passive pre-amp, two 100VA custom-made iron-core transformers providing '300% more power

than the unit will ever need', a two-box chassis made from stainless steel, *ad infinitum*. Admittedly, **Howie Hyperfy** is as aptly-named a tweak merchant as I've ever met, but for once his flood of 'Merda di Toro' seems justified. And the piece is about as gorgeous a device as I've ever seen.

At one-tenth of the the price is the **Dodson Audio DAC-263** which, like every other new model, concentrates on jitter killer, 20-bit Burr-Brownery, 8x oversampling – are we seeing a trend or something? **Museatex's** Meitner-designed IDAT boasts a proprietary DSP algorithm and is described as the only upsampling processor which achieves frequency and transient accuracy with no coloration. It uses four 20-bit DACs per channel. Another fave digital trinket, though, just has to be the nifty, minuscule **Micromega** transport and DAC shown at The Hi-Fi Show in mock-up form. The tiny units are pretty, compact, clever, and sensibly priced, the top-loading Microdrive featuring the Philips CDM 9 assembly and a choice of matching mini-DACs, the bitstream Microdac or the advanced version, the Variodac.

But the real killer is the drop-dead gorgeous, this-must-be-made-by-a-Japanese-camera-company, I want one, gotta have it, look at that amazing LCD panel Discmaster and Dacmas in **Mission's** Cyrus range. Refined even further from the early sample seen at the factory reopening, the two sections of this CD package are Cyrus-sized to match the new integrated amp, tuner and PSX power supplies – in other words, 215mm wide front panels. A top loader with a power lid and puck, the Discmaster features monolithic glass optics, Hall-effect motor, dynamically balanced disc drive, enough socketry on the back to double for an old-style phone exchange, brilliant new control icons, a diecast magnesium alloy chassis and a copper alloy sub-chassis, CDM-9 Pro transport, dedicated communication with the rest of the Cyrus gear and XLR connection to the Dacmaster. The latter shares the same physical details as do the tuner and integrated amp, uses 20-bit DACs, star earthing, 8x oversampling, a master clock when used with the Discmaster and 16 power supplies. The package should sell for under £2000.

AMPLIFIERS

The **Cyrus III** Integrated is a completely new unit, sharing only the basic shape and size of its best-selling predecessor. Rated at 50W/channel or boosted to 70W/channel with the optional PSX power supply, it offers phono and five line inputs, **Cyruslink** system comms and a neat volume control which doubles as the balance, with the corona of green LEDs changing function according to mode. The matching tuner, like the CD player, employs a custom LCD which shows signal strength and centre tuning on an easy-to read arc, simplified station storage, and both rotary and press button tuning.

Dynaco, having revived its tube gear, has also reissued the Stereo 400 solid-state amp in revised Series II form. This 200W classic now offers front panel control for increasing or decreasing current output to match different speaker loads. Restyled, it sells for under \$1000

in the USA. Another revival concerns **McIntosh**, back in force with everything from home theatre to multi-room to something we never thought we'd see, the limited run of the reissued MC275 tube amp. The company showed a series of comprehensively equipped A/V amplifiers, and they still bear the distinctive black front panel which defies time. The best thing that ever happened to the company just may be the acquisition of **Ron Fone**, who is as dynamic as the firm is conservative. But who would have thought he'd front the reissue of a tube amp?

Both **Classé** and **Threshold** unveiled remote control pre-amps, the former having an input configurable by the user for either line, m-m or m-c just by changing jumpers. Price is a ridiculously low \$1200. **Threshold's** T2 is a luxu job, fully balanced and offering two sets of balanced inputs and six unbalanced; a front panel dis-

BITS'N'BOBS

My cable moratorium extends to even mentioning the damned things, but I can't let you down. **Ray Kimber** told me – or I think he did – that he has a \$15,000-per-metre interconnect. **Tara Labs**, bless 'em, went the other way with a new group of affordable cables, including the **Quantum CD Interconnect** for \$49. Full marks as well to that company for introducing a dedicated in-wall wire for \$2.95 per foot, **Omni 4TM**, with four cores to allow for bi-wiring from a single cable; it's been designed for easy, no-snap pull-through. At least a dozen people brought up the subject of carbon fibre cables; I heard 12 different opinions. **NBS** announced a special cable for **AES EBU** digital connection, as well as a version of **Wilson's WATT Puppy Tail**. **Andrew Chow** showed me **The Cable Jacket**, which is just that: a cloth garment you slip over your cables which is said to perform all manner of miracles, including the filtering of RFI, the damping of internal resonances and more. They look like oriental willy warmers, but too many people

said they were 'Amazing!!!' to allow to much mickey-taking. **Synergistic Research** came up with the neat idea of a 'cable library' which allows consumers to try cables at home, sparing the dealers from keeping large stocks of weird lengths. An 800 number reaches the company, a credit card keeps the punters from doing a runner with the cable, and the deposit is refunded should no cable be purchased. The company's own cable is notable for featuring a pair of trailing earth leads to allow the user to experiment with earthing.

Avalon introduced a pointy foot called the **Apex™**, fabricated from non-ferrous stainless steel. **Rank Video Services** announced a new video tape duplication system called **Master Sharp™**, said to produce superb quality on 6-hour tapes in EP mode. **Product Not Ever Likely to Be on KK's Wants List: Nikkodo's Ninja™ Portable Karaoke System**. Neat Accessory Dept: **Audio-Source** added a couple of functions to their **CD Laser Lens Cleaner Disc**. The **LLC3** also tests the CD player through the use of

play communicates the function and volume setting. Linn floored me with the next stage of its system programme: wall-mount key-pads (indoor and outdoor versions) for accessing the multi-room capabilities of an all-Linn system. (And seen in the room but not really/coulda been my imagination/this is off the record was a prototype Linn in-wall speaker...) **Gryphon** showed a prototype of a new, smaller power amp, while fellow country company **Primare** merely had to show the flight cases used to ship its stainless steel beauties to dazzle visitors. (Primare also demo'ed a wild new speaker which has me praying that my camera worked okay...) **Archidee** of Italy followed its stylish integrated amplifier with the F68 six-input remote control pre-amp and a pair of power amps, the B24 with 80W/channel and the B25 with 100W/channel.

I'm at a loss to explain not the survival of my beloved valves

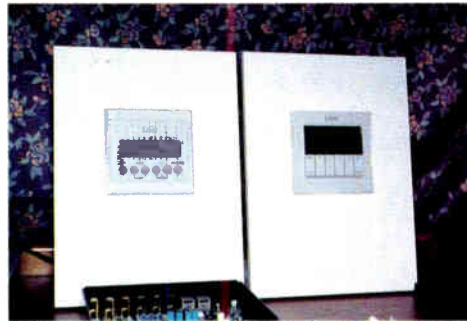
tones including a Dolby Pro Logic set-up procedure, channel identification, a localization test, polarity check and more, along with five full music tracks.

Non-gag accessory of the show? Harmonix's latest tuning device goes nowhere near the hardware. Packed in a small wooden box are the new self-adhesive discs which tune the room, (old) 10p-piece-sized felt-like affairs which – were you not told otherwise – would pass for the stick-on pads used to prevent items from scratching the surfaces on which they might rest. But, no, these are for real, and the room at the show was treated with the pads placed at specific points. And one soul told me that he heard that a visitor to the room – that belonging to the US distributor for Jadis – asked why did the room sound so much better than any of the others, without having been told that the Harmonix pads were in use. Rubbish? Nonsense? Wishful thinking? I don't suppose that it's any more farfetched than Sonic the Hedgehog outselling the current Number One audio-only CD . . .

but the sheer flood of new products and manufacturers. **Audio Research**, in the far-flung Golden Nugget, unveiled its first non-hybrid, all-tube products for ten years, the long-awaited Reference series Models One and Two. Model One is the power amplifier, rated at 100W and using a unique blending of the company's proprietary partial cathode-coupled output stage and ultra-linear connection of the screens. Tube options include every major output tube such as the 6550 and a cluster of KT's, up to the new 90, 91, 99 and 100. The Reference Two pre-amp brings back the days of Audio Research control units sporting more glass than than a milk float at dawn. Twelve – count 'em – tubes ensure that transistorphobes can return to the ARC fold with confidence. And those who crave SP-11/SP-15 mission-control useability will delight in a fascia containing every worthwhile function you could want. By the way, this system is balanced throughout, so say bye-bye to your RCA phono plugs . . .

Other tubed goodies include **The Valve Amplification Company's** (how's this for an oxymoron?) new Vintage Series, including the Williamson Power Amplifier, a single chassis stereo amp based on the classic 45-year-old circuit with modern touches, an integrated version, a monoblock and a line amp. **LA Audio** of Denmark added another monoblock to its range, the 500W P-5 Gold, weighing a mere 50kg and deriving its juice from a dozen KT88s.

Gold Aero introduced new tubes: the KT99A, similar to a KT88 or 6550, the E34L Power Pentode and the 6FQ7. Sharing the room was **Hovland**, with a massive 14.5x14.5in cube of an amp delivering 100W/channel from EL34s; it's bridgeable to 100W operation. **Convergent Audio Technology** finally released an amplifier to match the CAT-1 pre-, all-valve, with eight 6550s (or KT-series tubes) producing 125W. From **Sonic Frontiers** is the SFC-1 Control Amplifier (Canadian for 'integrated line amp'), basically an SFL-1 line amp with a 100W stereo amp in one handsome chassis. **Conrad-Johnson** now has a special limited edition of the Evolution 20 called the SE, with upgraded OFC socketry, pure silver internal wiring, etc, making it 'essentially a Premier



Linn showed a host of new products including (above) its multi-room system controller



Gayle Sanders (above left) with his wall-mount Martin Logan; the soft look (above) from TR Sound; and (left) the limited-edition McIntosh 275 valve-amp reissue



Ten with a phono stage'. The Premier Eleven power amplifier is described as a 'baby Premier Eight' and was seen in Chicago as the MV70 but has been upgraded to warrant the Premier status. At \$2995, this represents Premier's entry level.

Air Tight made good with the gorgeous ATC-2 pre-amp, a full-function beauty seen only as a drawing in Chicago. Unison again showed the amazing and gigantic bronze/wood sculptures I'm afraid to call mere integrated amplifiers. From **Yakov Aro-nov**, a 60W stereo amp for under \$2000. **Solo Electronics** offers a pretty integrated amp, the 320 delivering either 2x8W in triode mode or 2x50W in pentode. **First Sound** made an active version of the delightful passive pre-amp by adding some valves to create the Line Stage 1. But all seemed, well, conservative when you consider **Wave-stream's** 200W all-triode

monoblock. They call it the V8. Why? Because you could mistake it for a car power plant.

With all this retro in the form of tubes, what about analogue? **Benz Micro** flew the flag with a full display of cartridges, sharing space with the **Lukaschek PP1** phono amplifier, while **Expressive Technologies** displayed the SU-1 moving-coil step-up which I mistook for an overkill Yankee mains purifier. **Immedia** had on show the beautiful, finished versions of the RPM-2 turntable and a prototype arm. I saw a full display of **Thorens** units, **Oracles**, the massive **Forsell** and more. And there were lots of specialist LPs seen here and there. But I couldn't clear my mind of the terms 'horse', 'dead' and 'flogging'. Yes, the times they are a changing. But I never thought I'd live to see the day when CES stood for Cinema Enthusiasts Show. ↕

*If you thought that digital
processors and Dolby
Surround could not be 'high
end', think again . . .*

by **PETER J COMEAU**



LEXICON CP-3

The CP-3 follows the trend set by Yamaha in the field of home music enhancement using digital sound processing, and is able to transform the acoustic environment surrounding the listener in a variety of ways

One day, while visiting a low-rise ranch in California, Al Bone Jnr picks up a slim remote and idly presses a nondescript button in a playful sort of way. Suddenly, a projector TV rises out of the centre of the coffee table, while a Stewart projection screen descends. A sound that seems to build up from the uttermost depths of the earth surrounds them with its demonic fury, bringing them trembling to their knees until, with a flourish of tinkling carillon from the heavens, the screen is lit with ...'PRESENTED IN DOLBY SURROUND'.

Prior to this, a slim black box, almost hidden in a wall of amplifiers, announced itself through its fluorescent orange display as a Lexicon CP-3, and the originator of the dynamic sound expansion from the Dolby logo on LaserDisc. Lexicon will be better known for its digital signal devices used in professional sound installations.

Featured proudly on the front panel is the LucasFilm THX logo which identifies the processor as certified for Home THX use, but this is only part of the function of the device. The CP-3 follows the trend set by Yamaha in the field of home music enhancement using digital sound processing, and is able to transform the acoustic environment surrounding the listener in a variety of ways. Where Lexicon scores over its predecessors – and it does so in a giant leap – is in the way the design experience gained in the professional field has been realised for home use.

PRE-AMPLIFIER DUTIES

First and foremost, the Lexicon CP-3 can act as a pre-amplifier, with inputs for four audio sources, three of them having parallel composite video inputs. This is all right for AV use, but not generous, allowing typical sources such as LaserDisc, VCR and television TV and FM tuners to be switched. For combination with a

hi-fi system you will almost certainly want to put the processor in a tape loop, to allow connection to tape recorders etc, unless you restrict CD to your LaserDisc player and audio-tape recording to a hi-fi VCR. Alternatively, you can front the audio-only input with a passive switching unit to allow for extra inputs.

For this class of pre-amplifier we need to be more critical than normal in assessing the effect of the unit on a music source. Traditionally, AV components are notoriously poor in comparison with specialist hi-fi designs on a performance versus price basis, so we often have to make allowances for all the other functions provided, such as video switching and Dolby Pro-Logic decoding. The Lexicon, however, is presented as a device which will draw the listener 'more deeply into a musical performance or film'.

One button on each remote handset (two types are supplied) performs a wonderful function: Effects Mute. With this key, all signal processing in the CP-3 is cancelled, and the unit acts as a straight input switch and volume control. The button toggles the 'effects off' action so that repeated pressing shows the differences between the sound with and without, digital processing.

Compared with a passive pre-amp the CP-3 has a decided pruning effect on the straight audio signal, marginally reducing the brilliance and tonal depth of a recording and bringing a slight 'shut in' effect to the overall acoustic as portrayed by a serere pair of speakers. Actually it is surprising how this latter influence is ameliorated by the music surround mode; judicious use of the controls can bring the scene round in the Lexicon's favour. There is little loss of rhythm or pace through the CP-3; once again emotional involvement with the music is clouded in the straight-through mode, and there is little doubt that there is some reduc-



DIGITAL PROCESSOR

SYSTEM MUTED
E10 TELEVISION

VOLUME

BANK

MAIN MUTE

EFFECTS MUTE

World Radio History

You can use the auto setting to suggest a manual setting by winding the input level right up, playing the source, and then watching the auto circuit optimise the level

The CP-3 offers a range of frequency breaks from 63Hz to 175Hz. As a result it is now possible to balance the timbre of male voices on the centre speaker

tion in low level detail too. Despite this departure from the 'straight wire with gain' ideal, this is still a fine preamplifier and, to a certain extent, is able to make good through its surround enhancements.

CONFIGURATION

There are two aspects to configuring the CP-3 to your own system. The first is a necessity: informing the unit about your speaker set-up and personal preferences. The second you can play about with as much as you like. Configuration is a job for the installer but, like most features on this processor, should hold no qualms for the user, as the detailed instruction book and on-screen menus guide you through the functions. Having named each input – and the name stays on the display while you are listening, so you might as well remind yourself what you are connected to – input levels can be optimised. Each input has an independent manual and automatic level setting, the latter acting as a peak signal detector. You can use the auto method to suggest a manual setting by winding the input level right up, playing the source, and then watching the auto circuit optimise the level. This little feature is one of the ways of making sure the digital circuits work with minimum distortion and noise. The unit has the capability of a 110dB dynamic range with odd-order distortion components occurring at around the –90dB level, so this input calibration method is a good way to maintain performance.

Also provided is a slow gain-riding S/N optimiser which adjusts signal levels within each of the processor modes. Sometimes this produces a slight clicking noise in the rear channels when it is operated during long quiet passages in music or films. The answer is to turn it off and, as this is optional for each input, I would deselect it for LaserDisc or CD where it proved annoying.

The CP-3 really needs eight loudspeakers and channels of amplification to show off all its talents. These comprise left, centre and right front channels and associated subwoofer(s), two side and two rear speakers. The side speakers are almost mandatory for THX, whilst the rear are used in ambience recovery and generation modes. If you have THX-certified side speakers with their forward and rear-facing lobed output, however, it is possible to dispense with the rears. There is an option for a mono rear speaker, but bear in mind that the unit carries out decorrelation for the Dolby Surround effects channel, so a pair of rear speakers will provide better results. If you are using standard, non-THX

speakers it is worthwhile investing in the extra units and amplification for the sides as well as the rears.

As is typical in THX systems, a separate line-level subwoofer output is supported with automatic crossover above 80Hz at 24dB per octave. Similarly, an option in the speaker configuration menu will activate a high pass filter to feed frequencies above 80 Hz only to the front speaker amplifiers. This may not suit some satellite/subwoofer combinations but is a necessary requirement for the THX spec. As I used an REL Stadium subwoofer with its own active crossover and amplifier, this excess filtering disturbed the integration throughout the bass range. Lexicon's instruction is to run the front left and right speakers full range and split off the subwoofer output from them, which REL also prefers. Unfortunately, this lessens the advantages of reduced bass level being fed to the smaller speakers unless this is managed by the subwoofer itself.

Sub-bass boost can be applied to the front speakers, though why anyone should want to do this I have no idea – surely Lexicon does n't expect their unit to be used with a loudspeaker system deficient in low bass? Low frequencies can easily be diverted from the centre channel, with a more sophisticated choice than the usual Dolby Pro-Logic Normal/Wide options. Bass Split separates bass from the centre channel and pushes it into the L/R or subwoofer channels. Instead of the fixed, usually 100Hz, frequency split used in standard decoders, the CP-3 offers a range of frequency breaks from 63Hz to 175Hz. As a result it is now possible to balance the timbre of male voices on the centre speaker; too high a split gives a thin rendition while a much lower frequency provokes too much chestiness.

PROCESSING

Being an all-digital circuit, Lexicon takes a unique step in sound processing with the CP-3; all incoming signals are delayed by 20ms before output. To put your mind at rest, Lexicon points out that film sound reaches the front row of a cinema audience at about this time. Actually 20ms is too short to notice, and if you hadn't read this in the theory book you would never know. But this all-pass delay is not a result of the processing; it is there for a reason.

Dolby Pro-Logic processors improve their performance over the simple matrix Dolby Surround decoding by 'steering' a sound image to the requisite channel for output. By sensing relative signal strengths in adjacent channels, logic steering uses feedback and level adjustment to

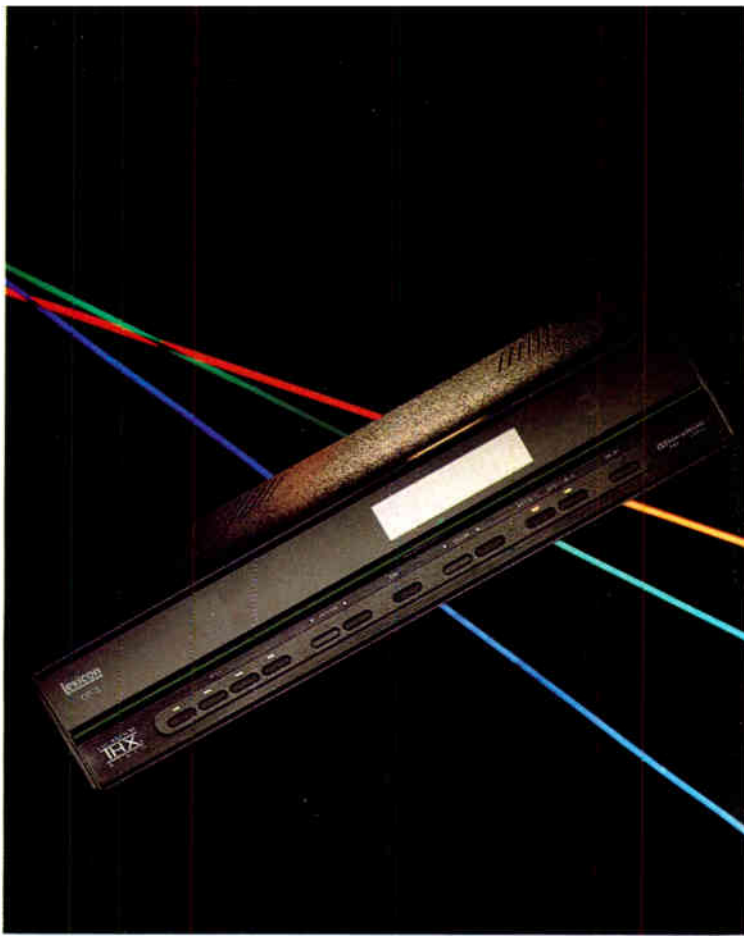
emphasise the dominant signal and reduce crosstalk between channels. In most processors this would be an instantaneous operation, though almost impossible to action on a multitude of high-magnitude audio images across all four channels, sometimes carried out in the digital domain. By delaying the signal, Lexicon allows its digital processor plenty of time for evaluation, and adjustment to crosstalk suppression, before the sound is output. Clearer dialogue and a better spread of ambient material is the claimed result, especially where there is a lot going on in the effects channel.

By far the most outstanding part of the CP-3's performance is its digital reverberation, as used in the music modes. All the processors I have so far tried have a degree of artificiality about their efforts to enhance the acoustics of a stereo recording, mainly because the added reverb sounds too gritty. With the Lexicon, however, design experience in studio installations shows in the quality of the reverb. You can have fun with the CP-3 by playing a solo voice or unaccompanied chorus and winding up the RT in the Large Room Reverb mode to 5.2 seconds. Then just pause the CD and listen to the reverb tails dying away. This is about as close as you can get to a spring reverb unit sound without the honkiness of the latter. To turn your listening room into a cathedral, increase the Pre-Delay to 80ms and Effect Level to –6dB, and reduce Treble Rolloff to 1.7kHz with Speech Detect off. With a simple choral CD it is remarkably like Kings' College, Cambridge.

It is important not to be put off by the factory pre-set parameters in each mode. For instance play *The Köln Concert* with the standard settings in 'Music Surround', and the spread of Keith Jarrett's piano is offputtingly large. Reduce the Centre Level to '14', increase the Rear Delay to somewhere between 12 and 20ms, depending on listening room size, and try changing the centre delay between 1 to 3ms; you'll know when it sounds right. Just a few tweaks and you have something which might just add a touch of extra acoustic involvement, bringing you closer to the music. The point is not to be afraid to experiment; parameter adjustment is not just a novelty but a tool to enable you to tune the processor to your taste, and with very fine adjustment.

On the expanded handset there is a group of buttons labelled (none too clearly if you are short-sighted) for the various modes from Mono Logic through Ambience and Music Surround to THX. Each of these fifteen modes has three banks for parameter adjustments; a factory preset bank

DIGITAL PROCESSOR



and two user banks labelled A and B. You can alter any parameter in any bank, but only the adjustments in banks A and B are stored if you switch the unit off. The easiest way to use this facility is to set up your main preferences in bank B, as five of these custom modes can be called up by the second remote.

This is the handset you can leave lying around for anyone to use: simpler one, offering five modes labelled Night Club, Concert Hall, Music Surround, Television and Movies. Actually switching the unit on using this handset means that no one can muck around with your precious settings; all the customisation commands are disabled, leaving only balance, volume and input switching available, plus Effects Mute for straight stereo.

But is all this jiggery-pokery any use for real music? Well, it all depends on how you view a hi-fi system. If you enjoy the expanded sonic universe that Dolby Surround brings, and want to apply it to music, then the flexibility in tailoring the effects to your needs is unparalleled by simpler devices. If, however, you have a purist approach to music reproduction, believing that the recording is sacrosanct, then it is unlikely you will want the CP-3 in circuit. But note that some of the modes act as ambience extractors, not generators, retrieving buried ambience and reverberation from the recording itself. This can yield a quite natural acoustic from simpler classical recordings, whilst releasing a wealth of material from pop

records. Try 'Welcome to the Pleasure Dome' by FGTH; you will certainly hear another 25% increase in the effects that Trevor Horn mixed in, probably using a Lexicon too.

Crying 'out, out damned spot' over digital devices is a common, and partially blind, statement by fanatical audiophiles over interference with the purity of the signal path. I have to say that the Lexicon does not *sound* digital in that there is no extra brightness, hash or even background noise apparently added to the signal. Even if you wish to switch the unit out of your pre-amp's tape monitor loop for stereo listening, the television mode is highly useful for both mono and stereo programme material, though the main interest must be in the THX implementation.

USING THX

You can plunge straight into the THX mode without adjustments if, like me, you are too impatient to find out what the Lexicon can do. The first thing you notice is that the surround speakers disappear acoustically. For the first few days you will toggle the effects mute switch on and off just to make sure those four extra channels are working at all. Mind you, when they are turned off, the whole sound-field collapses in an alarming manner as if the acoustics of your listening room have been sucked into the front speakers.

The only time the side speakers appear to come into action is when sounds are panned from front to rear – the so called fly-by. The rest of the time they are just subtly recreating

the recorded, or concocted, acoustic; sometimes the walls of your listening room are blown away. In the night club scene in *Bugsy* the creation of the surroundings is almost tactile. Tinkling of glasses, near table conversation, shuffle of dancing shoes all accompany the band and immerse the listener in the atmosphere. Part of the reason for this outstanding performance is the low noise floor of the decoder which allows the softer sounds to stand out against a remarkably quiet background. Re-viewing *Dances with Wolves* proved astonishing. Off-screen sounds such as rustling grass, dogs barking, the lulling sounds of the wash of water against a river bank all combined to intensify the emotional response.

As you continue to live with the Lexicon THX system other extraordinary things start to happen. It is so easy with Dolby Surround almost to distance the sound from the screen image, especially if you set the effects speakers at too high a level. But the CP-3 manages to enhance your visual perspective so that sounds take on a palpable texture which relates to that perceived by the visual cortex. Not only is the advance in audible detail matched by improved visual perception, but as sounds become sharper so colours become brighter! I can only put this down to an improvement in concentration.

But these contributions are very software-dependent. Poor post-production sound-mixing stands out too. Sounds that do not originate from the correct position as given by the visual clues are picked up immediately. One of the intriguing aspects of the fly-by panning technique is that you continue to visualise the sound source after it disappears off the edge of the screen. Several times with the Lexicon I was sure I had seen some detail, only to find on replay that it was a sound image only.

Like music records, films are quickly graded into good and marginal on the basis of their sound as well as visual appearance. Funnily enough, the overt use of the effects channel (as in *Top Gun*) becomes a bore, smacking too much of the old quadraphonic approach, and one longs for the greater sense of realism engendered by well produced soundtracks such as *Bugsy*.

CONCLUSION

The Lexicon brings a new level of enjoyment and accuracy to home theatre, enabling not just a level of sonic resolution that advances the art of Dolby Surround, but bringing an implementation of the THX standard that heightens involvement in the worlds of fantasy and experience that good films create. †

Do not be put off by the 45 effects settings that are stored in the unit; these just add to its flexibility. Thirty of these are user-adjustable for permanent storage, and some thought has been put into the methodology

In the night club scene in *Bugsy* the creation of the surroundings is almost tactile. Tinkling of glasses, near table conversation, shuffle of dancing shoes all accompany the band and immerse the listener in the atmosphere

Supplier:

Celestion International, Foxhall Road, Ipswich IP3 8JP. Tel: (0473) 723131

*Following the popular
Alpha model, the Alpha
Plus aims to continue
Arcam's successful CD run*

by MARTIN COLLOMS



ARCAM ALPHA PLUS

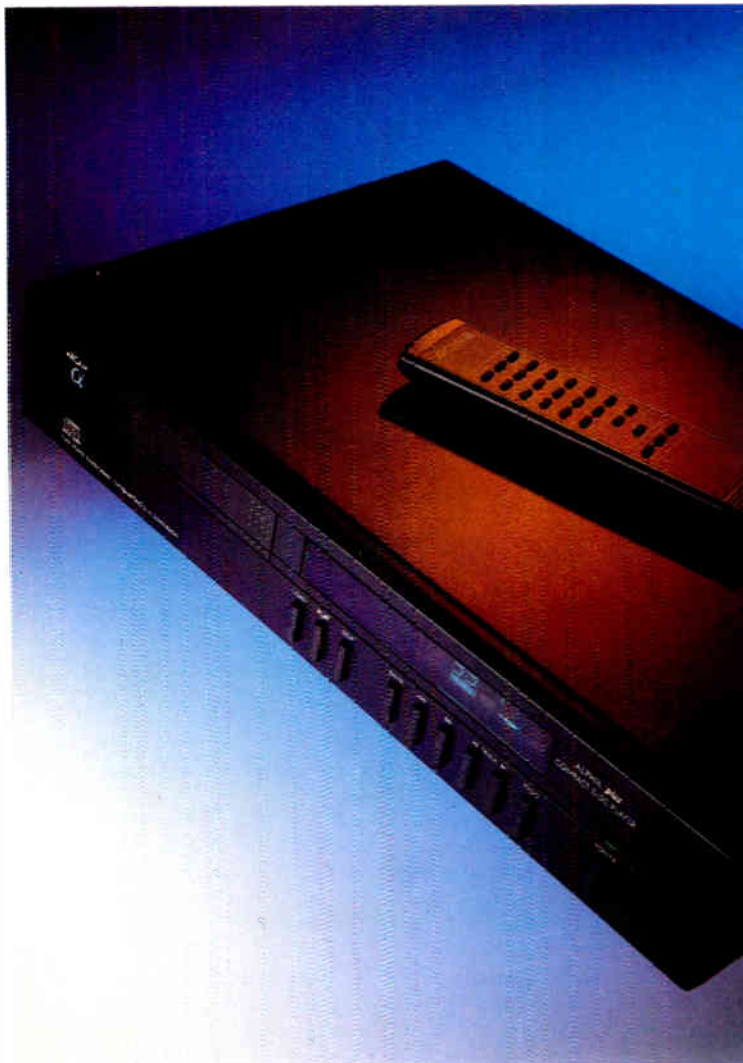
Certainly there have been improvements in such hi-fi aspects as greater clarity, a more tuneful bass, plus a purer, more detailed and sweeter treble – a sound nearer that expected from good bitstream examples

The Arcam Alpha CD player is one of the laudable survivors of the Philips/Marantz series of multi-bit designs. Based on technology which matured over five years ago, the first Alpha achieved a top position in its class. More refined than its equivalents, with an outright advantage in subjective performance, it managed to preserve the multi-bit strengths of good dynamics and rhythm with a level of clarity and subtlety which went a long way towards satisfying bitstream fans.

Rather than redesign the player after its highly successful three-year production run, or scrap it in favour of some new fangled recipe, Arcam chose to further develop the Alpha to produce the Alpha Plus, priced at £450, including remote control. In fact taking inflation into account the cost has not risen since it was first introduced.

Outside, little has changed, and this neatly presented unit still conforms to the Arcam Alpha styling convention. The disc drawer is located on the left for this full-size machine. Positive action buttons on the fascia provide the usual basic facilities, while the simple, recessed vacuum fluorescent display provides information on tracks and timings. The latter are accessed via the 'time' button on the remote control, and cover track time, overall time and time remaining. The volume buttons on the remote are not operational with this model.

Up to 20 tracks may be programmed in any order. Extra facilities on the infra-red handset include a 10-key pad for rapid numerical entry, and repeat plus index location where the disc is so programmed.



TECHNOLOGY

The Alpha Plus is fundamentally based on Philips engineering and a Philips CDM4 transport plus 'mono-board' are incorporated, stripped down to Arcam's own specification. In contrast with simpler conversions which may involve only higher quality output stages, Arcam has added much of its own work to this model. For example, the existing power supply transformer has been moved to a less critical area (on the right) and is allocated to the transport and digital sections.

A second transformer feeds the new decoding and analogue board which has integral rectification and smoothing. Adjustments to the Philips section include a damping pad on the disc clamp arm, and a rubber damping sleeve over the quartz crystal to reduce the jitter-inducing effects of vibration. Digital filtering is at a 4-times oversampling rate, with the Philips SAA 7220B chip which includes an S/PDIF coder. Data is linked via a ribbon cable to the new audio board where the dual 16-bit TDA1541A multibit converter resides. This stereo DAC benefits from local power regulation with

'337/317 chips, decoupled over a wide band by both electrolytic and ceramic capacitors. Active pre-filtering further reduces ripple levels.

Current-to-voltage conversion is by OP27 ICs, while de-emphasis is active using selected film capacitors switched by FETs. The output is delivered by the evergreen NE5534 op-amps, coupled by selected Black Gate capacitors, and the signal is muted non-invasively by a shunt relay. A DC offset is maintained to bias the output stage and capacitors.

Arcam has taken care to reduce the RF content in both ground and signal lines to meet EEC recommendations for this class of equipment. The all-metal alloy case also helps here. A good layout is evident and the player should be easy to service; in fact, Arcam backs this player with a two-year guarantee.

Existing owners wishing to upgrade to Alpha 'Plus' status may do so at a cost of £100. For this review we had an old unit for comparison, to aid us in our assessment.

SOUND QUALITY

A pair of Epos ES11 speakers (still favourites here) was partnered by

Musical Fidelity A1 and Rotel RA8290BX4 amplifiers. As well as the old Alpha, comparison players included the Marantz CD52SE plus an older (but unfortunately obsolete) Marantz CD60SE.

First impressions were of a sound that incorporated many of the better aspects of a good bitstream design. Stereo images had improved depth with superior low-level ambience; these were both rated as very good. Tonal quality was smoother and warmer-sounding while the treble was significantly improved, with less grain and a more accurate perspective. The bass region had also been cleaned up, with clearer tune playing and an impression of more bass extension.

Along with the obvious improvements, it soon became apparent that some other important factors had altered for the worse. The bass sounded softer and less authoritative while the mid was less dynamic, showing that mildly compressed effect, common with a low-bit system, and one which gives a feeling of blandness to the reproduction. Finally, the new version sounded 'slower', with a significant loss in rhythmic ability. Its replay was simply less involving – just 'average' here.

Returning to the original Alpha heightened this difference. On these grounds, the original was certainly preferred. The very qualities which distinguished this moderately-priced CD player from the common herd were largely absent from the new model. No doubt the end result is now more acceptable on a wider range of systems, but in my opinion the loss of involvement and excitement in the player's performance matters and, as a result, my score for the new Alpha Plus is just 14 – 2 or 2.5 marks lower than for the original.

LAB RESULTS

The test results were typical of the classic TDA1541 chipset. Channel balance was fine at 0.04dB mid-band with 1kHz separation at 100dB, falling to a very satisfactory 88dB by 20kHz. No interchannel phase difference was present and the frequency response met the usual tight limits, incorporating a small rolloff by 20kHz: -0.33dB on average, [Fig 1]. Output was 1.66dB above the 2V reference, measuring 2.42V. A low source impedance of 22ohms was noted. Very good S/N ratios approaching 110dB were measured, while the radio frequency signal content was quite low, mainly 5mV or so of 20MHz. There was no clipping in the white noise signal.

At full level, distortion was par for the course, -85dB at 1kHz, but a

little worse than average at 20kHz; the in-band noise measured at -74dB . This was also reflected in the high-frequency intermodulation results, -82dB of difference tone distortion at full level, and an improving -86dB at the 10dB lower modulation level. At -70dB , with encode dither, the usual mild distortion was present for this DAC, -40dB each of 3rd and 5th harmonic, but little else, these in practice -110dB relative to full level and considered pretty harmless. Exploring this test to 100kHz the spurs were well suppressed at -110dB [Fig 2].

At lower levels, the distortion remained quite low and the -90dB sine wave [Fig 3] was quite presentable, accompanied by some fairly innocuous 3rd harmonic distortion of absolute level, -112dB relative to full level, though -18dB relative to the actual 1kHz reproduced tone. A graph for linearity [Fig 4] gave very good results to -80dB with mild deviation thereafter. The level error at -90dB was -3.8dB left and -2.3dB right. Linearity was effectively 15.7-bit with a 108dB effective dynamic range.

Mechanical noise was low and very good gap error correction was achieved. The output was absolute phase correct and essentially linear phase. The review sample occasionally failed to respond properly to the reverse search button.

CONCLUSION

The news is not all good for the Arcam Alpha Plus. While the performance in the lab was well up to the expected standard, the sound quality had changed significantly. Certainly there have been improvements in such hi-fi aspects as greater clarity, a more tuneful bass, plus a purer, more detailed and sweeter treble – a sound nearer than expected from good bitstream examples. I would like to think that those other strong aspects of the original Alpha – namely the comparatively good rhythm and timing and the lifelike dynamic quality – were not merely accidental as far as Arcam was concerned. Yet the fact remains that those aspects have suffered in the Plus redesign. I have the original here as proof, and the differences are not trivial.

Without that rhythm component the Alpha CD becomes just another model and there's a wide choice of those. Personally I would not recommend the £100 rebuild for an old Alpha. The new model is just good enough for a recommendation with the usual warning to listen first. If meeting the European EMC regulations does this to a good player something is going to have to be done to restore the sound quality balance. ↙

ARCAM ALPHA PLUS

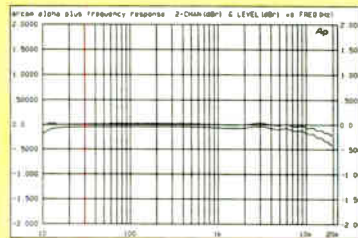


Fig 1. Arcam Alpha Plus: frequency response; above, left; below, right channel



Fig 2. Arcam Alpha Plus: spurs up to 100kHz associated with 1kHz tone at -70dB

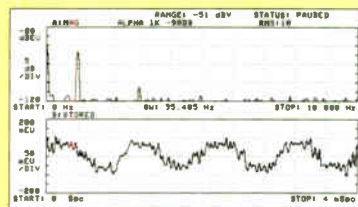


Fig 3. Arcam Alpha Plus: dithered 1kHz sine wave at -90dB , with distortion spectrum above

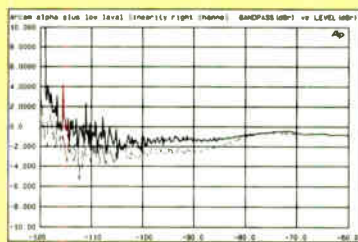


Fig 4. Arcam Alpha Plus: linearity plot below -60dB . Right channel – solid trace, left channel – dashed trace

Test results	Arcam Alpha Plus		
	20Hz	10kHz	20kHz
Channel balance (dB)	0.05	0.04	0.2
Stereo separation (dB)	100	100	88
Channel phase difference	0°	0°	0°
THD – 0dB	-93	-85	-74
THD – 10dB		-82	
THD – 70dB		-37	
Intermod 19kHz/20kHz, 0dB		-82	
Intermod 19kHz/20kHz, -10dB		-86	
Frequency response left (dB)	+0.01		-0.24
Frequency response right (dB)	-0.02		-0.39
S/N, 20kHz, unwd		109	
S/N, CCIR/ARM, 1kHz ref		107	
De-emphasis (error in dB) L/R	1kHz	5kHz	16kHz
	0.02	-0.00	25, -0.17
Output level, (0dB)	2.24V		
Output impedance	22ohm		
Track access time (Tr 15)	3.5 secs		
Error correction capability	gap 4mm		
Mechanical noise	low		
Spuriae up to 100kHz (dB)	-105		
Error at -90dB left/right (dB)	-3.8	-2.3	
Dimension (whd)	430x310x85mm		
Typical price (inc VAT)	£450		

First impressions were of a sound that incorporated many of the better aspects of a good bitstream design. Stereo images had improved depth with superior low-level ambience

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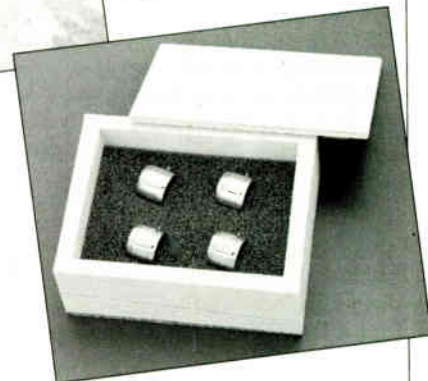
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*Marantz's budget CD52
MkII SE CD player offers
performance far beyond
its price tag*

by KEN KESSLER



This baby is firmly of the school which screams 'It's what's inside that counts'. A sturdier case or any restyling would have taken this out of the budget-audiophile category

Pointing out the confusion in the low-end CD market-place, Paul Miller showed how chaos reigns when too many manufacturers chase those budget bucks. His review of the Marantz CD52 MkII in the January issue described Marantz's latest entry at the £200 price point, noting the risk of rushing to market and issuing a run with naff parts; which, Paul added, Marantz did manage to catch. Thank goodness my exasperated colleague didn't know that Marantz had another giant killer hot on the MkII's tail, and costing a mere £100 more. As PM stated, the CD52 MkII he reviewed offers most of the CD52 (MkI) SE tweaks in a standard, non-SE model. How would he greet the (hasty) arrival of an SE version of the CD52 MkII?

Your extra £100 pays for some gold script on the front panel and a few primary internal changes. Note that some of the original (MkI) CD52 SE part changes do not feature in the standard, non-SE CD52 MkII because of their incompatibility with automatic component insertion machines; they are, however, ingredients of the CD52 MkII SE recipe: ● The basic transformer has been replaced with an improved version featuring oxygen-free copper for the primary and secondary windings; the core uses silicon plates (mu-metal), to raise the magnetic saturation level considerably.

● Two Cerafine power supply capacitors serve as the direct voltage feeds to the output op amps; the latter were changed from NE5532Ns to NJM2114Ds for the original '52 SE and then used in the standard '52 MkII. These offer improved capacitor matching after the rectifier and before the regulator, DC decoupling

MARANTZ CD52SE MkII

caps providing a clean supply to the analogue circuits. Sonic gains are better bass extension and tightness. ● The four Silmic coupling capacitors are inserted back-to-back, said to add a greater degree of resolution for a clean and detailed sound. PM noted that the Silmics have since been fitted to the normal '52 MkIIs in place of the Elna devices.

Aside from the gold label, externally this is the same unit as the normal '52 MkII, one which betrays its price tag because of its flimsy case; it could say Airfix or Revell and you wouldn't bat an eyelid. But this baby is firmly of the school which screams 'It's what's inside that counts'. A sturdier case or any restyling would have taken this out of the budget-audiophile category and shifted it up into the mid-market, where Marantz already has machines on offer. Flimsiness aside, it is remarkably well-equipped, with a full-function remote, a tell-all LCD panel, reasonable mechanical operation and subdued styling. Even if it didn't perform above the norm, it could still hold its own on the dealer's shelves. But let me clue you in on how special it is by offering two quotes.

The first comes from a hi-fi manufacturer who prefers to remain nameless. After I A/B'd the Marantz for him against a good £7000's worth of

high-end digitalia, he said, 'I prefer the vocals on the Marantz'.

And that cost less than the coax I was using to connect the high-end transport to the DAC.

The other quote comes from Marantz's Ken Ishiwata, who – all will agree – is the kind of person who never wastes words. When he says something, you listen. He said, and I quote him verbatim, 'At last, here's a product which I'm truly proud of.' This is from a guy involved with some of the best CD players of the past six years, alongside the Marantz Music Link amplifiers, which I reckon will be looked upon as classics in a few years' time.

Anyway, I slid the '52 MkII SE into a system which costs not unadjacent to £40,000. I expected to laugh. Or smile, at the very least. Instead, I sat down dumbstruck. I don't know what a standard CD52 MkII sounds like; Paul's review didn't exactly inspire me to kick down the door of the local Marantz dealer, or to send a bike messenger to Middlesex. If it is as good-but-not-great as Paul described, then the few mods needed to create what I heard are akin to what Carroll Shelby did to the humble AC Ace.

He turned it into a hairy monster called the Cobra.

The CD52 MkII SE is just as

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Theta's Pro Basic, an excellent example of a top-price digital decoder proving that multibit design can still hold its own

by MARTIN COLLOMS

Last year I assessed the Theta Data transport and DS Pro Prime decoder [*HFN/RR Feb '92*]. The Prime performed very well, proving to be a skilfully designed exposition of bitstream technology combined with Theta's proprietary digital signal processing expertise. The DS Pro Prime has a more costly brother with a potentially superior performance but confusingly called the Basic. Now in 'Generation II' form, the Basic was originally derived from Theta's top-line model but lacks the latter's exotic Teflon printed circuit boards as well as



A SWEETER THETA

certain other details.

While the Prime is low-bit, it looks as if multibit will remain the choice for top-end models for the next year or two at least. Advocates of low-bit technology have accused multibit of a variety of technical sins, but the design has been steadily advancing to a point where many of these criticisms – low-level linearity, resolution or distortion – are only relevant to older (and by now obsolete) applications. For example, multibit is often accused of being flawed by the need for a high-order analogue brickwall filter, yet nearly all such non-over-sampled designs passed into history five years ago.

What matters most is sound quality and, while there is much common ground, each decoder type undoubtedly has its own characteristics. Regardless of absolute merit, these differences do matter in the context of system matching and they may lead to a preference for one type or another.

With the pace of change in digital replay it is dangerous to generalise. Multibit is reputed to be harsher and brighter than low-bit and yet good models now exist which contradict this statement absolutely. Low-bit often has softer bass definition, but examples using this technique, such as the Meridian 606 and Theta Prime, have particularly firm, solid-sounding bass. Multibit is reputed to have poor linearity but the majority

of recent examples have very good linearity. It is the quality of the application of a given technique which matters more than the technology itself.

The DS Pro Basic is a slim-line digital decoder with a wired digital input via gold-plated phono sockets. AT&T or other optical inputs may be fitted on request. A lever switch allows for absolute phase inversion, accomplished in the digital domain. Audio output is at a higher level than usual from a source impedance low enough to drive any pre-amp or passive controller. A balanced output version of the Basic is also available. Another option will use the unit as a decoder with line inputs and volume control facility. For this review, the matching Theta Data digital transport was used.

TECHNICAL REPORT

Built in a strong, steel case offering good shielding, the Pro Basic uses single board construction with an integral power supply. DC switching selects between the three digital input options via phono terminals, but Toslink and AT&T input options are also available (the latter at extra cost). Optional phase inversion is by 'twos complement' inversion. The supply begins with a wide-band line input filter leading to a fuse with contacts exposed at mains potential. Two C core power transformers are fitted, one for analogue and the other

for digital, and the design physically separates the primary and secondary windings to give improved electrical isolation. A high power TO3 regulator feeds the extra demand in the DSP section.

In the original model the S/PDIF input was captured by a Yamaha 3623 chip backed by a VCO to reduce jitter, but Theta now uses a decoder from Crystal, the CX8412 with even lower jitter as of right. With proprietary interchangeable Theta digital software, the interpolation, filtering and oversampling are accomplished using a pair of DSP 'engines', the established Motorola XSP5600. High performance can-type regulators feed the DACs and analogue stages. The DACs are a pair of selected, matched Burr-Brown PCM61P[k] with OP12 I/V conversion. In this new Mk 2 version a PCM67P[k] has been substituted with AD829 for I/V which includes selected Vishay feedback resistors. The PCM 67 is an unusual design, a hybrid chip combining multibit for the top 10 loudest bits and a compact, Delta Sigma or low-bit part handling the eight lowest bits. In theory, the dynamics of a multibit converter will be complemented by the low level resolution and linearity of a low-bit type. With only an 8-bit dynamic range for the pwm section, simple first-order noise shaping is sufficient, while an offset is introduced to displace the zero crossing transition into the upper-bit

The Basic excelled in establishing a magnificently proportioned and expansive soundstage. It was hard to criticise any aspect of the stereo images it produced. Focus was excellent, complemented by very fine depth, the latter well served by generous quantities of low-level detail and ambience

THETA DS PRO BASIC

range where it does least harm. Given the potential quality sought for this Theta design, this unit provides something of a test bed for the hybrid DAC. The outputs are corrected for DC offset. De-emphasis appears to be in the digital domain, and minimal passive filtering leads via a short path to the zero loop feedback unity gain output buffer, a heatsinked BUF03, passively corrected for DC offset. The whole signal path is thus DC coupled. All this reflects good, contemporary practice in decoder design and augurs well for the sound quality. A pre-amp version will also be available with volume, balance etc.

SOUND QUALITY

The Basic was assessed using my Wilson WATT 3/Puppy 2 loudspeakers, Audio Research CL120, Krell KSA 150B and Meridian 605 power amps, with pre-amplifiers being the Audio Synthesis switched passive controller and the Audio Research LS2. CD transports comprised the Theta Data and Data II, Accuphase DP-70V and Meridian 602, with cables by Siltech.

Reference decoders included the Meridian 606, the Micromega Duo, the Theta DS Pro Prime, Audio Synthesis 'UA' and 'DAC7', plus the Accuphase DP-70V.

Contrary to comment in *Stereophile*, [Robert Harley on the Theta Prime], given an A/B situation and working with the Data transport, I found no difficulty in distinguishing between the Prime and the Basic. The latter presented a substantial uplift in sound quality, commensurate with the price differential involved. Good as the Theta Prime was, the Basic was unquestionably better, and the result, in combination with the Data, was so close to the state-of-the-art in many respects that in alternative systems one might well prefer it to the notional top-rated competition.

The Basic excelled in establishing a magnificently proportioned and expansive soundstage. It was hard to criticise any aspect of the stereo images it produced. Focus was excellent, complemented by very fine depth, the latter well served by generous quantities of low-level detail and ambience. Stage width was also up with the best.

Where the Prime could sound a touch larger than life, and rather close, the Basic units gave a more correctly distant presentation with superior perspective. The fine bass performance of the Prime was seen as merely a starting point for the more dramatic and articulate slam of the Basic, which possessed that characteristic US 'high end' authority.

The Basic's clarity, neutrality and

purity rivalled the best bitstream models, especially in the treble and midrange.

Very good detail and instrumental differentiation was evident throughout the midrange, placing the Theta in the top category of CD replay in this respect.

There were no sonic problems relating to digital replay and the results were consistently musical, enhanced by its good dynamic and transient rendition. The competition was left sounding rather bland and unexciting in comparison.

In the context of digital replay, the pace and rhythm aspects of the Basic I were rated 'good plus'. Very few could better this standard but unfortunately, the MkII's rhythm was inferior – significantly so when rechecked against the Accuphase DP-70V. After exhaustive comparisons, a score of 33 was arrived at, this in conjunction with the Data II; and a mark or two should be deducted if a lesser digital source is used. If the new model's timing and dynamics had been better, a reference level approaching 37 could have been achieved, and this should be borne in mind in your system.

As a transport, the Data II excelled in matters of purity and clarity. It added no hardness to the sound and the treble was delicate and transparent. The bass showed a strong, firm character, at its best when the mechanical grounding point was used. Transports also show variations in rhythm and timing, and in this respect the Data is perceptibly 'slower' than a Meridian 200 or Accuphase 70, though neither matches the subtlety of the Theta laser disc-based design.

LAB REPORT

Channel balance was very good throughout the frequency range, while the channel separation results were a fine 108/105dB for left and right at 1kHz, though not as good as the earlier model which gave 130dB mid-band. No interchannel phase difference was present, while the audio output was essentially linear phase, absolute phase correct. Phase inversion may be accomplished via a front panel switch. Frequency response was excellent, essentially free from ripple and showing no premature rolloff.

Distortion at full level was poorer than expected although at nearly 0.01% it can hardly be considered a cause for concern as it was of innocuous low harmonic order. At this point it was noticed that the distortion results differed for the two channels and that some low-level fault was present on the left channel. A second sample had to be obtained

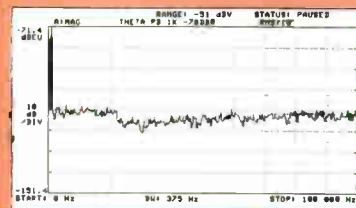


Fig 1. Theta Pro Basic 2: spurs up to 100kHz associated with 1kHz tone at -70dB

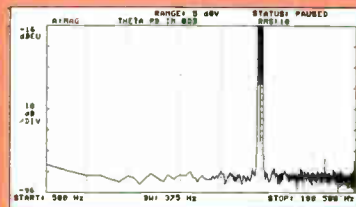


Fig 2. Theta Pro Basic 2: intermodulation spurs from 19kHz/20Hz tones at 0dB

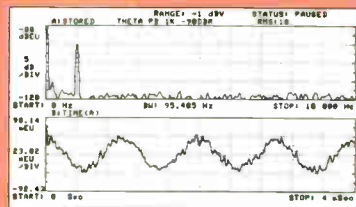


Fig 3. Theta Pro Basic 2: dithered 1kHz sine wave at -90dB, with distortion spectrum above

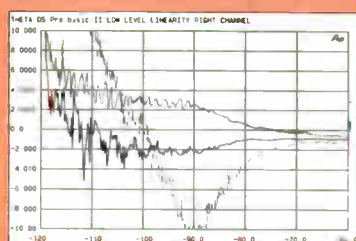


Fig 4. Theta Pro Basic 2: linearity plot below -60dB. Centre trace is 2nd (correct) sample; hand-drawn traces are 1st sample errors

Test results	Theta DS Pro Basic		
	20Hz	1kHz	20kHz
Channel balance (dB)	0.12	0.12	0.13
Stereo separation (dB)	115/106	108/105	84/101
Channel phase difference (°)	0°	0°	0°
(dB) THD 0dB	-81/90	82/90	>90
THD -10dB		74/82	
THD -70dB		23/40	
Intermod 19kHz/20kHz, 0dB		94/103	
Intermod 19kHz/20kHz, 0dB		84/89	
Frequency response left (dB)	-0.01		-0.03
Frequency response right (dB)	-0.01		-0.04
S/N, 20Hz-20kHz, unwd		-100/80	
S/N, CCIR/ARM, 1kHz ref		85/94	
Output level, (0dB)	2.08V		
Output impedance		20ohms	
Spurs up to 100kHz (dB)	-91		
Error at 90dB L/R (dB)	-20	-0.5	
Dimension (mm) (WDH)	482x370x60		
Typical price (inc VAT)		£2,299	

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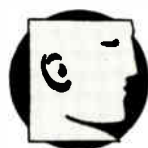
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[the auditioning refers to this second sample] and then the results were good for both channels. The high-frequency intermodulation results were very good [Fig 2]. The virtual absence of high-frequency tones associated with these high-frequency fundamentals indicated high-class digital filtering, reflected in the Theta's price.

The distortion improved relative to full level at -10dB and at lower modulation, to normal programme levels. By -70dB the usual rise in distortion was present -30 to -40dB. With the -70dB dithered tone analysed to 100kHz [Fig 1], the band-limited spectrum can be seen to have an excellent low noise floor, settling at -110dB over this analyser window. Overall, the spurious outputs were typically 107dB down, and signals in the radio frequency band to 100MHz were mainly simple noise, less than 7mV.

De-emphasis was very accurate; and while the Basic I delivered a high 6.63V output at peak bits, 10.4dB above the nominal 2V, the Mk2 gave a more sensible 2.08V just 0.34dB up on the standard. Equally surprising was the very low output impedance of 2 ohm. Thus any input, any cable,

any passive controller and any power amplifier could be driven by the Basic. The review model came with unbalanced and balanced outputs. Specific linearity was good, with the measured error at -90dB held to a +2dB left and -2dB right. Charted for low-level linearity, using Audio Precision's special digital generator function, the output was accurate right down to -110 dB.

Though marred by some residual noise, the CCIR/ARM [1kHz] signal-to-noise ratio measured 100dB. The Basic II retrieved a very satisfactory -90dB sinewave and the accompanying spectral analysis [Fig 3] indicates negligible distortion at a noise floor of -118dB relative to full modulation. It has a fine 108dB dynamic range together with an effective resolution of 15.7-bits, close to the theoretical ideal of 16.

CONCLUSION

I found the Theta Pro Basic MkII to be a fine decoder which, in combination with the Data 2 transport, had no problem whatsoever in demonstrating the requisite margin of superiority over the Theta Prime - good as this more moderately priced unit was.

The high score obtained placed the Basic II close to state-of-the-art, indeed within the boundaries of experimental error and, even more importantly, system matching, the Data/Basic combination approaches the current reference, the Accuphase DP-70V. There was not much to choose between them, just a few per cent either way.

Like the Accuphase, the Basic is a well-ordered design with good filtering, and there are no spurious high-frequency signals to complicate system matching. There is no doubt that the field of digital replay is moving forward very fast indeed, and so last year's reference can fall back to the merely 'good' or 'very good' within the space of a comparatively short period of time.

Discussion aside, the Basic is a very worthy digital decoder, of excellent build and transparent sound. Compared with its competition, the price is more realistic than most, and I can recommend a product of this calibre notwithstanding the reservation on its rhythmic performance. Ironically, the Mk I was better in this respect. Like the Prime, the Basic gives of its best in conjunction with the Data transport. †

Good as the Prime was, the Basic was unquestionably better, and the result, in combination with the Data, was so close to the state-of-the-art in many respects that in alternative systems one might well prefer it to the notional top-rated competition

CD PLAYERS

◀ dangerous. Why? Because it offers performance so far beyond its price tag that it must be a guaranteed sale to any audiophile who doesn't mind its flimsy build quality. Or, more accurately, to any audiophile who doesn't care what label is on the fascia. But before you cancel your order for a Wadia, look at what it cannot do.

For starters, there's a mild haze, a slight lack of transparency which keeps you from mistaking it for a Krell or a Theta. Because it features digital output, I was able to assess the CD 52 MkII SE's transport's contribution away from the DAC and output sections; it was not the primary cause of the haze, even though it was easily distinguishable from the Krell MD-20 transport as being less transparent.

Next up, the frequency extremes are not as clearly defined as through state-of-the-art players. The bass is not as rich nor as solid, but we're talking extremely low frequencies; considering that this is likely to be used in systems with smaller-than-Diva speakers, I doubt it will be detected by most candidates for '52 MkII SE ownership. The treble,

though, seemed slightly less authoritative than the Krell/Vimak or Krell/Krell pairings, regardless of speaker type used.

Er, that's it.

So insignificant are these weaknesses that identifying them borders on the sadistic. Instead, look at the Marantz's virtues. The midband is positively luscious: rich and fluid and warm, like a tube amp or an LS3/5A. The soundstage is full and convincing, with a slight degree of recession at the centre which suggests deeper front-to-back dimensions: a boon if your system is lacking in this area. And because it is not in your face, the sound lacks aggression, usually the curse of budget gear pretending to be what it is not.

Given the slight failings at the frequency extremes, it is a pleasure to note that everything from the lower/mid bass up through the middle reaches of the treble is consistent, smooth and coherent. It calls to mind the ingredients of classic, affordable, 'small' components: magical mini-monitors like the LS3/5A, Dynaco 35W/channel tube amps, AR turntables, basic Denon m-c cartridges, entry-level Sennheisers, the Audio

Alchemy DAC and the like. And so satisfying is its performance, the minor zits obscured by a psychologically applied dab of Clearasil, that you can get away with it when using it out of context. In other words, I've had it in my reference system for a week and haven't suffered withdrawal symptoms.

Which leads me to an announcement: The CD52 MkII SE just may be the biggest bargain in digital hardware available as of early 1993. While it is not a challenge to the high-end aristocrats - especially if customers want/need more than mere sound quality - it is good enough to serve as the source for any audiophile who's shallow of pocket, without ever reminding the listener (via the ears) that he or she has purchased something so inexpensive. Add it to an AMC integrated tube amp, whack on a pair of Mission 760is, Celestion Ones or Tannoy 603s and you have a system for under £900 (or a thou if you add some decent cables and stands) which will never let you down in any room under 4x5m square. And anyone who sniffs at the sound is a fool who likes hi-fi rather than music. Amen. †

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*NAD's 302 amplifier –
all set to step into the
giant killer's shoes?*

by ALVIN GOLD

Under the skin, the 302 is an updated 3020i, but the changes are extensive

One well-known measure of maturity is when policemen seem younger than yourself. Another, perhaps more reliable measure, is being able to remember when the NAD 3020 was introduced (you're still in the kindergarten if you need to be told what the NAD 3020 is). Those who were around at the time will remember the tide of interest in this inexpensive and uncontrived amplifier whose design was predicated on sound first, gadgets second and build quality last.

Gradually, the 3020 came to acquire the reputation of a giant killer and NAD's walkover success with it may have partially blinded NAD's engineers to other product areas. The 3020 remained the backbone of the range, and ultimately the only real star. Of course, there have been a number of iterations on the 3020 theme, but few of the higher cost derivatives convinced – not because they were objectively deficient, but because the peculiar alchemy that made the 3020 special was the wrong mix of virtues and vices when translated to higher price points, and when teamed with less compromised or high-end ancillaries.

Although the 3020 has continued to be a successful, even desirable, product, it is no longer pre-eminent. Hence the 302, whose name is clearly designed to establish the succession whilst drawing a line under the original model.

The 302 responds to changing times in various ways. Since the 3020 was designed, there has been a general increase in the requirement for amplifier inputs: for example to accommodate compact disc (yes, the 3020 goes back *that far*), hi-fi VCR sound, and imminently, digital home recorders. Accordingly, the 302 has six input circuits, including two tape



NEW BABY THE NAD 302

circuits, one of which allows independent third-head monitoring off-tape. Tone controls are retained, but a tone bypass facility has been added.

Look around the back, however, and you will see all the old NAD trademarks, including a 'soft clipping' switch to apply compression at high levels to reduce the danger of output stage clipping, which should be regarded as a party-only switch to be avoided in normal use. The output stage can also be switched from 4 to 8ohms, giving a mix of current and voltage drive to suit the loudspeakers, though the 4ohm setting is normally preferable, sonically.

The most useful feature here, however, is the ability to separate the pre-amp from the power amps, which could be used, say, with an outboard Dolby Pro Logic processor, say, though the feed comes after the volume control. It will otherwise be of benefit when upgrading the pre- or power amp. Tip: replace the metal pre- to power amp links with short screened connectors to improve sound quality. The casework is new, but very much in the NAD idiom. It's a neat and attractive design built to a quality commensurate with its £159 price-point.

SOUND QUALITY

The NAD 302 amplifier was tested mainly with the output stage switched to its 4ohm setting, with the soft clipping circuit deactivated. For

once, the effect of bypassing the tone controls was palpably beneficial. One key comparison that I was able to make very late in the day was with the latest Mk II version of the Denon PMA-250, an amplifier which is as important to Denon as the 302 is to NAD, and which costs just £10 less.

Of the two, the NAD 302 has somewhat less reach and poise when extended. The Denon yielded sustainable average listening levels of the order of 90dBA with 88dB/W speakers in a medium size room, which is a couple of decibels clear of the NAD when used with the soft clipping circuit deactivated. Soft clipping allowed the NAD to close the gap, but at the cost of clear, though episodic, signs of gain-riding and compression.

More relevant to most users, however, was the nature of the differences at lower SPLs. An early indication of the way the two would shape up was with a song called 'Whatever Happened To The Blues' from Phil Upchurch. This track was originally chosen as a warm-up, but the drum sound drew attention to key differences between the two amplifiers. The drum kit is particularly well miked in this recording, and via the NAD it reproduced with greater impact, freedom and spaciousness, especially from the bass drum. This finding was subsequently repeated with many types of music. Similarly, on Mary Chapin Carpenter's 'I Am A





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**HI-FI NEWS
McDONALD**

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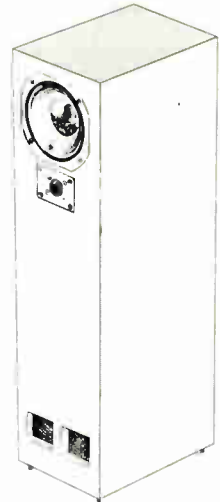
The kit is available in three forms.

The *basic* kit which contains just the drive units and kit crossovers.

The *plus* kit as above but includes acoustilux, wacoustic panels, gold plated binding posts, grill studs, grill fabric, internal wiring and a set of spikes.

The *total* kit as above but includes flat pack cabinets accurately machined from 18mm M.D.F.

Dimensions 1024 x 274 x 375mm



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<i>Plus Kit</i>	£329.00	<i>Carriage</i>	£10.00
<i>Total Kit</i>	£459.00	<i>Carriage</i>	£20.00

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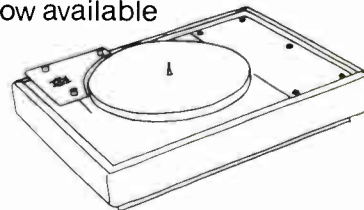
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Town', a simple acoustic recording, the NAD demonstrated a muddled vocal sound and a loss of air and spaciousness. It was probably predictable that switching to a Pioneer A-400, a fine benchmark for low and middle-price amps, would result in a larger scale yet more sharply focused and clearer style of sound reproduction. The difference in price and engineering is, after all, substantial.

That similar findings would apply to the PMA250, however, was more surprising. In both comparisons, the NAD sounded attractive, but restrained dynamically and sometimes a little muddy in texture. These differences impeded access to the lowest levels of detail, such as much of the finger noise of the acoustic guitar accompaniment and the lower level ambient cues, which led to a sharp reduction in depth perception.

The Denon doesn't have things all its own way. It has a nice, crisp quality that makes it instantly appealing, but the qualities of the NAD are a little more subtle, and tend to insinuate themselves, as if by osmosis through the pores of the skin. The overt clarity of the Denon paid dividends with some vocal material and more generally with densely scored material, but the NAD had a fine, organic quality that made for some beautifully expressive chamber and small scale (especially early) orchestral music. The phono input, tested with a Roksan Corus Blue cartridge equipped Systemdek IIX turntable, was mildly coloured, but detailed, refined and, on the whole, up to the standard of the line inputs.

LAB REPORT

Under the skin, the 302 is an updated 3020i, but the changes are extensive. Power output has been increased from 20 to 25W/channel, with matching improvements in HF dynamic output, up to 50W from 40W. Current yield and the ability to drive low impedance loads cleanly are also better according to NAD, courtesy of a change to new Sanken bipolar output devices with higher current and voltage ratings than their 3055/2955 predecessors. Heatsinking has also been uprated. A number of individually small revisions have been made to the power amplifier to improve behaviour into complex, reactive loads; but although it is hard to upset the 302's poise seriously, some residual sensitivity to loading remains in the form of larger than expected changes in sound quality with different loudspeakers and cables. The same cables performed more evenly with other amplifiers.

Measured at the 4ohm and 8ohm settings of the rear panel switch, the former consistently gave much

higher output volts and watts at some cost to output current. Into a 4ohm load, for example, the NAD delivered 38W with the 4ohm setting, and only 25W at the 8ohm setting. The equivalent single channel, 8ohm figures are 60W and 45W respectively. Peak available current was reduced by a manageable 20% (approx) at the 4ohm setting.

The pre-amplifier section has a lower value and therefore quieter volume control pot than before, and the tone control circuits are fitted with feedback loop. Other changes also contribute to improved edge-of-the-envelope distortion, especially at high levels and high frequencies, which is confirmed by the excellent measured figures for THD and intermodulation, even on the re-engineered phono input, and by the spectrum analysis, which are essentially clear of harmonically related trash. Noise is also more than adequately suppressed under all conditions of use. None of the inputs will overload in normal use, but they all show high levels of input capacitance and care must be taken to keep input signal leads short if in-band treble roll-off is to be averted. Channel balance deteriorates significantly at low settings, though I've seen worse. Again, DC offset wasn't exactly vanishingly small, but it resulted in no more than an innocuous mild thump when the amplifier was connected to the load.

Remaining circuit changes are concerned with a 'revised' power transformer with better regulation, higher capacity reservoir caps (now 6800µF/50V from 4700µF/35V), and improved local regulation of the pre-amp and at the input of the power amp to improve noise rejection. The output stage wiring has been made more direct to give what is described as a much lower output impedance and better loudspeaker damping. The final value remains not especially low, and varies with frequency. The mid-frequency damping factor of 40 for an 8ohm load is satisfactory.

CONCLUSION

The 302 sounds more articulate and together than its predecessor; it also has more inputs and a cleaned-up fascia. I would judge that, with certain reservations (not least when reproducing female voice), the 302 is easy on the ear and noticeably lacking in the grit and grain that can afflict budget amplifiers. At the same time, it seems to have failed to pull ahead of the competition, an observation that its opposite number from Denon brought home all too clearly. The NAD 302 is a good buy then, but on current form it is less than an essential one, and certainly not one to get the adrenalin flowing. ✗

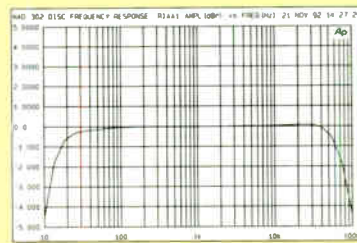


Fig 1. NAD 302: frequency response, LP disc (phono, m-m) frequency response (RIAA accuracy)

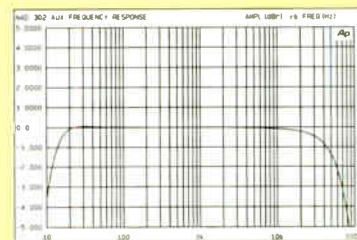


Fig 2. NAD 302: frequency response, aux/CD input

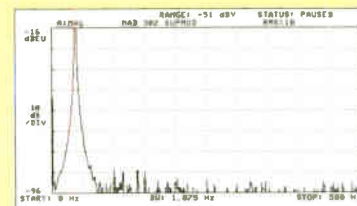


Fig 3. NAD 302: supply modulation test, 37.5Hz at 2/3 rated power into 4ohms

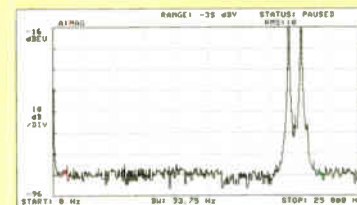


Fig 4. NAD 302: intermodulation, 19kHz/20kHz/20kHz tones at full level, aux input, at rated power

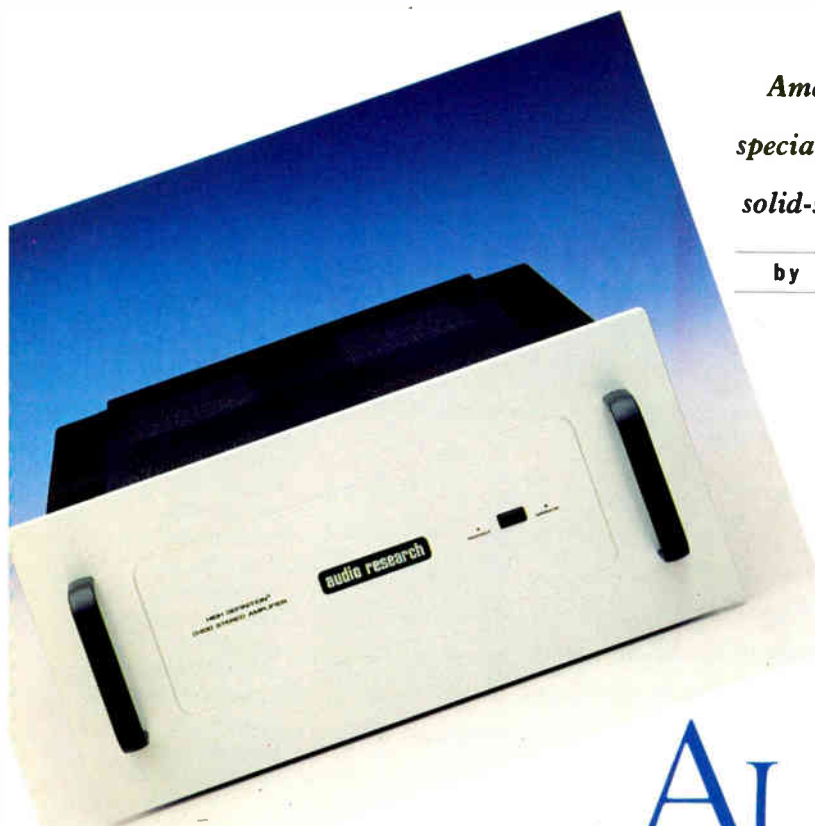
Test results		NAD 302		
		20Hz	1kHz	20kHz
Power output				
One channel, 8ohm load (dBW)		14.9/16.9	14.9/16.9	14.8/16.9
Both channel, 4ohms, pulsed (dBW)		12.8/14.1	12.8/14.1	12.8/14.4
One channel, 2ohm pulsed		13.5/15.5	13.5/15.5	13.5/15.5
Instantaneous peak current		+10/12A -10/12A		
Total Harmonic Distortion				
at rated power, aux/CD input (19/10kHz 1:1)		-81dB	-81dB	-67dB
at 0dBW disc (m-m)		-80dB		
Intermodulation distortion (19/10kHz 1:1)		at 0dBW disc (aux) -92dB		
Noise				
Disc (m-m) i/p IHF CCIR wtd		-75dB		
Aux/CD i/p IHF CCIR wtd		-83dB		
Residual, unwtd (vol at min)		-85dB		
DC output offset (tape o/p)	L=10mV R=10mV			
DC offset (pre-amp)	L=0mV R=0mV			
Input Overload				
Disc (m-m) i/p (IHF)		35.4dB	35.0dB	35.4dB
Aux/CD i/p (IHF)		>28dB	>28dB	>28dB
Stereo Separation				
Disc i/p (m-m)		60dB	60dB	60dB
Aux/CD i/p		66ohm	66ohm	58ohm
Output impedance (damping)		0.20ohm	0.20ohm	0.26ohm
-4ohm o/p setting				
Channel balance, m-m, 1kHz				
Volume/balance tracking				
Aux/CD				
Input Data		sensitivity	loading	
Phono m-m i/p for 1w o/p	0.56mV	47kohm/300pF		
Aux/CD i/p A weighed for 1w o/p	36mV	22kohm/450pF		
Power amp	-210mV	18kohm/850pF		
Output pre-amp (tape)	+16Vmax	2500ohm		
Disc equalization error 30Hz-15kHz	+0.08dB/-0.20dB			
Dimension (whd)	420x110	x 315mm		
Typical price inc VAT		£159		

Look around the back, however, and you will see all the old NAD trademarks, including a 'soft clipping' switch to apply compression at high levels to reduce the danger of output stage clipping

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*America's leading tube
specialist launches a second
solid-state power amplifier*

by **MARTIN COLLOMS**



AUDIO RESEARCH D400

A larger companion for its first solid-state power amp, the D240, Audio Research's D400 is a stereo chassis offering (as the name suggests) 200W/ch (8ohms). As Audio Research puts it, the D400 offers freedom from maintenance and tremendous reserves of power: it weighs a massive 33.2kg (73lbs) overall. A single pair of speaker terminals is fitted, these custom-made gold-plated binding posts also with 4mm sockets. Audio input connection is unbalanced via phono sockets, or balanced by means of channel pairs of phono sockets and by the more usual three-pin XLR alternative. When operating in unbalanced mode the unused phase is taken to ground via a shorting link (supplied): due to the high input impedance, full performance will not be obtained otherwise. A three-year non-transferable warranty is given.

Having chosen solid-state technology for the D400, the designers were clearly determined to produce a relatively cool-running, high power, high current, load-tolerant model.

Excluding the drivers, the direct-coupled complementary output stage uses 16 large Sanken multiple emitter output transistors, with above-average bandwidth and linearity.

They are connected as emitter followers and are biased by a sophisticated tracking circuit which is based on FET control. Altogether, 20 FETs are used per channel. If these have a sound, it has a chance of dominating the end result.

Negative feedback is held to the very low value of 9.3dB and a very good reactive load stability is assured. Audio Research is proud to claim a massive 600joule power reservoir (summing both channels), while two E and I power transformers are fitted, the smaller to provide good isolation for the driver and input sections of the amplifier. Heavily soldered connections are used throughout; Audio Research eschews the use of crimp or press-fit connections. The amplifier idles at around 110W/channel, of which around 80W is estimated to be enriched Class A/B biasing of the output stage.

SOUND QUALITY

Listening was carried out over an extended period, with a variety of ancillaries. Control units included the Audio Research LS2, Krell KSP-7B and Conrad Johnson PF1. In the main, the loudspeakers were WATT 3/Puppy 2. We also tried the Quad 63 and the Acoustic Energy AE1. Cables

were Siltech and custom silver types.

First observations indicated that the D400 had considerable headroom in terms of both a generous maximum loudness and a clear tolerance to a variety of loads. Its almost valve-like character was consistently expressed with the several speakers we tried. Don't get me wrong – neither the D240 nor the D400 can directly replicate or replace the liquidity and delicacy heard from the finest vacuum-tube amplifiers, yet some of that ease, tonal accuracy and low fatigue factor was present in these solid state designs. Moreover, their sound with a wider range of speakers may be relied upon.

There can be no doubt that the D400 has some 'character', which means that there may be more dissenting opinions than usual as to its absolute quality. On the other hand in some systems it may fit so well that it becomes the preferred choice regardless of absolute ratings.

While it handled rock and jazz well, it was evident that the replay of classical programme was its forte. Here it showed excellent dynamics from the low midrange to the uppermost treble. Those impressively realistic peak levels were achieved with very good purity and a noted absence of compressive hardening, strain or edge. String tone was excellent. Brass instruments appeared authentic while big orchestras sounded big, their sense of scale conveyed well. At the limit, it was this proper soundstage dimensioning at realistic levels which helped us to distinguish the D400 from the D240.

If the upper treble range was not quite so grainless and transparent as an Audio Research Classic 120, the D400 midrange was quite something nonetheless. It set very high standards for articulation and definition. There was a feeling of tight, crisp control, of pinpoint focus and exposition, and an almost spotlight effect for nearfield soloists – an intriguing subjective effect. Midrange sounds had presence, yet this was achieved without apparent tonal emphasis or imbalance thanks to a virtual freedom from 'solid state' hardness.

Stereo images were presented with very good width and overall focus, while some mild limit to transparency and image depth was noted. However, the crisp definition for soloists still lent a good feeling of perspective to the soundstage. Good levels of recording ambience were established, though I would swear that an equivalent Audio Research valve model would have still more retrieval of ambience.

I have left the low frequencies until last: here personal opinion becomes a more influential factor. By 'super

AUDIO RESEARCH D400

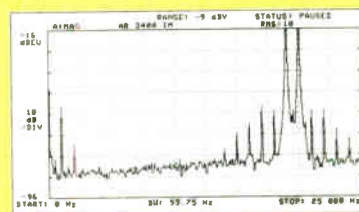


Fig 1. Audio Research D400: high-frequency intermodulation, 19kHz/20kHz tones at 0dB

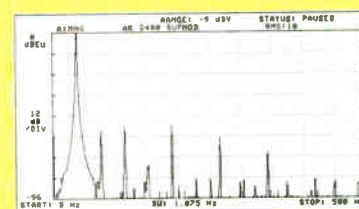


Fig 2. Audio Research D400: power supply intermodulation test, 37.5Hz at 2/3 full level into 4ohm load

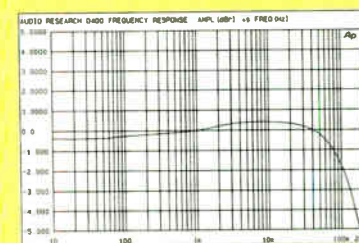


Fig 3. Audio Research D400: frequency response to 200kHz, 1dB/div

amp' standards the D400 bass was more colourful than some, and may even be preferred in certain circumstances. There was no doubt concerning the fine depth, overall power or quality of 'foundation', but compared with the midrange performance the definition was notably softer. A hint of a 'boxy' or 'wooden' coloration was present. The bass was slower and softer, altered by a 'springy' effect. None of these characteristics were in any way severe, but the standards set these days are very high.

Likewise, the very good dynamic quality and good timing shown over most of the frequency range was not fully echoed in the bass, and this lapse was easier to hear on rock.

Taking into account all these factors, and applying my usual listening-test marking system, a most respectable score of 18.5 was obtained. This places the D400 in the top category of audiophile amplifiers even though it is not top of the tree. Put in context, the LS2 line controller points to an even higher standard and yet gives the D400 ample opportunity to perform at its best.

LAB REPORT

Specifications for power output of 200W 8ohms (23dBW) and 400W, 4ohms, 20Hz to 20kHz, were met on test, with only a negligible 0.1dB shortfall into 4ohms, both channels driven, at 20kHz! Overall the power results indicated excellent load tolerance and a very wide power bandwidth. Peak current of $\pm 53A$ represents an ample reserve, sufficient indeed for bursts equivalent to 1.4kW rms into 1ohm.

Output impedance was quite constant at a tenth of an ohm over the audio range giving a damping factor of 80 into 8ohms.

In this 'low-feedback' amplifier, no attempt has been made to conjure up artificial and meaninglessly low distortion figures. At full level, the distortion was -50dB (0.3%) at low and mid frequencies reaching -44dB (0.63%) by 20kHz. But the distortion products were of low harmonic order, pretty harmless subjectively, and they quickly reduce to negligible levels at lower powers.

At full level, the high frequency intermodulation spectrum was quite rich [Fig 1] with first and higher order difference products evident. The 1kHz difference of a 19kHz/20kHz input was seen at -52dB, not a serious level. By 0dBW (1W, 8ohm), the distortion was fine at -82dB, 0.008% and quite harmless.

Strangely, this amplifier did not deliver good channel separation results, measuring 56dB mid-band and just 46dB up at 20kHz. Since 80

to 90dB mid-band is not uncommon, with rarely less than 70dB at high frequencies, one wonders whether the more moderate separation figures for the D400 are intentional.

Good signal-to-noise ratios were delivered, though with some of the most sensitive loudspeakers (such as the Tannoy Westminster Royales) some mild background hiss might just be noticeable. Channel balance was excellent, while unwanted DC offset was held to negligible levels at the output.

An easy to drive 150k-ohm input impedance was measured (300k-ohm balanced differential) and 2.12V sufficed for full power. This was too insensitive for direct connection of a 2V output CD player.

Tested for supply intermodulation [Fig 2] at 2/3 rated level, stressed by a 4ohm load, the spectrogram showed harmonics related to the fundamental at 37.5Hz, but negligible 50Hz mains supply-related components were seen: this was a good result.

Interestingly, the frequency response was not perfectly flat, measuring -0.4dB below 100Hz, +0.4dB over the treble range [Fig 3] and falling to -0.5dB by 61kHz and -3dB at a high 130kHz. No significant band limiting was present. At low frequencies it was very well extended, to less than 0.01Hz for -3dB, 0.02Hz for -0.5dB. (A second sample measured similarly, at +0.38dB over the treble.)

It is to be expected that with critical listening this mild tonal uplift would be audible, and it may partially explain the characterisation of higher definition and precision in the upper midrange. It is rare to find even a mild response tilt in an audio power amplifier.

CONCLUSION

This is a likeable amplifier. Powerful in the US 'super amp' tradition, this solid-state unit can amplify wide-range music signals to levels where a valve/tube design would be left gasping with the more difficult loudspeaker loadings. The D400 sound is eminently relaxed and musical, free from solid-state edge or hardness, and yet is able to carry midrange detail and dynamics at a state of the art level. It is highly load-tolerant and inherently unflappable, a 'fit and forget' unit for a high end audio system. It legitimately belongs to that select group of references offering its own unique blend of qualities. At this level the validity of a recommendation to a given purchaser will depend as much on the applicability of the matching system as the opinion of the reviewer. In context it is realistically priced for its combination of power and performance. ✓

First observations indicated that the D400 had considerable headroom in terms of both a generous maximum loudness and a clear tolerance to a variety of loads

Test results Audio Research D400

Rated power 8ohms	200W, 23dBW*		
4ohms	400W, 23dBW*		
Measured power (at 240V AC 50Hz)			
	20Hz	1kHz	20kHz
Continuous 8ohms 1ch (dBW)	23.8	23.8	23.6
Continuous 4ohms, both (dBW)	23.1	23.1	22.9
Burst 10ms 8ohms (dBW)	—	23.9	—
4ohms (dBW)	—	23.6	—
2ohms (dBW)	—	23.3	—
Output impedance (ohms)	0.1	0.1	0.11
Harmonic distortion			
Rated power 8ohms	-50dB	-50dB	-44dB
At 0dBW 8ohms	-80dB	-80dB	-79dB
Channel separation	56dB	56dB	46dB
Intermodulation distortion			
(19kHz/20kHz 1:1)	rated -52dB; odBW -82dB		
Peak current via 1ohm, 2.2µF	+53A -53A		
2m sec pulse	—		
Signal-to-noise (full gain)	rel. 0dBW	rel. full level	
22Hz-22kHz	-80dB	-103dB	
'A' wtd	-77dB	-100dB	
Channel balance	0.02dB		
Input impedance	150k-ohm		
Input sensitivity	139mV/HF, 0dBW		
DC offset, I/R	2.12V for programme clip		
Frequency response	2mV/20mV		
	-0.5dB, 0.02Hz to 61kHz;		
	-3dB, <0.01Hz to 130kHz		
Dimensions (wdh)	430x230x532mm		
Typical price (inc VAT)	£5298		

*where 0dBW = 2.83V, or 1W/8ohms

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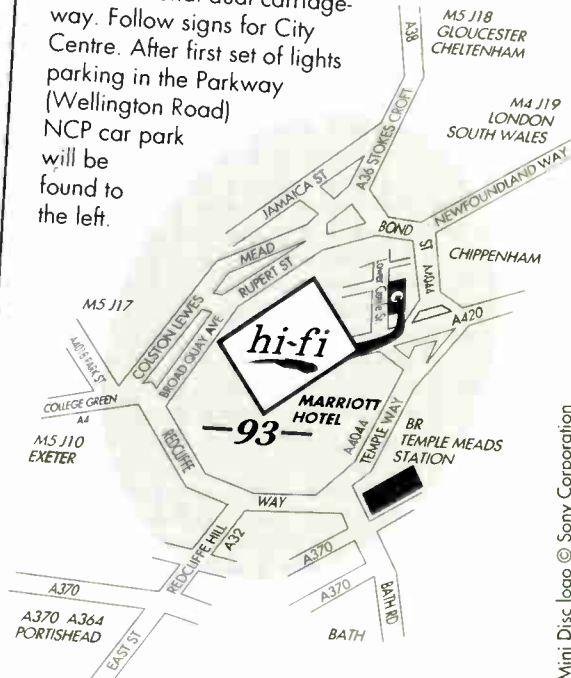
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Mini Disc logo © Sony Corporation



*Musical Fidelity offers
revamped pre- and power-
amp designs in chrome . . .*

by STEVE HARRIS

In these digital days, the term 'pre-amplifier' usually means nothing more than a set of line input and outputs with a volume control in between, but The Preamp 8 gives you moving-magnet and moving-coil phono capability as well

In the world according to Musical Fidelity, hi-fi listeners can be divided into 'A' and 'B' categories. But this is not some sinister selection theory: it just implies that some will prefer the sound of MF's 'A' series amplifiers while others will go for the more recent 'B' models.

The foundation of the 'A' series (and perhaps of the company's success) was the A1, in which a circuit designed by Tim de Paravicini was housed in an unusual casing with a ribbed top providing a heatsink. When running, this top surface became almost too hot to touch, which lent credibility to the early claims that the A1 operated in pure Class A right up to its rated output of 25W. In fact, the A1 circuit provides only a few watts of pure Class A power and so could best be described as 'enriched Class A/B'.

Although the 'Class A' marketing angle must have helped establish the product, the A1 survived on its own merits, overcoming early reliability problems. There was no doubt about the appeal of its sound quality, which had an immediacy and gutsy realism lacking in most of its mid-1980s competition. Then, in 1989, the first 'B Series' model, the B1 integrated amplifier, was first unveiled to the press.

The B1 (at least in its early form) along with subsequent MF solid-state models, offered an overt sense of high power, along with plenty of what KK calls testicular fortitude in the bass, virtues not very detectable in the A1. The 'B' listener would be attracted by these attributes, not missing the midrange and treble sweetness which were meat and drink to 'A' listeners. In other words (if this isn't beginning to sound too fanciful) the 'B' Series would please those who wanted a muscle amp on a budget, while the 'A1 sound' continued to please those who would have used valves but for the expense and inconvenience. The A1 went on selling.

Meanwhile, the circuit and the casework of the A1 were both used in various derivative models. The most obvious step was to offer a more powerful version, the A100: but more power meant more heat, and even Musical Fidelity's asbestos-fingered founder Antony Michaelson had to admit that the A100 got rather



MUSICAL FIDELITY

PREAMP 8/MA65

too hot. More successful was the MA50, a mono power amp containing an A1 board and summing its two 25W output stages to produce 50W.

Last year, Michaelson decided that it was time to provide a new pre-/power combination for the 'A' listeners. It was a relatively simple matter to beef up the MA50 to 65W (8ohms) to produce the MA65, a pair of which costs £875. And, in its own variant of the A1 case, The Preamp 8 (£299) is an attractive visual match. It is a tribute to the original industrial design, as well as to the reviving power of chrome plating, that this casework still looks fresh and modern. I cannot help feeling that to some eyes, the chrome front and black top may say *cucina* rather than *chic*, but at least the MA65 does not get quite hot enough to cook on.

However, it comes with a warning card which reads: 'Attention. This amplifier runs at high temperatures. Under no circumstances place anything over the unit. Keep out of reach of children. Position in well ventilated area.' Another red-printed notice informs the purchaser that Musical Fidelity products 'are not designed or intended for "disco-level" applications such as parties or extended use at very high sound pressure levels. Such use constitutes abuse of the units and renders the

warranty null and void. Damage caused by abuse will not be repaired under the terms of the warranty.' You have been warned.

In these digital days, the term 'pre-amplifier' usually means nothing more than a set of line input and outputs with a volume control in between, but The Preamp 8 gives you moving-magnet and moving-coil phono capability as well. In the usual sensible Musical Fidelity manner, the disc input sensitivity is switched by a discreet push-button on the back. Apart from the illuminated power-on button, the only front panel controls are the volume knob, a rotary source selector, and another button for tape monitor. There is no balance control or mono switch.

LISTENING

I don't know why this is called The Preamp 8, but in any case, rather than comparing it to The Preamp 3, I set it against the old Musical Fidelity MVT. Listening to CD through The Preamp 8 on rock and jazz revealed that it had much of the same basic character as the MVT, the perceptible failings being a somewhat soft bass (less so than with the MVT, though) and a slight lack of overall transparency. The Preamp 8 gave a feeling of crisper detail in the treble. It seemed that, by the same token, ▶94

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*Transparent in more ways
than one, the CLSIIz is the
latest version of a classic
American electrostatic*

by ALVIN GOLD

MARTIN LOGAN CLSII



When it was launched in 1984, the CLS established Martin-Logan as a force to reckon with on both sides of the Atlantic. A full-range transformer-coupled electrostatic speaker with some built-in active bass equalization, the CLS was unique in two respects. First, the diaphragm was built from several mechanically independent sections, angled to give approximately 30° of lateral dispersion. This helped counteract the usual criticism of panel speakers, that they have a very sharply defined listening sweet spot, making them, in effect, like giant headphones, suitable for only one person at a time.

The other unique feature, and the one that really set the range apart from its peers, concerned the structure of the transducer itself. Like all electrostatic diaphragms, the CLS was a direct radiator, that is, the driven part of the panel is also the bit that produces the sound. Unlike other designs, however, the diaphragm in the CLS and in all other Martin-Logan designs including the new CLSIIz reviewed here, is used 'naked'. The stator part of the system, the front and rear mesh panels, are polymer coated for insulation and cosmetic purposes, and an unusually high-resistivity coating on the diaphragm means that charge migration across the diaphragm is extremely low, with no need for separate layers of sound-absorbing plastic sheets or dust cloths.

Visually, there is nothing to distinguish the CLSIIz from previous CLS models, but this in itself is no bad thing for a loudspeaker that remains among the most striking ever conceived. Although it lacks the sheer elegance and liveable-ness of Martin-Logan's narrower hybrid models, the CLSIIz has an unrivalled simplicity of line. It takes up an inconveniently large proportion of the field of view from the listening hot seat, but the transparent mesh-covered diaphragm means it does little to impede the view if it stands in front of a window.

The CLSIIz is derived from the CLSII/a, and includes what the manufacturer describes as a 'strengthened transformer interface', and a version of the diaphragm/stator assembly capable of larger excursions. The most important practical difference is that the minimum impedance of the system is increased from 0.6ohm to around 1.5ohms (nominal impedance is 4 ohms). It is still a punishing load by normal standards, but the 'z' version does at least take a couple of steps back from the brink. As Martin-Logan points out, even amps that can deliver full power into sub-ohm loads are audibly happier

into higher impedance loads, and this is especially true of valve amps, which are commonly selected for use with the CLS, if only because they have a suitably exotic image.

Power handling has increased to a nominal 200W and sensitivity is increased to 84dB/W, a change for the better which goes some way to reducing the cost of ownership. The (still) relatively narrow dispersion of the speaker gives the sound a strong 'throw', increasing SPLs and presence at longer listening distances, although as noted, Martin-Logan's usual laterally curved diaphragm reduces 'beaming'. Low-frequency extension is also improved to a claimed 40Hz (-3dB). A switchable low-pass filter is also included to render the sound a little softer if it is found too analytical but, in the test system at least, its softening effect was not felt beneficial.

Any discussion of the qualities of a loudspeaker must be based on a clear understanding of the nature of the beast. With box loudspeakers, the essential character, pros and cons alike, tend to be almost intuitively understood, in much the same way that a discussion about TV picture quality doesn't need to spend much time pointing out that the picture is two-dimensional, or that it is drawn up from rows of multicoloured dots repeated every 1/125th of a second, fundamental as these things are. Similarly, with box loudspeakers, we are all accustomed to certain types of interactions with rooms which are attributable to their approximately cardioid dispersion patterns. We are used to their resonant bass character.

We are also familiar with certain more subtle phenomena, such as the compression that is caused by heat build-up in bass driver motor systems, and by the rather indirect nature of the drive unit system, which means that the drive-unit coil and the diaphragms are only rigidly coupled together at relatively low frequencies. Back with our television analogy, we tend to be tolerant of the inherent faults we have grown up with, but someone coming to television fresh would surely be much less forgiving of what he would probably perceive as gross and deep-rooted departures from reality. Translating this thought back to the realm of loudspeakers, the peculiarities of boxes have tended to become accepted just as the problems of panels have come to be overstated.

SOUND QUALITY

This helps explain the widely varying reactions I have had from listeners to the CLSIIz, which have often been polarised, according to whether or not the listener has experience of,

and was broadly sympathetic to, the sound of panels, though the split has been about 90% in favour. Superimposed on this was another altogether more rational spread of opinion, this time based on the success of the specific combination of equipment in use at the time. This is a roundabout way of highlighting the first important feature of the CLSIIz. This is a speaker which can be used with less than the most exotic amplification. Indeed, some of the combinations that worked best were among the least costly, whilst some notably expensive amplifiers failed to gel with the CLSIIz at all. From what I could judge, the problems were aesthetic rather than electrical in nature.

Amplifiers that worked well with the CLSIIz are exemplified by the butch super-amps from Krell and other US makers, whilst my own Michaelson Audio Chronos valve monoblocks sounded uncharacteristi-

Maker's specifications	Martin Logan CLSIIz
Frequency response	40-18,000 Hz 1-3dB
High frequency softening switch	-3dB from 1kHz to 10kHz
Impedance	40ohm nominal, 1.5ohm min at 20kHz
Power handling	200W, 60V peak/channel
Sensitivity	84dB/W
Dimensions (hwd)	1461 x 711 x 360mm
Typical price inc VAT	£3806

cally sloppy at times, and were judged less than a total success. Most will no doubt be delighted to hear that another less-than-happy pairing involved the use of the latest tidied-up version of the Audio Note Ongaku (single-ended triode output, 26W/channel, £43,000 approx), though its predecessor wove spells with the Quest, which more nearly suits this extraordinary amplifier's operating envelope.

Another amplifier that did not cramp the CLSIIz's style was the ubiquitous Pioneer A-400. This integrated amp was pressed into service in desperation for the purposes of a listening test at the suggestion of James Michael Hughes. It was used as a power amp with the volume control on full, driven by the output of a Krell KSL. Although I've heard a lot better, not least from the matching Krell KSA power amp, it performed with excellent definition, surprising control and real agility, and at volume levels that were often quite close to the speakers' limits with much bigger amps. The moral? Do not be put off the CLSIIz because of reputedly expensive tastes in matching amplification.

When the CLSIIz is on form, which was usually the case, it was pure magic. One of the special joys of a good panel is the way it can respond with absolute fidelity to the tiniest change in dynamics or phrasing. Instrumental textures were also illuminated as with few other speakers. Detail extraction was of a high order,

and even very subtle sounds are reproduced with an air of precision and clarity denied through most other transducers. CLSIIz bass is not to be compared with bass from most box speakers. It may be a little less deep and loud than a good box bass, but it has a complexity and depth that leaves ordinary bass sounding monochromatic and unconvincing.

At the same time I feel that large-scale dynamic swings continue to defeat the CLSIIz. Less so than with earlier CLS models, true, but although the bass is reasonable in normal circumstances, when pushed hard it fails to respond in kind, and at genuinely high levels with wideband material the sound tends to become thin and anaemic and, terminally, a little 'shouty'. The midband and treble may still respond cleanly at this point, but if the music in question is female vocal or choral, or in any case if it has a high upper midband content, the speakers can clip, producing a tearing type distortion at only moderately high volume levels. As you might expect, this effect was minimised with the amplifiers that exerted the firmest control, which is one argument in favour of some of the better US monster amps. They were often able to squeeze an extra couple of dB from the speaker, though this demonstrably had nothing to do with any lack of power in other combinations.

CONCLUSION

Enough of the ifs and buts. Although you would be ill-advised to buy CLSIIzs for disco-level rap or very loud parties, for almost any other purpose they are hard to surpass. As with their predecessors you still need to sit on the bisector to achieve optimum sound quality and stereo, but the losses off axis are less than with most panels, and they can be used successfully for listening in company. The nature of their stereo imagery is also rather better controlled than on many panels, though much depends on the placement of the speakers since, with inappropriate distances to the rear walls, the sound can de-focus and become washy.

When the CLSIIz is well set up, it is possible to produce extraordinary results. Play a small jazz combo, or a string quartet and the CLSIIz sometimes achieves the near impossible: a sound that hangs in the air, that sounds palpably real from outside the listening room, and that stays that way after entering the room. For all its limitations, I can recall no box speaker that under the right circumstances can even approach the CLSIIz's physical presence, spaciousness and delicacy. ♪

This is a speaker which can be used with less than the most exotic amplification. Indeed some of the combinations that worked best were among the least costly

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PHILIPS AZ6819 CD PLAYER 'SYSTEM'

This stylish and eye-catching portable CD is certainly remarkable in terms of the facilities it offers as standard. Perhaps the most interesting is the cordless transmission of the signal to the headphones. This is achieved by a radio transmission link working in stereo and as a result it includes a pair of rechargeable battery-powered headphones which can receive the transmissions from the CD player at considerable distance.

The other major feature is the remote control. This is not associated with the headphones and is a conventional infra-red linked type using the same operating protocol as other Philips mains-operated CD players. Used with the remote the player is installed on its base and is linked up to the plug-type power supply.

The base provides a convenient vertical strut for storing the headphones when not in use, and it also carries the interconnecting wires running between the power cable and the base, the base and the headphones and the CD player itself.

The player comes with a rechargeable battery pack giving 2-2½ hours of use and is charged when the player is installed on its power base. In addition to the cordless headphones (offering 4-4½ hours from a full charge) there are two more audio outputs. One is fixed level for feeding the line inputs of an audio system while the other delivers its signal to a normal headphone socket whose volume is controlled in steps using push-buttons on the top panel.

This CD player incorporates a digital signal processor which can provide tailored characteristics, processed for various frequency responses and for enhanced ambience. These latter effects are anything but subtle and have coarse, fixed settings. Standard controls on the remote include repeat, shuffle

play, scan, mute and program. The LCD display is both legible and of a decent size, showing tracks, a track calendar and track times, plus the total time, which is given when the disc is first loaded.

This player uses BitStream technology with one DAC/ch and promises good low-level resolution, one aspect which was verified on test.

SOUND QUALITY

The cordless headphones had a bright 'open' sound (a bit too bright) for my taste but not unpleasantly so. Quite good bass was achieved.

However, these headphones were quite heavy with a fairly tight ear pressure from the foam pads. Furthermore, the headphone band has no padding and rests with considerable pressure on the top of the head. The sound quality was not as good at low levels, with a fuzzy effect and some noise, possibly an artefact of the radio transmission link.

Certainly, when a good pair of Walkman-compatible headphones or earphones was substituted, a very good sound resulted, rather better than with the cordless type. They showed the CD player to have a powerful and clean sound, offering a good tonal balance and very good detail over bass, mid and treble ranges. Stereo focus was very good and this fact, plus its good recovery of ambience, all helped to place it close to the top group of battery-powered CD players.

I was not so keen on the settings for music types. For various reasons I found them to modify the sound too much to be credible. They sounded too much like sound effects and added an unwanted cast to a wide range of recordings, regardless of origin. The push-button volume control worked well enough on the headphone socket, covering the range in 16 steps of 2-3dB, though a little coarse for critical adjustment.

CONCLUSION

For a recommended price of around £300, the AZ6819 is a modern stylish CD player system which offers a remarkable package of features. This gives it a unique combination of flexibility and application. It is fully portable and with its rechargeable battery-pack low on running costs. It can drive headphones or earphones of choice well, but also has its own rechargeable cordless headphones, good enough for less critical use if not particularly comfortable. Once on its elegant base it becomes a mains-powered home unit, illuminated, and with an infra-red remote [supplied] as well as an output for an audio system.

Martin Colloms



SONY D303 DISCMAN

Sony makes a range of Discman pocket CD players, with a wide variety in size, price and facilities. As such, different models are targeted at different customers. Recently I was checking the range for what I would call a 'hi-fi' model; according to Sony, the D-303 is just such a product. It resembles the better looking designs from the competition and is superbly finished in a metallic charcoal enamel. Not the smallest or the thinnest CD player around, it is nonetheless compact and will slip easily into a larger pocket. For example, it is fractionally thinner and deeper than the classic model of this genre, the Technics SL-XP6.

Like the Technics model, the D-303 offers the great convenience of dual power operation, either a NiCd rechargeable unit supplied or a couple of AA alkaline cells. The D-303 rechargeable is one of the larger block types and the player accommodates both options by means of an ingenious hinged section in the battery compartment. A play time of 2 to 3 hours is possible from the rechargeable, with 3.5 to 4 hours from the alkaline cells. It weighs 450g with batteries and comes complete with a soft case that includes a wrist-strap. The supplied 'cans' are the earphone type, augmented by a very light folding headband. Using alternatives is complicated by the cord-mounted remote control unit, a feature which provides quite a range of facilities, eg track skip and search, stop, play/pause and volume.

The clever thing about the cable remote for the XP6 was its ability to feed any chosen headphone or earphone but, on the other hand, it has fewer facilities. A product which is feature-led remains a major aspect of the market and the D-303 may be extended in a number of ways. This takes it well beyond the specialised province of a pocket CD player. For example, if you want to fit other headphones they plug in directly. If, after all, you want to use them with a cord remote, this is available as an accessory which also plugs in separately. In addition, an infra-red remote handset may be added, but it is only functional when the D-303 is

Suppliers:

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Sony (UK) Ltd, Sony House, South Street, Staines, Middlesex TW18 4PF. Tel: (0784) 467000



operating with its supplied AC power-pack/charger. When this is operational, the audio line output socket is boosted from a base level of half a volt to a decent CD level of 1.5 volts suitable for a hi-fi system. Furthermore the unit has a digital audio output to drive other equipment. The link is optical, again only operational when the unit is on the AC power pack. Thus the D-303 is equally at home as a portable or in the living room, and a car pack further extends the user options.

The unit comes encased in metal with a good fit of parts. The conversion technology is '1-bit' promising good low-level resolution. Control facilities include 'resume' which will restart a disc at the point where the deck was previously turned off. The bass boost facility was effective and has three positions – normal, mid and maximum. Tracks may be programmed. Repeat modes include all, single and A to B phrase repeat. In addition, index points can be located, which is rare with a Walkman.

SOUND QUALITY

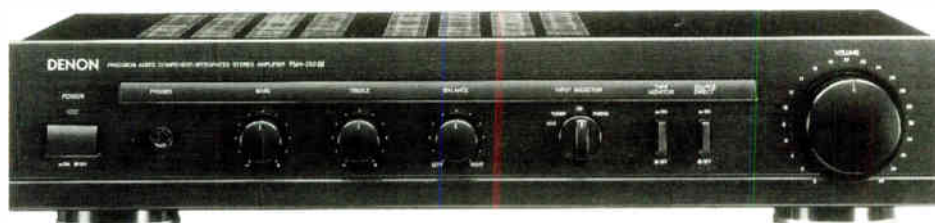
The supplied ear-phones were comfortable and gave a very clear, open sound, if a little on the bright side. I found the bass boost switch to be effective at its 'mid' position and this helped balance the sound. Unexpectedly deep, clean bass was possible, a pleasure on both classical and rock material. The player could also drive larger headphones of the more sensitive 'CD' or 'Digital' type and the sound was consistently impressive for low frequency reach and power. This sets a new standard for battery-powered products. Other aspects were also very strong, such as the articulate, detailed midrange and the clear, natural treble.

With wide dynamic range classical programme some CD Walkmans can sound veiled even to the point of audible quantization distortion on low level sections. Not so the D-303. Here the recovery of detail and ambience was consistently good. Timing was fairly good for a portable though it was not quite as taut or as rhythmic as the old XP-6. The extra resolution of the D-303 happily made up the balance, however.

CONCLUSION

The D-303 is rather expensive but can be justified in terms of the versatile power supplies, high sound quality, useful headphone remote control and its auxiliary facilities.

The build quality and finish were to the usual very high standard and this CD Walkman may be recommended for those prepared to pay a bit more in order to obtain a superior quality item. *Martin Colloms*



DENON PMA250III

Denon's amps have a good reputation, being reliable, well built and, on the whole, stylish. Their facility options were good, not over the top, not purely minimalist, and their power ratings were sufficient to drive most likely speaker loads with ease.

The latest in the line is a reincarnation – the PMA250III. Now in its third version, it offers all the usual options: tape, tuner, phono, CD and aux. A speaker-switching headphone socket is also fitted. Round the back, connections were RCA phonos for sources (nickel or steel, including phono) and 4mm banana sockets (which will also take bare wire) for speakers. Mains enters via a captive two-core lead which completes the ensemble.

Tone controls were fitted – but avoidable using the 'Source Direct' button. Connecting the amp to suitable ancillaries was a doddle, then it was left switched on overnight playing a CD 'till the listening began early the next morning.

Certainly, the initial (straight after powering up) impressions were of a brittle, hard-sounding and nasal amplifier, but by the morning, its true character was really beginning to show through. Using CDs to start with, the '250 showed a great clarity and unfussedness. The bass was a tad light, though deep, losing a little weight to higher-end amps, but was nevertheless tuneful and articulate. Using Christopher Herrick's *Organ Fireworks* the pedal ranks of the great Westminster Abbey organ could be distinguished in all but their true weight. 'Shop 'Till You Bop' on *The Fabulous Baker Boys* album left you in no doubt as to the dexterity of Brian Bromberg on bass, the amp faithfully reproducing every nuance and slide through the fast, tight bass riff. There was an openness about the reproduction, too, which left the impression that this was a more upmarket amp than it is.

CD presentation was relaxed, tactile, three-dimensional (for the price) and involving – a trait lacking in many of the '250's competitors. It was neither forward nor laid back, but balanced, making a creditable illusion of the recording acoustic, and it didn't get flustered when the going got tough.

Phono reproduction was not so endearing though. With difficult pas-

sages – Saint-Saens's Symphony 3 (The Organ) – the amp sounded veiled and a trifle muddled compared with the CD input, and the openness and clarity which earned such praise on CD had been replaced with a hazy representation of a soundstage.

However, with high-energy and high-level LPs this cleared up considerably, leaving only low-level information seeming a bit hazy. Perhaps the clouding effect is simply a result of low sensitivity to low-level signals as, apart from this anomaly, the phono stage performed very well. Winding up Steely Dan or Dire Straits, or even Prince (*Diamonds and Pearls*) and Michael Jackson on *Dangerous*, gave a good, lucid and tight presentation. The bass was a little slow and woolly compared with the CD input, and the treble was a little dulled at the top end, but the mid-band was clear, clean and open – until the level drops . . .

Tape inputs fared well, displaying none of the apparent quirks of the phono stage, except when making recordings from LP, when they became identifiable as such. Overall there seemed to be little treble roll-off, and bass was surprisingly tight for a tape input. Aux and tuner both gave a more than respectable and musical performance, the two being difficult to differentiate.

Overall, the amp was dynamic, open, un-fatiguing and musical. While the phono stage might be described as a bit flat, with the right material it performs well. CD fares a lot better, being able to retrieve low-level detail and capturing the recording acoustic well. Dynamics and bass were both good, ultimately being beaten by really complex material, but for most situations this amp coped well.

When the volume was cranked up the sound didn't harden until quite late on, and even into difficult loads – either my favourite Quad ELs or low-impedance power-hungry types. The amplifier had a wide tolerance even when driven hard to high listening levels.

Ultimately, a very creditable amp which will perform well. Sounding neutral overall, it will combine with most sensibly chosen ancillaries, and should find a home in a good many respectable budget systems with audiophile pretensions.

Chris Beeching

Supplier:

Hayden Laboratories, Hayden House, Chiltern Hill, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 9UG. Tel: (0783) 888447

potpourri

IT'S IN THE CAN

Headphone listening is an increasingly necessary pastime for many for whom a dedicated listening room or enough peace and quiet are sadly missing from their lives.

Sennheiser has three new models on the market at different price levels which may be of interest to those who have need of such devices. Model one is the HD440II – a green-banded plasticky pair with (to me) uncomfortable flat earpieces which pressed my sacred lobes to the side of my head with disquieting ease. That apart, they offered a good clear, deep and forward sound, but with little spatial differentiation. While their weight was light, their burden was heavy, and although the aural experience was enjoyable, the physical one was a bit lacking.

Model two is the HD480 Classic II

Supplier:

Sennheiser UK,
12 Davies Way,
Knares Beech
Business Centre,
Loudwater,
High Wycombe,
Bucks HP10
9QY.
Tel: (0628)
850811



sidelines

Last month's piece touched upon headphone listening in connection with the left/right amplitude differentials characterising stereo signals intended for reproduction via loudspeakers. But as headphone usage becomes ever more common I wonder whether we ought to take a fresh look at binaural recording, using dummy-head microphone systems and intended specifically for this alternative listening mode. Back in the 1970s there was a wave of interest in the topic, and I recall an article by my namesake, James Crabbe, describing experiments in which dummy-head and velocity-crossed-pair recordings of various ensembles were judged via headphones and loudspeakers. At that time there was also the occasional binaural LP, offering dramatically realistic street scenes, uncanny voices over the shoulder etc, plus music where the natural placing of the listener within an acoustic setting could be extremely impressive even with very modest forces.

This was all brought back to me recently when a couple of German 'kunstkopf' CDs turned up in the post. One features a Warsaw baroque group playing pieces by 17th-century Polish composers (Midas CD 5088), and the other, Japanese accordionist

– a much more relaxed and, as the suffix suggests, classic performer. The sound quality was a lot warmer, and even though the earpiece was nominally just as flat on the surface (if you'll pardon the pun) they conformed to the shape of my cranium and its protuberances much better. They even felt warm. There was also a much wider and more spacious soundstage, with a surprising amount of depth considering there are no room reflections to assist. Bass went deeper than on the 440s, and the top end was much smoother. Dynamics were exceptionally good, yet quiet passages didn't suffer any loss of detail. Bass riffs and sax solos were reproduced with a clarity and ease which was quite beguiling.

Completing the trio is Sennheiser's HD 560 Ovation II – a can in a different class. Although also classified as 'open' the earpieces enclose the ears much more than the other two models here. The vice-like grip on the head is absent, but readily apparent in the music reproduction. Bass is deep, full and weighty – an achievement many other cans would give their gold jack plugs for. The treble is smooth, easy on the ear and detailed. External sound was almost completely excluded – with no detri-

ment to listening pleasure, comfort or sound quality. Dynamics were handled with consummate effortlessness and even complex full orchestral (or jazz/funk) sequences left the aural experience intact. The heaviest of the three, they feel the lightest, due mainly to the additional support band inside the main frame of the headphones, which spreads the weight about a greater part of the head.

Overall, I could live quite happily with the 480s, and for ever with the 560s, but the 440s, although bright, dynamic and open, are too tiring for extended listening. None of the three exhibited that nasal or boxy quality on vocals, and all offered a good insight into recordings, at times putting conventional speakers to shame. My listening is mainly acoustic material, which is why I preferred the 480s and 560s. Others who are more into electronic listening found the 440s more involving and exciting, but all criticised the tight head fitting and preferred the fit of the 560s for prolonged listening. None of the pairs had any gross sonic flaws, and at their respective price levels – bearing in mind my reservations over programme material – all deserve serious audition. *Chris Beeching*

Is it time we took a fresh look at binaural recording?

Mie Miki playing arrangements of sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (Frees Kunsthau LC 8139). The consummate artistry of Miss Miki's interpretations completely bowled me over, perhaps biasing my judgement on purely sonic points, while I must digress here for a nod in the direction of my old friend George Goodall, whose letter on Bach transcriptions (Dec p11) makes me wonder how he might react to Scarlatti on the accordion. It's much livelier than the boring old harpsichord!

But to return to the binaural point, for those like myself who are untroubled by the 'sound through the head' aspect of headphone listening, and who externalise the direct image as a matter of course (a process made easier by binaural recordings), both of these productions sound very natural. Yet neither seems especially striking when heard via loudspeakers, probably because each depends on a relatively subtle recorded ambience which is easily masked by the listening acoustic.

There are certainly problems in producing recordings designed to serve both listening modes, a feat perhaps best managed by employing a pair of directional mics to satisfy the amplitude aspect, but spaced and baffled to provide the necessary inter-

aural time difference for headphones. But whatever the technical solution, I hear that things may now be on the move outside Germany – where 'binaurality' traditionally attracts more professional attention than elsewhere. It seems that Naxos/Marco Polo are pondering binaural options for a UK recording session, possibly involving a Mahler or Havergal Brian symphony to exploit the medium's potential for large-scale realism. I'm told that if this is successful it could lead to the launch of an audiophile label aimed at headphone devotees.

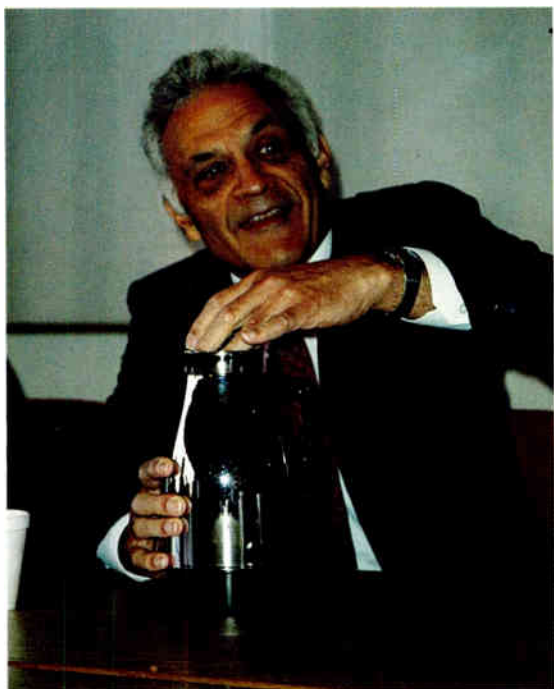
In the meantime there are already about 60 binaural recordings on CD, spanning pipe organs, choirs, brass groups, jazz, chamber ensembles, breaking waves, thunderstorms, and the dawn chorus. But they are not for the most part accessible in the UK. Ironically for we Europeans, the one person offering an international catalogue supported by a postal service is based in California. John Sunier, who runs a syndicated radio programme for audio buffs and a sales division called The Binaural Source. His catalogue can be obtained by sending or crediting \$1.00 (a dollar, not simply its sterling equivalent) to The Binaural Source, Box 1727, Ross, CA 94957, USA.

John Crabbe

A meeting with the charismatic Dr Bose proved to be more tantalizing than informative

by ALVIN GOLD

MEET DR BOSE...



'The enclosure isolates the back of the transducers from the front. That's all it does.'

It was an invitation not to be refused: to visit Bose in Framingham, near Boston, with a number of others from the UK specialist press. We would get to meet the legendary Dr Amar Bose, founder and mentor. I would get to ask him about direct/reflecting loudspeakers. Gee, I would be able to ask him how he was, personally; this was enough.

Published figures put Bose at or near the top of the charts for loudspeaker sales in most of the major territories of Europe as well as Japan, Australia, Canada and the USA. The only thorn in the flesh appears to be Mr Major's merrie kingdom, in part perhaps because of a lingering scepticism over Bose direct/reflecting loudspeaker technology.

Knowing that Bose doesn't normally waste time dealing with the hi-fi community, it was clear the invitation had two agendas. We

would learn of the Bose way of doing things, and they would seek some insight into what makes the UK market for loudspeakers and related products tick.

What I (we) hadn't bargained for was Bose's culture of confidentiality, which borders on the obsessive. Not only would Bose not discuss proprietary technologies, it would not even describe what lines of research it was following. To make matters worse, company policy means it rarely publishes research findings. This was particularly tantalising because of the heavy stress Bose lays on R&D, which it claims represents a greater proportion of its activity than any other comparable company. We were shown the labs, but some doors remained firmly closed, and all we ended up seeing was some very standard measuring equipment, the only significant departure being an electron microscope which is used to investigate the properties of loudspeaker cone materials close up. Even its work on psychoacoustics, by which Bose lays great store, and which is surely not proprietary in the sense that a transducer design might be, was not up for discussion.

In the end, everything appeared to hang on that personal interview with Dr Bose, which had been arranged even before my departure for the States. This followed a brief open meeting for the group where Dr Bose was preceded by a clearly excited group of handlers ('we're so sorry He is a little behind *schedule*; He will be here *momentarily*') and even an official note-taker, which made proceedings seem more like a court hearing than a one-on-one chinwag. The good doctor, who still lectures regularly at MIT just down the road, displayed a consummate set of communications skills, including the directness of a politician and the forthrightness of a member of

royalty. He had the knack of sidestepping difficult questions without even seeming to try, yet he could have charmed the hide off an elephant. The best, however, was saved for last: the private interview, which was scheduled for just 15 minutes – not long enough to break through Dr Bose's defences.

Still, I managed to get some tantalising if incomplete replies, for example on the subject of home cinema, an area of increasing activity for Bose. His comment on THX must be seen against the background that the direct/reflecting principle is at odds with the technical requirements of the system (loudspeaker directivity is closely specified by THX), though this doesn't necessarily negate Dr Bose's view. At the same time, I detected a certain reticence about acknowledging the work of others. In all the Bose literature I acquired on their home cinema systems, for example, I couldn't find a single instance of the word Dolby, as in Dolby Surround or Dolby Pro Logic.

What I asked was this. Does Bose see THX as a means of setting standards in AV? 'I hope not, because THX standards are not very meaningful. It is a peculiarly seat-of-the-pants, non-scientific set of standards even for the motion picture industry. I haven't seen a single sound piece of technical literature on the subject.'

I also asked about a point that had arisen earlier, to the effect that the rigidity of loudspeaker enclosures has virtually no effect on sound quality. Would Dr Bose elaborate?

'The enclosure isolates the back of the transducers from the front. That's all it does.'

That contradicts my and other reviewers' experience, not only of enclosures, but also how they are supported, coupled to the floor (using spikes, etc) and so on. Can you point to work you have done to demonstrate the opposite?

'Oh yes. These structural matters are absolutely not important. You can make any measurements in the world to show that this is so.'

And so on.

All in all the trip was a lot of fun, whose high spot was driving around Boston in a magnificent, turbine-smooth Honda coupé which had been fitted with a truly excellent Bose-designed OEM speaker system. The car system made the best music we were to hear during the visit, and the clear, autumnal conditions, which are surely more beautiful in New England than anywhere else in the world, made for some blissful driving moments. Would that the trip had been as enlightening as it was entertaining. ♪

BIT BY BIT

BACK TO
BASICS

*Continuing our step-by-step
guide to the basics of digital
audio, this article explains
how CD digital data
is converted*

by **DAVE BERRIMAN**

In January's 'Bit By Bit', we saw how an original (analogue) audio signal from a microphone is converted to digital form and recorded for storage on compact disc. This article explains the operation of the CD player, which has to read the information from the disc and convert it back to analogue form for replay through the amplifier and loudspeakers.

For the purposes of this article, we shall ignore the optical system, which uses a laser to read the data encoded on the surface of the disc, and look at the way this data is processed once it has been recovered from the disc and is again in electrical form.

ERROR DETECTION AND CORRECTION

When checked, some data will be shown to be wanting. Perhaps a 1 has been added, or lost from a word. This is corrected using the very powerful error correction techniques of CIRC, Reed Solomon and cross-interleaving. If too much information is missing or wrongly corrected, it may have to be replaced by a best 'guess' of what was probably there in the first place. This is known as error concealment (see Figs 12a and 12b

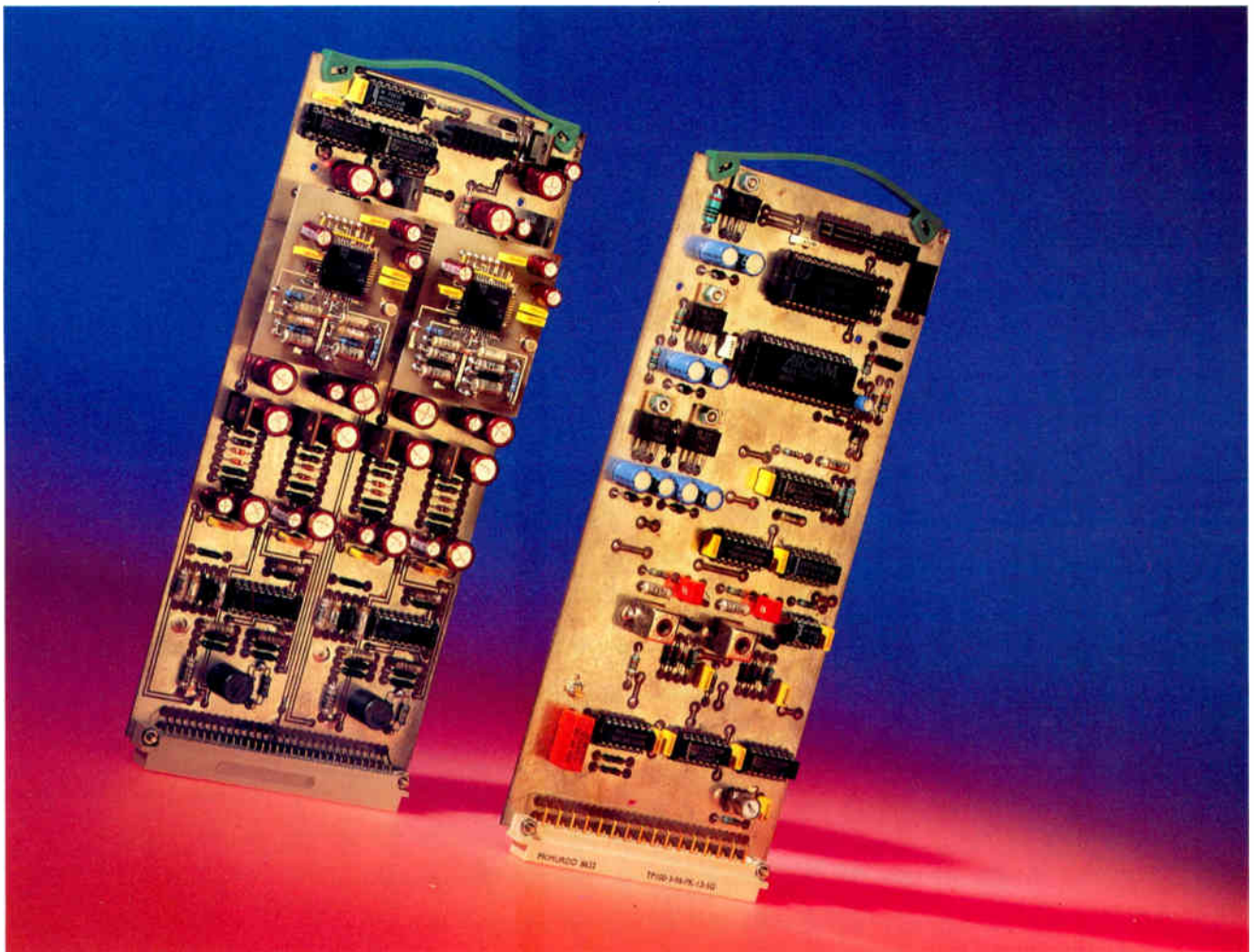
from January). For larger losses of information, which are not estimable, the system mutes for the duration of the errors to prevent disconcertingly loud clicks and bangs.

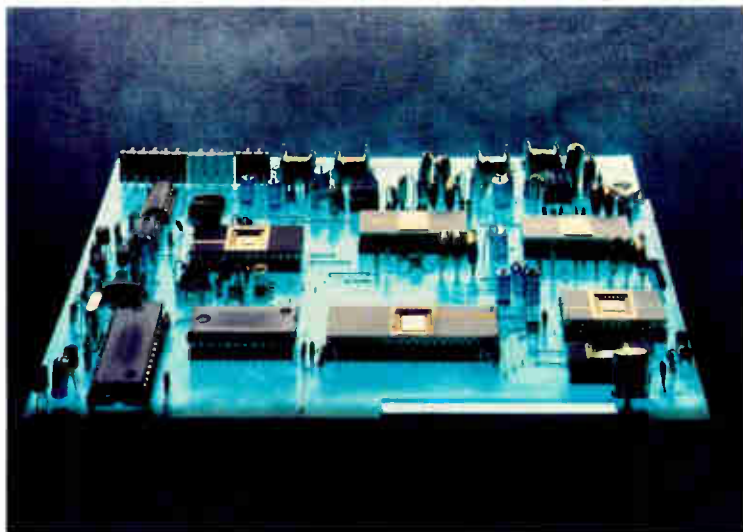
THE DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTER

The DAC is presented with one 16-bit number after another in a regular stream (with CD, 44,100 times a second). Within this short time the DAC must convert each 16-bit number into its corresponding analogue voltage, and hold it until the next voltage is presented, repeating the process over and over for each successive number. The immediate output of the DAC is therefore a wave comprising staircase-like steps, similar to the quantized samples in the ADC immediately prior to digital conversion.

At high frequencies there are fewer samples per cycle. At around the highest recordable frequency (say 20kHz) there will be only marginally more than two samples per cycle, creating large steps in the waveform.

These steps were not, of course, present in the original, but they comprise only high frequencies: odd harmonics at 3, 5, 7, 9 etc, times the fundamental. These unwanted





products are therefore quite simply removed by the anti-image filter. The lowest distortion product of 20kHz is 60kHz, which is easily removed by this filter (immediately after the DAC). The result (after filtering by the anti-aliasing filter) is a smooth waveform, just like the original but with some phase shift (see Fig 1).

OVERSAMPLING

Oversampling is a technique used in some digital-to-analogue converters, which effectively increases the sampling frequency by some factor, typically four times, thus giving (say) four times the number of 'samples' and a waveform which looks much less like a series of steps. Additionally, the frequency spectrum of the error signal due to quantization and sampling (see Fig 5, in 'Bit by Bit', January) is pushed higher in frequency, further away from the audio band, which gives better resolution. Oversampling allows a much gentler analogue anti-image filter to be used for removing the unwanted ultra-sonic digital data (which is rubbish as far as the audio signal is concerned). Without oversampling, this filter must be very sharp-acting to attenuate digital garbage at frequencies only just above the top end of the audio band.

HOW OVERSAMPLING WORKS IN D/A CONVERTERS

The original sampling frequency in the studio recorder may have been 48kHz and this would be reduced by digital techniques to 44.1kHz, for example, for recording on to the CD (see Fig 2a). Clearly, once set at 44.1kHz, there is no information in the digital signal in between the words representing the samples. Oversampling, however, is cunning.

Taking four-times oversampling as an example, a circuit inside the DAC generates words at 44.1×4 , or 176.4kHz, to create a waveform from

the DAC with smaller steps (see Fig 2b). Only the words occurring at 44.1kHz are from genuine samples. The others in between are computed by a complex circuit which interpolates between the samples (assuming a smooth curve running between the analogue voltages which they represent) to decide what might originally have been there.

Interpolation is not as crude as it seems, because the anti-aliasing filter prior to the ADC has already removed any sharp deviations (ie ultrasonic frequencies) from the waveform.

The interesting thing about oversampling is that the results of the computations which generate the extra words are digital numbers much longer than 16 bits. These are rounded up and down to the nearest LSB to create 16-bit words in the same way as in an ADC. However, there are now four samples for every one previously, so that when these are averaged out by the filter after the DAC, changes in voltage smaller than the LSB can emerge. Though one could argue that these small voltages are pure invention, oversampling does greatly smooth the waveform by reducing its step-like nature both in level and in time. Another trick is to use an 18-bit or 20-bit DAC and to round off to the appropriately smaller LSB, which in theory gives more even voltage levels and smaller steps.

In addition to the reduced noise and increased resolution due to oversampling, the use of a gentle analogue filter and digital filtering to remove images allows a much better phase response to be achieved than would be possible with the sharp 'brick-wall' analogue filter which would otherwise be required.

OVERSAMPLING ADCS

Oversampling can also be applied to the analogue-to-digital converter. In

DIGITAL AUDIO

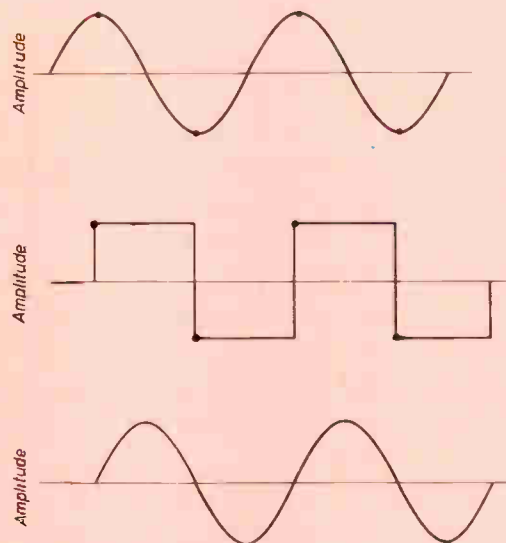


Fig 1: Sampling and sine waves. Sampling at high frequencies would appear to miss much of the waveform. The result of sampling a 20kHz waveform at 44.1kHz (Fig 1a) is a square wave (Fig 1b). However, the odd harmonics of this 20kHz square wave are removed by the anti-image filter at the output of the digital-to-analogue converter. The DAC output, perhaps surprisingly, is a pure sine wave (Fig 1c). The input to the ADC would of course have been a pure sine wave also, because the anti-aliasing filter would have removed any harmonics from the original signal. Therefore, within the specified 20kHz bandwidth, the digital system does re-construct all the frequencies present in the original signal, even though it only samples at discrete time intervals.

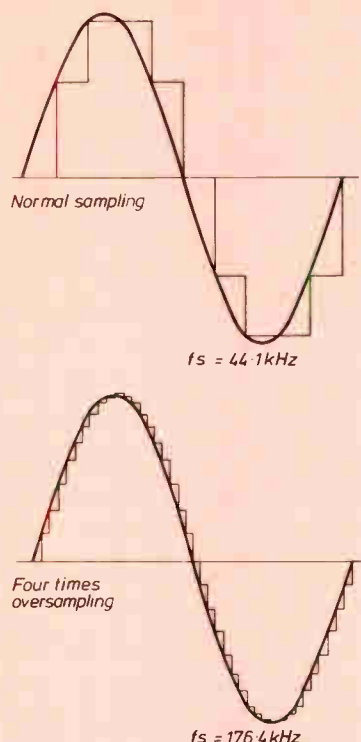


Fig 2: Oversampling. Normal sampling at 44.1kHz creates a staircase-like waveform (Fig 2a). However, oversampling (Fig 2b) results in smaller steps which are easier to filter out, resulting in less unwanted noise in the audio band, improved resolution and better phase response (see text).

Oversampling allows a much gentler analogue anti-image filter to be used for removing the unwanted ultra-sonic digital data

Fig 3: Current-dividing DAC. Here is a digital-to-analogue converter using dividing current sources (as used by Philips), which is much more accurate than using a simple resistive ladder network. These are interlinked so that the currents descend in the correct ratios: ie, 1 (the Most Significant Bit), 1/2, 1/4, 1/8 and so on down to the LSB. This diagram shows a 14-bit converter, but the principle is extendable using more bits by adding more current sources. One advantage of this type is that the current sources are active devices in which changes in current balance out to compensate for variations due to temperature, etc. This allows much more stable operation down to the tiny currents involved in the Least Significant Bits. Accurate switching time is, however, still vital, particularly for the more significant bits.

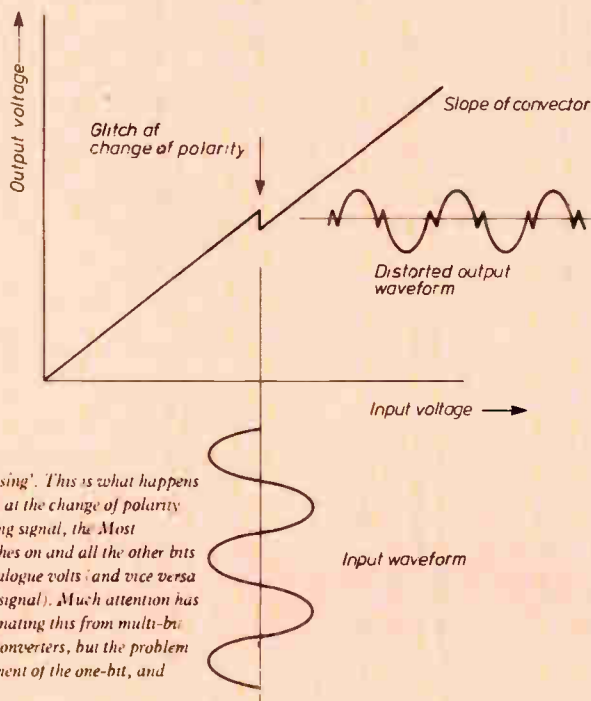
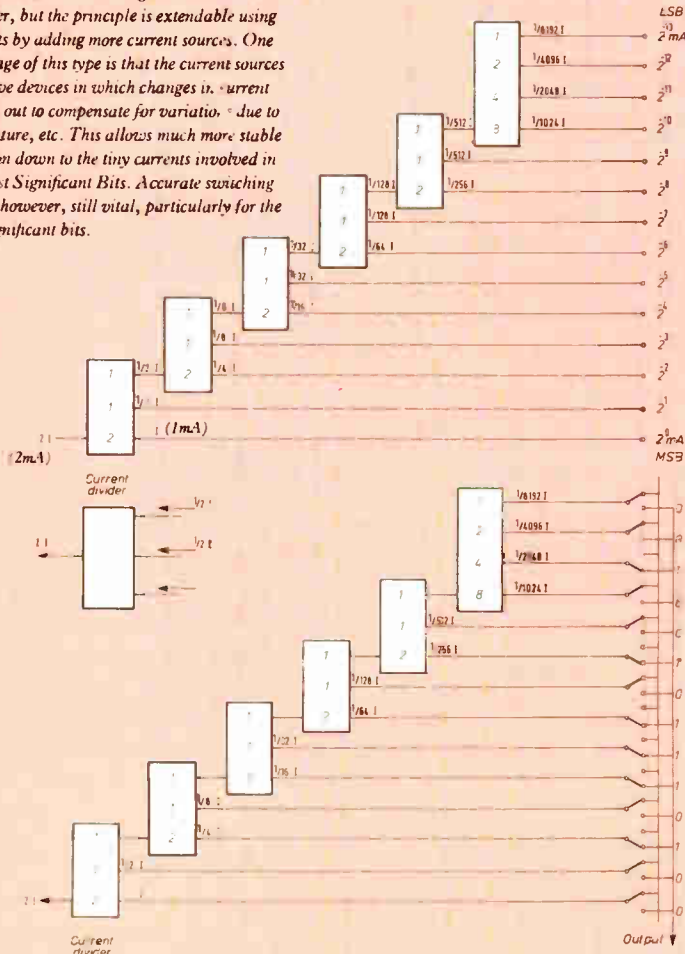


Fig 4: The 'zero crossing'. This is what happens when there is a glitch at the change of polarity as, for a positive-going signal, the Most Significant Bit switches on and all the other bits switch off at zero analogue volts (and vice versa for a negative-going signal). Much attention has been applied to eliminating this from multi-bit digital-to-analogue converters, but the problem has spurred development of the one-bit, and low-bit DACs.

Whatever processing circuitry appears in the DAC, the heart of it is that part which converts the succession of words from digital to analogue. There are various types, but the easiest to understand is the ladder DAC.

this case, the images or multiples of the wanted frequency are pushed up into a much higher frequency band (due either to sampling more rapidly, or the addition of extra interpolated words to the genuine sampled ones). Again, this makes the analogue anti-aliasing filter's job rather easier, so that a sharp brick-wall type is not essential. A gentler analogue filter with a better phase response can be used. (Its work is supplemented by a sharper-acting digital filter which prevents aliasing when the sampling rate is reduced to the correct frequency.) As with oversampling digital-to-analogue converters, oversampling analogue-to-digital converters push much of the unwanted noise due to quantization and sampling (see Fig 5, January) to above the audio band, thus reducing the error and effectively increasing resolution, while introducing less phase shift.

DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERSION
Whatever processing circuitry appears in the DAC, the heart of it is that part which converts the succession of words from digital to analogue. There are various types, but the easiest to understand is the ladder DAC. In this type of converter, resistors decreasing in value according to powers of two from the least to the most significant bit are employed to provide scaled currents. Electronic switches connect up the appropriate resistors, so that the appropriate currents add in one resistor to give the total analogue voltage at any instant. Resistor networks are prone to inaccuracies and thermal drift, so various other designs have been evolved to deal with these problems. One such type is based on current dividing networks and is shown in Fig 3.

LOW-BIT DACS
These DACs work on quite a different principle to the ladder or dual-slope multi-bit converters. They both aim to overcome the linearity problems which can affect multi-bit DACs. Ideally, a DAC should be perfectly even throughout the whole dynamic range from the maximum negative value, through zero, to the maximum positive value. However, this is not always the case, particularly when the waveform passes through zero when the MSB changes.

Non-linearity here can be very similar to crossover distortion in class B amplifiers (Fig 4). A DAC should be monotonic: in other words, the output of the DAC should increase when the digital number increases. If the voltages representing some of the bits are not correct or if they appear at slightly the wrong time, the wave-

Non-linearity here can be very similar to crossover distortion in class B amplifiers

form can show a downward glitch instead of an upward slope as the digital numbers increase. If that happens, the DAC is said to be not monotonic (Fig 5).

Careful design of the converter can help to avoid the non-linearity which can occur with multi-bit DACs and ensure monotonic behaviour. However, to sidestep such problems, the so-called low-bit systems using Pulse Width Modulation, Pulse Length Modulation, Pulse Edge Modulation, or Pulse Density Modulation have been developed. Available low-bit converters include MASH from Technics (PWM), Pulse D/A from Sony (PLM) and DD converter from JVC (PEM). These use rather less than 16 bits – between one and four for D-to-A conversion.

Of these, the Philips BitStream converter is arguably the front-runner in terms of popularity, so we'll take it as an example. BitStream works using Pulse Density Modulation using a single bit. Instead of relying on adding up 16 highly accurate currents or voltages, requiring to be turned on or off at exactly the

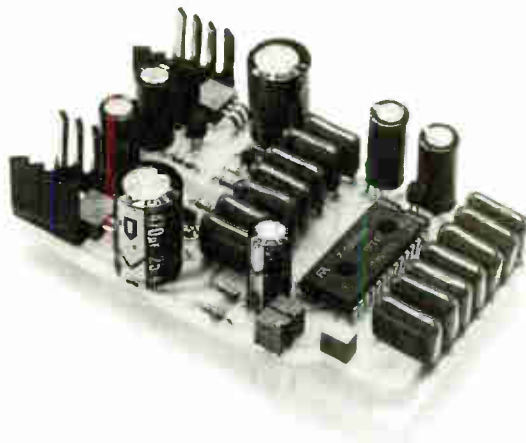
same time, by a stream of parallel words, BitStream converts the 16-bit words into a high-speed serial stream of single bits.

The average value of the pulses equates to the required analogue voltage. Filtering averages out the pulses much the same as with a conventional DAC. The output of the filter is a smooth, re-constituted analogue waveform. In order for these systems to work, however, the pulse rate must be very much higher than the highest audio frequency, so the digital circuits operate very fast indeed (typically just over 11MHz) rather like very rapid oversampling. This makes it easier (in theory) to filter than with a conventional DAC (see Fig 6).

THE WHOLE SYSTEM

These diverse elements are brought together in the conversion of analogue to digital for storage and playback into analogue. Figs 7 and 8 show these building blocks brought together for digital compact disc.

This 'Back to Basics' look at digital audio has been necessarily brief and,



of course, is by no means comprehensive: for those wishing to learn a lot more about digital I can recommend *The Principles of Digital Audio* by Ken Pohlman (SAMS, USA). It explores the subject in far greater depth, though it ideally requires an engineering background for a full understanding. More useful for the non-engineer is *Introducing Digital Audio* by Ian R Sinclair (PC Publishing). This does not go as deep but may be more accessible. ↙

Photographs illustrating this article show various CD circuit boards. On page 58 are two boards from Audio Synthesis; on page 59 a standard Philips 'monoboard'; and finally (above) one used by Covent Garden Records as part of its 'aftermarket' player upgrade

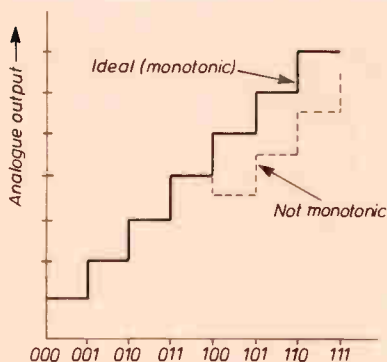


Fig 5: Monotonicity. Ideally a multi-bit DAC should be monotonic, so that its analogue output rises with the digital numbers. If one of the bits is inaccurate or is switched at the wrong time, the output may drop instead and the DAC will not be monotonic (another spur to low-bit DACs).

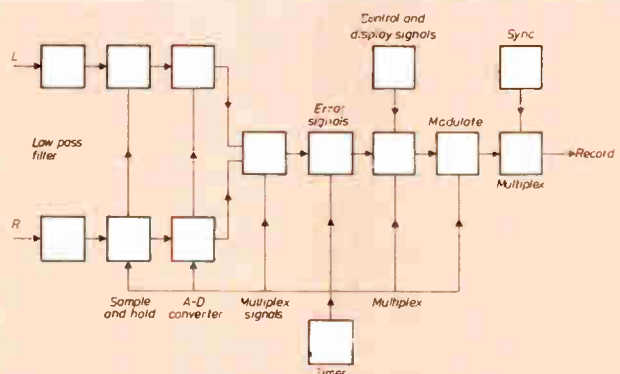


Fig 7: The CD record chain. Left and right hand signals are filtered to prevent aliasing, then the sample-and-hold circuits sample the left and right waveforms. The ADC converts these to digital after quantizing. The resulting digits are converted from parallel to series form, left and

right channels are time multiplexed sequentially into the data stream and error correction information added. Control and display information is inserted. Finally, the data is eight-to-fourteen modulated and synchronising signals are added for recording on to the disc.

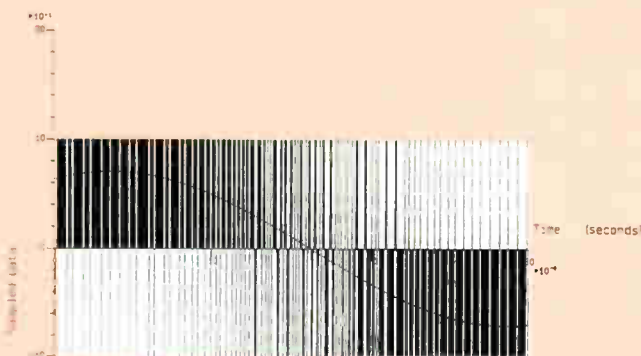


Fig 6: Bitstream. Here is the output of a BitStream DAC showing how the stream of pulses at 11.2896MHz is switched so as to average out to equal the original analogue waveform. Advantages are that no series of accurate currents, switched at precise instants, are required – just one voltage switched on or off (or + to -). The narrow pulses are easily filtered out to leave the wanted analogue signal.

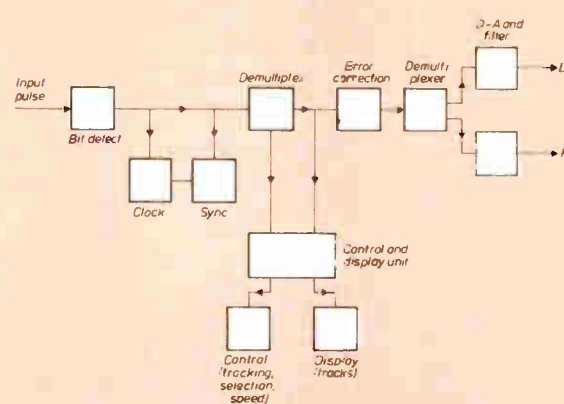


Fig 8: The replay chain. For replay from CD, the weak signal is retrieved, cleaned up and synchronised to a stable internal crystal oscillator, or 'clock', the complex digital signals are demultiplexed and error corrected for feeding

to whatever type of digital-to-analogue converter is employed. In addition, information is retrieved for display, etc and to control the tracking of the laser over the spiral of pits in the disc.

*Hungarian audiophiles
flocked to their country's
first ever hi-fi show*

by **KEN KESSLER**



BUDAPEST

Goulash. Gypsy music. That's all I knew about Hungary. Oh, and that Budapest is actually two cities, Buda and Pest, divided by the Danube. But it's a terrific city, like Paris without the French, and nobody had to twist my arm when I was offered a ride to the country's first-ever hi-fi show.

The show was organised by Istvan Csontos, the distributor for Audio Note, Goldring, Voyd, Moth, Sound Organisation and other brands, and he's quite a, uh, *character*. Art lover, music fanatic, cynic, record collector (he found me some Beatles bootlegs for around £3 per), journalist, raconteur – ain't no way the show was gonna flop. Even at a hard-earned £2.50 per head (roughly the cost of a very good meal or a brace of cinema tickets), the show attracted over 4000 visitors for its fifty-or-so rooms. And I soon learned why.

With equipment being so far beyond the reach of all but the few, Hungarian audiophiles find other ways of satisfying their cravings.



Naturally, the country is DIY-oriented, things having improved considerably now that they can buy Russian military valves instead of the civilian junk they used to suffer. Just about everyone has built part or all of his system, including turntables. But they're not unaware of foreign exotica, and this show provided an opportunity for them to listen to the gear they only read about in magazines like *Hi-Fi Forum*. And so they arrived, stayed all day, came back the next. And the next.

The lack of foresight in the world of hi-fi is legendary, so only a few foreigners showed up at the birth of what will eventually be a very exciting market. Linn, Audio Note, van den Hul and Focal were among those who actually sent representatives, while *HFN/RR*, *Audiophile*, *Hi-Fi Choice* and *Cone* (of Austria) were the only magazines to cover the show. But the distributors did a fine job, with Mission, JBL, Revox, B&O, Yamaha, Audio Research, NAD, Nakamichi, TEAC and over 100 other brands showing their wares. But I wanted to go native, or find scoops, and I wasn't disappointed.

Alisca Orange is a Hungarian brand which featured a complete system, including floor-standing speakers and massive solid-state amplification. My Hungarian ain't too good, so I couldn't make out what they were doing, but it was one of the best facsimiles I've heard with the kind of sound the Japanese derive from horn systems. Sources included a Rock turntable and a Nagra open reel tape deck. **Merlin** showed a funky triode OTL amplifier (yes, triode output-transformerless), 30W monoblocks using Russian military tubes on a wooden chassis. **Audio Note** provided the world with its first glimpse of the new-look Ongaku, now fitted with a chassis suitable for external display rather than cabinet mounting. **Zsolt** is a Hungarian speaker maker with a two-way, floor-standing design reminiscent of certain Monitor Audio models. I won't tell you the price, but what I thought looked like £500's worth of enclosure and driver costs around what we'd pay for a bookshelf speaker of the budget persuasion.

Lots of goodies were strewn around for anachrophiles to covet, including a display of arms and cartridges. Neatest application of antiques? Merlin did a demonstration through **Audio Innovations** gear with a 60-year-old **Dual** turntable playing jazz 78s. The sound? No kidding: *astounding*.

Jean-Pierre Farkas turned up, not with mind-boggling tweaks but with Hungary's first home-grown D/A converter in the Heybrook room.



Above, Hungary's own Alisca Orange speaker system; left, Merlin's triode OTL amplifier

And I always numbered Heybrook among the conservatives... The place was crawling with **Gryffusors** to sort out the (good, sensibly sized) rooms in the Hotel Platanusban.

We sold out of *HFN/RR* and met loads of its readers, including that stalwart audiophile Deszo Horvath. I had a hands-on session with the Revox Evolution system and fell in love with the LCD touch-panel controls. Every room had long queues, especially Linn, who turned up with all its latest goodies.

The show was software-heavy, with lots of stands selling hard-to-find CDs, US imports, used vinyl and the like. Jazz has a strong following, and I heard more demos conducted with vintage jazz than music from any other genres. One Hungarian company showed up with some astonishingly good classical CDs, the *Quint* label which is now a division of EMI. Try to get hold of its CD *Amadinda Live* (QUI 903081), a lush vibes-and-percussion recording containing a mix of African music and jazz standards, and convincing audience sounds. (Write to Kiadja Quint Kft, 1055 Budapest, Nephadsereg-utca 12, Hungary.)

The Budapest show was a refreshing change, a weekend spent among audiophiles at least three generations away from being jaded. Yet the show was loaded with A/V surround set-ups – now regarded as the last resort for rejuvenating this hobby of ours. Go figure. Here's hoping the Hungarians finally get some convertible currency. ✧



Above, the incredible Dual turntable and head amp; left, KK with the legendary van den Hul

Small but perfectly formed, like so many things Italian: the *Top Show* in Milan, covering but two floors and consisting mainly of distributors rather than individual brands, is a high-end-er's paradise.

The Italian hi-fi industry, though still to establish itself abroad, is bigger than you'd imagine, and the country's appetite for high-end imports is huge. Doyen of the Italian speaker makers, **Sonus Faber** launched what might be the company's best seller yet, the exquisite *Minima Amator*. Calling it a baby *Extrema* may be pushing it a bit, but this latest tiny two-way is a no-compromise mini, clothed in the trade mark curvey walnut. Heard on dedicated stands, it shocked the public by delivering real bass, a vast sound-stage and dynamics not expected from a box the size of an LS3/5A. The price should be under £1300 per pair in the UK.

The most amusing and charming new product comes from a company called **Quiet**, which produces a range of hang-on-the-wall speakers, one in particular showing incredible



Above, *Fidelta' Del Suono's* amazing transmission line; top right, *Transrotor's* 'oil rig'; far right, *Sonus Faber's* *Minima Amator*

imagination. It's a subwoofer-plus-satellites in the shape of a large triangle only 15mm thick. Not enough separation? Remove the two outer points and mount them away from the main section. Each contains a mid/treble unit. The price is circa £500.

The show was crawling with 'audiophile' software, but new to me are the CDs from **Foné**, best known in Italy for producing the sensational CDs sold by *Audio Review* magazine. Mainly obscure classical works, the *Foné* titles sound so natural and sweet you wonder why Linn made such a stink about digital; according to the notes, the company uses Linn hardware. The label can be reached on 010-39-586/884069 or at Via Gol-

doni 50/52, Livorno, Italy.

Which reminds me: Linn showed a bunch of new products at *Top Audio*, including the *Karik* single-box CD player (£1497 and upgradable with the addition of a *Numerik* converter at £998), the *Kairn-Pro* line-level pre-amp (£989), the *Keilidh* loudspeaker (£492), a polymer granite base, the *K18II* cartridge (£169) with revised cantilever suspension and more. Oh, and the Italy-only Linn T-Shirt is the coolest I've ever seen.

Despite some High Drama with wiring problems the night before the show, the **Krell/Apogee** system produced some of the finest sound I've heard for a long time.

Harmonix showed the new, larger equipment foot, appropriately called the *Elephant's Foot*, looking like a wooden coffee mug. **Musical Design** has a gorgeous tube pre-amp, the *SP-1*, with a neat window in the fascia so you can see the tubes.

The Italian magazine, *Fidelta' Del Suono*, showed a transmission line design featured in the magazine and part of a collaboration with L'Accademia Del Cimento, dubbed *Project Hetl*. A huge device, it uses forward facing and downward-firing drivers in an enclosure which looks like a gigantic telephone handset.

Avalon's latest is its smallest model, the floor-standing *Avatar*. And it looks just like a mini-Ascent, standing 34in tall. Drivers include an 8in *Nomex/Kevlar* composite woofer and a 1in titanium dome tweeter; price is US \$3950.

Cello, as at 1992 CES, demonstrated its new audio/visual system, while the eagle-eyed noticed a new, small speaker system. Turn to p26 for the full story, hot Las Vegas.

Naim unveiled the *NAC 82* pre-amp, remote-controlled and selling for around a third of the *NAC 52*. It can be upgraded to near-*NAC 52* spec through power supply options.

Italy's **Audiogram**, which showed a smart integrated amplifier at The Hi-Fi Show, unveiled a new power amplifier with similar, sleek styling and, possibly, a sub-£500 price, but it's early days.

Something for anachrophiles: the revived **ESS** Heil Air Motion Transformer tweeter.

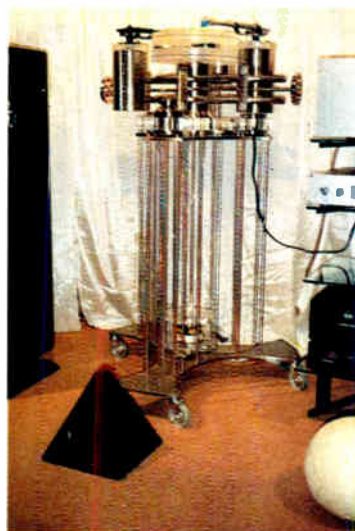
From **SOTA**, a prototype CD player, all black and shiny, and built like a tank. So yet another turntable maker bites the digital bullet.

Not so Germany's **Transrotor**. This company showed three or four of the wildest turntables I've ever seen, including a chest-high floor-stander which looked like a North Sea oil rig minus the North Sea. Chrome? Enough to embarrass a '53 Cadillac: sliding pillars, facilities for

Full of high-end treats, Top

Audio lived up to its name

by **KEN KESSLER**



MILAN

extra arms, a finish beyond that of surgical equipment.

Keep your eyes peeled for a new Italian tube range from **Graaf**: exquisite OTL amplifiers in 100 and 200W form, with 'magic eyes' for level display, gloss-black chassis and transformers the size of a Mini's wheel.

MB Quart had a weird design called the *Aera*, with a ball-shaped tweeter enclosure mounted in a Perspex slab, producing a floating effect. If I could speak Italian, I'd tell you whether or not the 'Magnetostriction' tweeter is a pulsating sphere.

Audio Note showed a tube DAC which doesn't cost £98,000.

Monrio had an interesting integrated amplifier, the *MC200*, delivering 2x75W into 8 ohms, with three line inputs, phono and tape as well as record-out facility at around £800, and the *Cento* 120W/ch Mosfet power amp, circa £1300.

Overall, a terrific show. ↵



Another elegant Italian speaker for the UK? Distributor John Watson of MPI with a picture of the *Acoustical*



record reviews

classical

- JS BACH**
Brandenburg Concertos
69 *Brandenburg Consort*
69 *Hanover Band*
Cellos Suites
70 *Bylsma*
Organ works
70 *Preston*
BETHOVEN
Missa Solemnis
70 *Soloists/VPO etc./Levine*
Violin Sonata 5
71 *Vengerov/Golan*
BOND
7-part Concertos
71 *Parley of Instruments*
BRAHMS
Piano works
71 *Pogorelich*
71 *Kempff*
BRUCKNER
Symphony 5
72 *BPO/Barenboim*
CORNAGO
Missa de la mapa mundi etc
72 *His Majesty's Clerkes/Newbury Consort*
DEBUSSY
Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien
soloists: *LSO & Ch Tilson Thomas*
ELGAR
Symphony 1 etc
72 *LSO/Tate*
72 *Baltimore/Zinman*
HANDEL
Opera Arias
73 *Stutzmann*
73 *Hunt*
Acis & Galatea (arr. Mozart)
soloists: *English Concert/Pinnock*
HAYDN
Symphonies 6-8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 40, 72
74 *AAM/Hogwood*
KRAUSS
4 Symphonies
74 *Concerto Köln*
LOBO
Requiem
74 *Tallis Scholars*
MENDELSSOHN
Violin Sonata in F
71 *Vengerov/Markovich*

- MOZART**
Violin Sonata K137d
71 *Vengerov/Golan*
Symphonies 38 & 40
75 *LCP/Norrington*
Die Entführung aus dem Serail
75 *soloists/Eng Baroque/Gardiner*
PROKOFIEV
Symphony 5/Lt Kijé
76 *St Petersburg/Temirkanov*
SHOSTAKOVICH
Tahiti Trot, Jazz Suites, Piano Concerto 1
76 *Concertgebouw/Chailly*
SCHUBERT
Hyperion Edition (Vol.15)
76 *Price/Johnson*
STENHAMMAR
Piano Concerto 1 etc.
76 *soloists/Malmö SO/Jarvi*
TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphonies 4, 5, 6
77 *St Petersburg/Temirkanov*
Nutcracker ballet
77 *RPO/Temirkanov*
77 *LPO/Jansons*
VERDI
La Traviata
78 *soloists/LSO/Rizzi*
78 *soloists/Met Op/Levine*
VIVALDI
Concerti da camera
78 *Il Giardino Armonico*
Oboe Concertos
79 *Boyd/COE*
WAGNER
Lohengrin
79 *soloists/Bayreuth Orch/Schneider*

- DAS ALTE WERK**
80 *CPE Bach, Marais, Rameau, etc*

rock/pop/jazz

- ALL ABOUT EVE**
92 *Winter Words - Hits And Rarities*
KEVIN AYERS
92 *Bananamour*
92 *Sweet Deceiver*
JOHN CAMPBELL
87 *Howlin' Mercy*
CARNIVAL ART
88 *Welcome To Vas Lligas*
THE CHALLENGERS
92 *The Man From UNCLE*
THE CHAMPS
92 *Tequila*
CHARLES AND EDDIE
87 *Duophonic*
THE CRYSTALS
92 *The Best Of*
THE EARLS
92 *Remember Them . . . The Very Best Of The Earls*
ENUFF ZNUFF
88 *Animals With Human Intelligence*
THE EVERLEY BROTHERS
92 *The Mercury Years '84-'88*
FISH
88 *Songs From The Mirror*
FUNKADELIC
92 *Music For Your Mother*
SLIM GAILLARD/BABS GONZALES
92 *Shuckin' And Jivin'*
JUDY GARLAND
92 *Always Chasing Rainbows*
GENESIS
88 *The Way We Walk (Vol.2)*
BILL HALEY AND THE COMETS
92 *The Very Best Of*
JOOLS HOLLAND
88 *The A-Z Geographer's Guide To The Piano*
THE IKETTES
92 *Fine, Fine, Fine*
NILS LOFGREN
92 *Code Of The Road*
DARLENE LOVE/LANI GROVES
89 *Bringing It Home*
MAGNA CARTA
89 *Heariland*
MELANIE
92 *Gather Me*
JONI MITCHELL
92 *Wild Things Run Fast*
MICHAEL NESMITH
89 *Tropical Campfires*
PAICE ASHTON LORD
93 *BBC Radio 1 Live in Concert*
GERRY RAFFERTY
91 *On A Wing And A Prayer*
TERRY REID
93 *Rogue Waves*
CHARLIE RICH
91 *Pictures And Paintings*
MIKE PENDER'S SEARCHERS
91 *Mike Pender's Searchers*
THE SEARCHERS
93 *The EP Collection Vol 2*
SOUNDTRACKS
VARIOUS ARTISTS
91 *Handel's Messiah - A Soulful Celebration*
VARIOUS
93 *Beware Of The Texas Blues Vol 2*
93 *I And Only - 25 Years of Radio 1*
93 *Rock'n'Roll Party Smashes*
93 *2000 Volts Of Stax*
93 *Your Starter For Ten*
GENO WASHINGTON & THE RAM JAM BAND
93 *Two Original Live Shows*
YELLO
93 *Essential Yello*
THE ZOMBIES
93 *The EP Collection*

reflections

- JS BACH**
Organ Works
80 *Rogg*
Brandenburg Concertos
80 *Concentus musicus*
BARTOK
Bluebeard's Castle
81 *soloists LSO/Dorati*
BETHOVEN
Symphony 7
81 *LSO/Montoux*
BERG
Wozzeck - excerpts
81 *Pilarczyk/LSO/Dorati*
BERLIOZ
Overtures etc
81 *Pars Cons/Munch*
L'Enfance du Christ, Les Nuits d'Été
81 *soloists/Boston SO/Munch/Price*
Chicago SO/Reiner
BRAHMS
Choral Works
81 *Senff Ch/BPO/Abbado*
DVORAK
Symphony 7
81 *LSO/Montoux*
Symphony 9
83 *Detroit SO/Paray*
KHACHATURIAN
Gayenah - excerpts
83 *LSO/Dorati*
LISZT
Années de Pélerinage
83 *Berman*
PAGANINI
Violin Concertos
83 *Accardo/LSO/Dutoit*
SCHUBERT
Winterreise
83 *Tear Ledger*
SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony 5
83 *Minneapolis/Scrowaczewski*
SIBELIUS
Symphony 2
83 *Detroit SO/Paray*
TCHAIKOVSKY
Nutcracker
83 *LSO/Previn*

The MFN/RR Ratings

Sound quality and performance are separately graded as a summary of each review. In Rock/Pop/Jazz the numerical rating also reflects musical content. (A few releases are reviewed from master-tape copies, as stated.) An additional 'star' denotes outstanding quality.

	Sound quality :	Performance
<i>Fine modern recording</i>	A	1 <i>Very Good</i>
<i>Good, some minor reservation</i>	B	2 <i>Good</i>
<i>Only moderately convincing</i>	C	3 <i>Moderate</i>
<i>Poor sound</i>	D	4 <i>Poor</i>
<i>Historical source, eg 78rpm</i>	H	H <i>Historical</i>

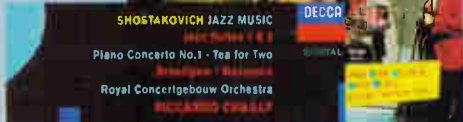
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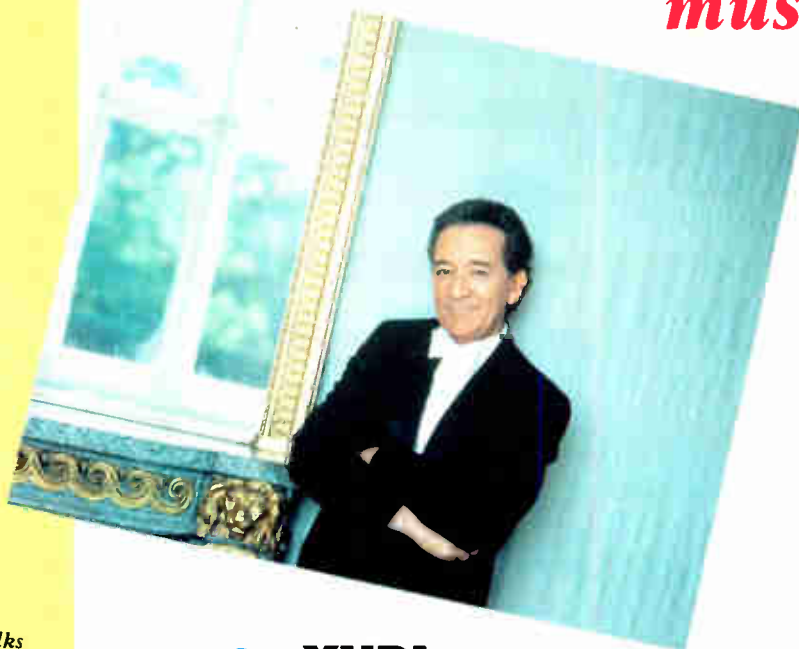
Review headings show catalogue number and CD total playing time, followed by a price coding (see 'Save on CD').

Reissues are shown as ® with the first UK publication date

Ⓜ = monophonic recording.

index





music news

65 Yuri Temirkanov talks to David Nice

record of the month

69 Debussy's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*

classical

69 Brandenburg Concerti compared, plus *Nutcracker*, *Elgar 1*, and *La Traviata*; contrasts in Brahms & Vivaldi

reflections

80 Bach's organ works; more Mercury classics and *Das Alte Werk*

rock/pop/jazz

87 Three views on Charles & Eddie; Robert Lucas does the biz; one for Rafferty fans; Soundtracks

reissues

92 Reviews by Ken Kessler

finale

106 The late Dizzy Gillespie – an appreciation by Steve Harris

interview

YURI TEMIRKANOV

by DAVID NICE

'Once I'm conducting, I'm not thinking any more. So all those other doubts don't exist. But in a way, I hate this profession'

Whether you love his style or hate it, the fact remains that Yuri Temirkanov is an extraordinary man. Listening to his new Tchaikovsky symphonies recording on RCA [see reviews], first with disbelief, then with a growing admiration for the deeper feeling behind the idiosyncratic approach, was enough to make me turn back to our conversation, held at the time when he was just leaving the Kirov Opera to take up the post of principal conductor at the (then) Leningrad Philharmonic.

On the platform he can seem a showman, manipulating clownish grimaces and gestures with a hint of uncertainty. Face to face, he speaks quietly, seldom looking you in the eye, always a cigarette in nervous hands (or so it was at the time). Having asserted, with no false modesty, that his new post was as much an honour for the orchestra as for himself, he qualifies the remark.

'If I were daunted by the prospect than I wouldn't have taken it on. Really deep down I'm not a very self-assured man, so it was unusual for me to be so certain. There isn't a more serious critic of myself than myself.'

Does a special confidence take over in performance? 'Yes. Because once I'm conducting, I'm not thinking any more. So all those other doubts don't exist. But in a way, I hate this profession, because there hasn't been a single time before a rehearsal, let alone a performance, when I'm not nervous – even with an orchestra I've conducted for many years. I'm nervous about whether I'll be able to achieve what I want, whether I can

make the musicians my allies.'

It must have been especially difficult to face that discerning bunch of musicians, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, in the days before Temirkanov was appointed their Principal Guest Conductor – in January he became Principal Conductor. 'Yes, there was a resistance to overcome. I very nearly walked out of the first rehearsal.' But he stayed, they liked him and 'out of the hundred orchestras I've worked with it's the friendliest and the one I'm most delighted to meet again. The conductor's hardest task is to win the musicians over to your side so they will do what you ask of them with pleasure, even if they don't agree. However strange it sounds, I can always tell whether the RPO players do what they do with pleasure.'

He certainly asks for the controversial in performance, and it never seems to be the same twice. 'I listen to recordings of my own live performances, and often I like what I hear. But even if I wanted to repeat what I liked about them, I couldn't do it. It reminds me of what Brahms said. A player came up to him after a second performance and said, "Maestro, you conducted much faster today than you did yesterday". And Brahms replied, "but today my pulse is quicker".' Temirkanov notes the tension between 'what the composer wanted to say, and how we understand that meaning personally'.

But how far does he think he can go? Given his love of extremes, the answer is, at best, evasive. 'The closer I get to what the composer wants, the better performer I will be. Inevitably there is my accent in

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communicating the work. Like a good detective I have to follow the composer's traces. The more I guess, the more I get right, which is good. There is nothing more vulgar than using the composer to give your own interpretation.' It sounds curiously like an epitaph for his own wildest performances.

A Russian's love of images colours his attitude towards the concert. 'Precise professional work' in rehearsal is the laying of foundations, and 'the concert is the house you build'. He apologises for sounding naive when he expresses his belief that in concert, 'conductor and performers are serving art, it's like a church service. The audience should come away feeling much better, as if they'd listened to a very good sermon'.

His repertoire with his London and St Petersburg orchestras remains conservative – Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Berlioz. He wants to look at Schnittke and Gubaidulina, but his attitude to modern music is simple. 'Time itself selects the works which should continue to live, so I don't have a special desire to go digging.' The Russian bias remains strong – 'of course, because I can feel it best.' He knew and talked with Shostakovich, though the composer never talked about his own works. And Prokofiev settled in the Caucasus during the Second World War, living for a month or two with Temirkanov's family, though he himself was only a child. He states bluntly that Prokofiev is his favourite composer, and adds that we only hear him conducting the best known Prokofiev symphonies because 'I like to make a lot of noise with the Second and Sixth symphonies, and I was very badly criticised in Vienna, they said it was too noisy'.

Curiously, he has nothing to say about Yevgeny Mravinsky, his predecessor at the Leningrad Philharmonic: when asked about great examples, only Karajan features, followed by another anecdote. 'It's like Heifetz, when asked who was the number one violinist in the world: "I'm number two but I can't tell you who's number one".' He was elected at the Philharmonic by secret ballot among the players, which rankles – but not nearly as much as subsequent misreporting (in *Classical Music*) which claimed that he was appointed because of his communist party connections. 'I was never a member of the communist party, and I certainly wasn't appointed by higher powers.'

To take up his post, he left the musical management of the Kirov (now Maryinsky) Theatre to Valery Gergiev. During his years there he took over some of the producing – his solid *Queen of Spades* remains in the

'I listen to recordings of my own live performances, and often I like what I hear. But even if I wanted to repeat what I liked about them, I couldn't do it.'



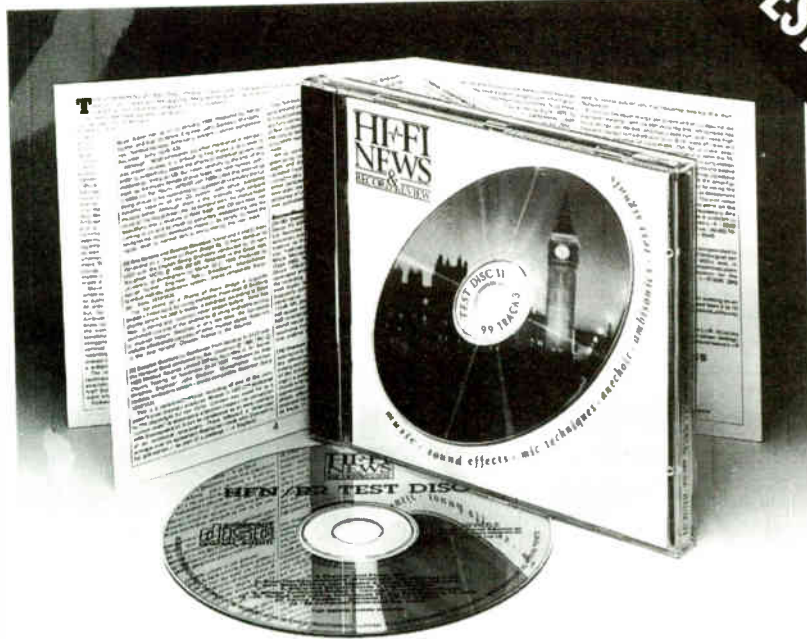
repertoire – and became acquainted with most of the great Russian operas. He is appalled that Tchaikovsky's *Yolanta* and Prokofiev's *Betrothal in a Monastery* – 'the wittiest opera in the world' – still aren't staple repertoire in the west, but he has no interest in championing them in Europe or the USA. 'The time for preparation is too short and in the end the compromise is too great, much bigger than the compromise you have to make as the guest conductor of a symphony orchestra.'

In the meantime, he's happy to revisit familiar works in his recordings. 'I feel it's right because now I'm more experienced. The French say that stupid people don't become cleverer with age, it's just that their stupidity is more profound. I hope that's not the case. Whether there's anything new in these Tchaikovsky symphonies, *Petrushka* and *Symphonie Fantastique*, only autopsy will show.' ↵



Yuri Temirkanov's new RCA recordings of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker ballet and Symphonies 4, 5 and 6, and Prokofiev's Fifth are reviewed in this issue.

76 MINUTES OF MUSIC
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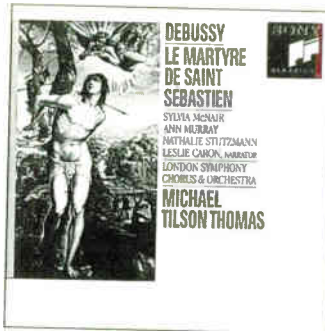
RECORD OF THE MONTH

DEBUSSY:

Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien

Leslie Caron (nar)/Sylvia McNair (sop)/Ann Murray, Nathalie Stutzmann (mez-sops)/LSO & Ch/
Michael Tilson Thomas

Sony Classical CD48240 (66m 25s) •



Michael Tilson Thomas introduces *Le Martyre* as 'like the fragments of an ancient gospel. Some sections of the story are realized in complete detail, others are barely touched on, others not there at all'.

Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien was a theatrical event conceived on an extravagant scale by the exiled Italian dramatic writer Gabriele D'Annunzio. It was commissioned by the dancer Ida Rubinstein and, along with Fokine and Bakst, Debussy was asked to collaborate – he wasn't first choice as composer, and he was placed under great pressure to complete the score (solo voices, chorus and orchestra). For it, he enlisted the help of André Caplet – to what extent is unknown. A five-hour premiere took place in 1911 (the Archbishop of Paris forbade Catholics to attend) and *Le Martyre* has been variously revived thereafter.

Monteux and Cantelli chose to record only orchestral fragments; Munch, Ansermet and Ormandy opted for a fuller realization, either with or without narrator. A concert performance under DE

Inghelbrecht (1960) is listed on CD: his wife's linking narrative is that most frequently used (her synopsis of the five scenes, or 'Mansions', appears in the booklet) but a different formula has been adopted for this recording.

There's some excellent casting here, starting with Leslie Caron – herself a former dancer – who, on R4's Kaleidoscope admitted surprise that Tilson Thomas had asked her 'not to declaim' (previous recordings have been marred by that style of narration). She is placed in the foreground, and her urgent pacing contrasts with the slower sections of music rather as do the perspectives, say, between the Archers' first chorus (from the back of All Saints' Tooting) and Caron's voice. The twins, Murray/Stutzmann, and Chorus seraphicus [track 3] further open up spatial dimensions. The music of the Second Mansion is often like *Jeux*, but the Prelude fanfares to the next, the confrontation scene with Caesar, few would recognize as by Debussy – nor the chorus 'Lo! Adoniestes!', which seems to anticipate the Walton of *Belshazzar*. The final setting is Paradise; here a sequence of choruses is broken into by the ecstatic soul of Sébastien (McNair).

The resonance blurs most of the choral text, yet exposes a curiously un-French sound from the men of the LSO Chorus. Sylvia McNair again might be faulted for French diction, but she makes some ravishing sounds, especially as *Vox coelestis* in the first stanza 'Qui pleure mon enfant . . .' [track 6]. Tilson Thomas, whose Debussian sympathies may be traced back on records to his work at Boston for DG, allows *Le Martyre* to unfold and envelop us in its mysterious and exotic textures without forcing. Certainly, after this it would be discontenting to hear the orchestral fragments alone.

[A:1/1*] Christopher Breunig

There's some excellent casting here, starting with Leslie Caron

Leslie Caron records the narration for Michael Tilson Thomas's *Le Martyre*



JS BACH:

Brandenburg Concertos 1-6

Brandenburg Consort/Goodman

Hyperion CDA 66711/2

(2CDs, 92m 35s) •

Brandenburg Concertos 1, 3, & 4, □ 2, 5, & 6

Hanover Band/Halstead

EMI CD-EMX 2200 & CD-EMX 22001

(43m 46s 48m 57s) ■

Britain leads the way in authentic players. These two admirable Brandenburg sets recorded between July 1991 and January 1992 show minimal personnel cross-over: Cherry Forbes is third oboe in both First Concertos, and Rachael Brown is flautist in both Fifths, but all other principals are different: we are offered a galaxy of talent divided between the two cycles. Other facts may help you decide before we settle down to opinion: the 'Eminence' is mid-price and on two separate discs, and Hyperion's is an inseparable set. Halstead himself plays harpsichord continuo throughout; Alastair Ross plays harpsichord for Goodman, switching occasionally to a modest-toned organ; Nigel North adds theorbo continuo in 1 and 6. Both companies provide excellent sound, but some balance problems emerge.

In Concerto 1 both groups over-emphasize the Minuet's downbeats, Goodman making an idiosyncrasy of it, but he helpfully separates horns left/right. While Halstead maintains lively rhythms, Goodman lets his relax in (iii), a slight fault also found elsewhere in the set, and Goodman's ensemble is not always as neat as Halstead's. Whereas Halstead tends to hold the impetus right to the last beat of some (not all) fast movements, Goodman rounds them off rather anachronistically (again, not always!). I find trumpet balance in 2 more satisfactory under Halstead: with Goodman the instrument is placed far right and well back. Trumpeter Stephen Keavy plays finely for Goodman; Mark Bennett for Halstead is a degree or so finer still – a true virtuoso performance.

There is little to choose between the versions of 3: a more prominent harpsichord and a full sonata movement as central link with Goodman; a touch more *joie-de-vivre* with Halstead and a wonderfully gruff moment around 4m in (i) as basses unravel Bachian knots. In 4, Goodman agrees with Harnoncourt that the role of *flauti d'echo* is to echo phrases in the Andante. They do, effectively, but they keep their distance in (iii), to the detriment of balance. Halstead's violinist adopts ugly slow-to-fast trills in (i) and there

Bylsma is a poetic, stylish and undemonstrative artist, able to conjure lovely sounds from his two historic instruments

is a surprisingly heavy final chord. Harpsichord in 5 rushes in Halstead's recording but plays excitingly, while Ross is more prosaic but steadier for Goodman. His recording is more spacious here than Eminence's, but there are tiny rhythmic hesitations in (i) that defeat true impetus, a fault not evident in the light and airy (iii). In 6, Goodman is a clear winner, (i) fast and more urgent than Halstead's, with theorbo contributing sparing but decisive pings where needed. The enthusiastic finale fascinates with its left/right chattering phrases, where Halstead is clear, precise but strait-laced.

My overall preference is for Halstead, but those who feel an understandable loyalty to the Hyperion label will not be unrewarded. Goodman [A:1], Halstead [A:1*].

Robert Dearling

JS BACH:
Six Suites for Cello
Anner Bylsma (vcl)

Sony Classical CD 48047
(2CDs, 127m 19s) •

There are around twenty versions available of the six Bach suites for solo cello, including a highly praised one by Anner Bylsma himself, recorded on a baroque cello and first issue by RCA on LPs made some thirteen years ago. The new version from Sony Classical is interesting not least because of the use for the first five suites of the big Servais Stradivari of 1701, and for the sixth of a five-string violoncello piccolo from Tirol of about the same year. Bylsma is a poetic, stylish and undemonstrative artist, able to conjure lovely sounds from both these instruments. These are rapt but not over-intense readings – not lacking a feeling for broad gestures and drama, yet properly intimate. Unfortunately, the recordings, made at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, on the last three days of January 1992, are too close and too resonant for my taste. The microphones pick up quite a few extraneous noises – sniffs and the occasional hiss – as well as the rasp of bow on string at very close range. In one or two movements – the concluding Gigue of the First Suite, the Courante of the Fifth – a tempo that would pose no problems in a drier acoustic muffles detail. This is a shame, given the integrity and lucidity of Bylsma's playing, and the beauty as well as historic interest of the two cellos. It should be pointed out that Sony seem to have short-changed themselves, CD2 playing for 12 minutes longer than the time printed on box and leaflet.

[B/C:1] *Peter Branscombe*

JS BACH:
Organ Works
Simon Preston (org)

DG 435 381-2 (71m 15s) •

For his recital on the Sauer organ at St Peter's, Waltrop (near Dortmund), Simon Preston has chosen an expertly shaped programme of familiar and much-recorded masterworks: the *Tocatta, Adagio & Fugue* in C and *Fantasia & Fugue* in G-minor open proceedings with stunning virtuosity offset by delicacy and wit; the six Schübler *Chorales* that follow are airy and spacious but lack something in emotional commitment; and the recital closes with the F-major *Tocatta & Fugue* and the *Passacaglia & Fugue* in C-minor, both put across with blazing conviction and the highest level of technical accomplishment.

The splendid instrument, installed in 1984, is recorded with great presence and clarity despite the potential hazards of a resonant acoustic. One small criticism is the shortness of the gaps between works. There is the usual excellent DG documentation. Above all there is the happy selection from Bach's *oeuvre*, quite brilliantly played.

[A*:1*/1] *Peter Branscombe*

BEETHOVEN:
Missa Solemnis
Cheryl Studer (sop)/Jessye Norman (sop)/Placido Domingo (ten)/Kurt Moll (bass)/Leipzig & Swedish Rad Ch, Eric Ericson Cham Ch/VPO/Levine

DG 435 770-2 (2CDs, 83m 10s) •

One can hardly take exception to such casting (precedents include Walter Legge's Schwarzkopf/Ludwig/Gedda/Zaccaria lineup for Karajan's 1958 recording) but there is something repugnant about DG's marketing this 1991 Salzburg Festival performance as 'the most luxurious *Missa Solemnis* of our time'. Harnoncourt's COE alternative – he conducted it the following year at Salzburg – is imminent, and will doubtless satisfy a taste for something more astringent. Levine's set, incidentally, bears a dedication to the memory of the VPO leader Gerhart Hetzel, killed last summer in a mountaineering accident. It proves a sugary-sweet memorial, for which James Levine must surely take responsibility. (Try to hear Hetzel in the Böhm recording. Also, DG should quickly reissue the 1977 VPO/Böhm *Ein Heldenleben*.)

A very mixed impression is created



James Levine conducts 'the most luxurious Missa Solemnis of our time' – a Salzburg Festival recording

by this performance. After the drum-taps, the opening phrasing of the Kyrie is done in a self-conscious way that draws attention to the conductor. Domingo's entries twice catch an unflattering vibrato (his best work is in the solo sections of the Credo); Studer appears to sing 'Ahr-yie'; Jessye Norman restores one's confidence. In the Gloria, Levine gives us a galumphingly accented

'Quoniam' which sounds very contrived. It would be hard, though, to resist the rather wonderful 'In gloria Dei Patris'; and where this performance really takes wing is in the whooping jubilation of the 'Amen's' that close the movement.

A strong feature of Karajan's three recordings, 'Et vitam venturi' (Credo) is here rather flimsy, its middle section [track 3.7] raced through and superficial. In the Sanctus, the true voice of Beethoven registers only intermittently in such vague swirling reverberations as those of the big choral 'Pleni sunt' (the Festspielhaus acoustic reminds me of the Bayreuth Ninth, under Furtwängler); the sheer beauty of orchestral sound at the Praeludium arouses great expectations of a Benedictus which virtually submerges itself in plushness – apart from the honourable singing of Jessye Norman.

In the Agnus Dei, Beethoven gives the bass singer a special role: here Kurt Moll is very fine indeed, yet all four soloists, in combination with some memorable orchestral playing, provide in the introduction the most memorable seven minutes of the whole performance. Had everything been imbued with this seriousness and directness, what an event it would have been! (On the whole though, this deserves to count as the Jessye Norman *Missa Solemnis*.)

The recording is diffuse, *eg* opening of Gloria, or Credo [3.2/3.3]; the chorus sounds over-large yet produces little real weight. Not on her best form, Cheryl Studer seems favoured by the quartet microphones. Although you only get 35m on CD2, all sections are helpfully indexed; but why conceive the violin entry at the Benedictus as an actual track point? [B:2] some 1*, 3.

Christopher Breunig

BEETHOVEN:

Violin Sonata 5 in F, 'Spring'

MENDELSSOHN: Violin Sonata in F/

MOZART: Violin Sonata in B^b, K317d

Maxim Vengerov (vln)/Itamar Golan (pno)/Alexander Markovich (pno)

Teldec 9031-76349-2 (64m 55s) •

Maxim Vengerov is the remarkable young musician who won the Carl Flesch competition in 1990, when he was 16, and he has already made several recordings that are praised as much for their maturity as their virtuosity. Here, partnered in the Mendelssohn by Alexander Markovich (winner of the Rachmaninov competition in 1983), and by Itamar Golan in the Beethoven and Mozart, he earns fresh laurels. The Mendelssohn is an agreeable three-movement

sonata discovered, edited and recorded by Yehudi Menuhin in the early 1950s, and even nowadays a comparative rarity. It is played with poise and fire, though balance is less good in this work (recorded in May 1991, with some jangly piano chords) than in the Beethoven and Mozart (made in the same Teldec Berlin studio thirteen months later). Itamar Golan, a new name to me and the third of these fine young Israeli artists, sees eye to eye with Vengerov in matters of tempo and phrasing, showing considerable Romantic panache and flexibility in the 'Spring' Sonata. The Mozart *Andantino* is taken very slowly, with neither repeat observed, and with no embellishments at the fermatas, though with a pleasing sense of wit. Some stylistic uncertainties, then, but very assured, powerful and poetic music-making.

[B:1]

Peter Branscombe

BOND:

Six Concertos in Seven Parts

Parley of Instruments/Goodman

Hyperion CDA 66467 (51m 25s) •

Volume 8 of Hyperion's 'English Orpheus' series offers Capel Bond's Concertos of 1766, five of which, I believe, are first recordings. Bond (1730-90) worked in the Midlands, dying in Coventry, and these are his only instrumental works. They comprise an opening trumpet concerto, five string *concerti grossi* and a closing bassoon concerto, only the last breaking substantially free of the all-pervasive Handel influence of the time. It is difficult to conceive of

more stylish playing or more sympathetic recording than they receive here. Crispian Steele-Perkins fits well into the intimate style of 1, Sally Jackson's soft-toned Baroque bassoon coos fetchingly in 6 (with some key rattle in *iii*), and the small string orchestra's lower line is strengthened in all but 5 by bassoon. In fact, there are deft changes of timbre in each work. The 'B-roads' of music are often more rewarding than the trunk routes; like a drive in unfamiliar countryside, this perfect disc offers frequent unexpected delights.

[A*:1*]

Robert Dearling

BRAHMS:

Intermezzi Op.117 **Rhapsodies**

Op.79 **Intermezzo Op.118:2**

Capriccio Op.76:1

Ivo Pogorelich (pno)

DG 437 460-2 (53m 05s) •

Fantasies Op.116 **Intermezzi**

Op.117 **Klavierstücke Op.118**

Klavierstücke Op.119

Wilhelm Kempff (pno)

DG 437 249-2 (71m 21s) recorded 1963 ■

'Composer and interpreter are here linked by ties of nationality and religious belief, and they seem to come together ... across the gulf of two generations'. That sentence has been cut from the 'Galleria' reprinted text written for the 1964 LP containing Kempff's late Brahms, generously recoupled here with Op.116. Ideally we need all of this great master's Brahms – Decca, too, *nota bene!*



*Wilhelm Kempff
and Ivo Pogorelich
– very different
ways of
approaching late
Brahms*





Brahms
photographed at
Gmunden in the
late 1890s

The beauty of
Kempff's
playing lies in
its apparent
simplicity. The
touch is light,
the song-like
form clear

What of the first Brahms venture of a much younger keyboard master? Eccentric timings arouse instant suspicions. The Op.118 excerpt [wrongly titled on DG' cover] is almost *twice* as long as Kempff's; Op.117:3 is 2½m longer – even Glenn Gould did not stretch to 8m. The comparison is not quite fair, since Kempff achieved depth of expression without slowness, eg Opp.118:6, 119:1. But contrast Pogorelich with Lupu, Kovacevich, Katchen and Kempff – Op.118:2
8m 49s/5m 55s/4m 59s/6m 04s/4m 32s
Op.79:2
8m 01s/5m 41s/ 5m 26s/5m 58s/7m 06s
Op.76:1
6m 05s/ – 12m 33s/3m 25s/2m 56s

It is more than a question of slowness. The first page of the Op.118 Intermezzo brings various unmarked accents; before the Tempo I the *piu lento* crotchets are actually *faster* than in the middle section, whilst the return brings bizarre 'echo' effects by desynchronizing hands. The whole piece is just mauled about. Pogorelich adopts a grand manner for the Capriccio, dramatically persuasive with darkly rippling semiquavers, but the melodic lines are lugubrious. Katchen is no less dramatic, just as capable of voicing strands – why does DG's Pierre Jasmin find this aspect of Pogorelich's Brahms so remarkable? – yet he is true to the 'poco agitato'. With markings 'con moto' or 'moderato' discounted, pauses held between phrases, laboured emphases and a constantly varying pulse, the Op.117 Intermezzi similarly strain the listener's patience. Ultimately, Pogorelich is merely obscure – subtle technical control, luminous pianissimi are about all there is to admire.

The beauty of Kempff's playing lies in its apparent simplicity – sometimes the music slips by, as it were, elusively, yet emotionally everything is fulfilled for the listener. The touch is light, the song-like form clear; a certain domesticity sounds *echt-Brahmsian*. And the sound has come up well. You happily listen beginning to end. Stark in recording clarity, Pogorelich's Brahms proves glum, boring in its wilfulness. Pogorelich [A:4], Kempff [B:1*].

Christopher Breunig

BRUCKNER:
Symphony 5 (Nowak Edition)
BPO/Barenboim

Teldec 9031-73271-2 (72m 02s) •

Teldec's commitment to Bruckner continues – though so also, alas, does their liking for illustrations in very questionable taste. Barenboim's 1979 version of the Fifth with the Chicago Orchestra (DG) is currently out of the catalogue – an interesting though ultimately untreasurable reading. His new recording, made with one of the grandest and most experienced Bruckner orchestras, reveals changes of emphasis rather than fundamental differences. The first movement is now taken marginally faster overall, more in line with most other interpreters; the slow movement and scherzo too are now taken more quickly. However, it is the relationship between tempos, structural blocks, that matters more, and here I felt again that Barenboim allows himself counterproductive speedings-up and holdings-back. The effect is almost Mahlerian within the scherzo and trio – fascinating detail, but too fussy for my liking. The playing is rich, full-toned and deeply expressive, though in faster tempos some detail gets lost in the resonance of the Berlin Schauspielhaus. The production team have secured a fine recorded quality, with ample reserves of power, though the *pp pizz* openings to movements may tempt one to a higher volume setting than proves comfortable in the mighty outbursts; and once or twice there is a kind of expectant rustle (preferable to the old bane of pre-echo, of course) before a silence is shattered by an *ff* entry. [B:2] Peter Branscombe

CORNAGO:
Missa de la mapa mundi □ **Secular music of 15th-century Spain**
His Majestie's Clerkes/Hillier/
Newberry Consort

Harmonia Mundi HMU 909083

(66m 04s) •

Although this is a well-shaped performance, with clean diction and all of the sense of ensemble which such open-weave music requires, to my ears it does not go nearly far enough along the path of authenticity to do real justice to the interesting and well-balanced programme. The bare fifths and open octaves often moving in parallel, which are one of the strongest characteristics of 15-century music, lack the almost rough intensity which the musical language requests, and which underpins performances by groups such as the New London Consort, Les Arts Florissants and the Tallis Scholars. To be fair, Paul Hillier and His Majestie's

Clerkes are all Chicago-based, so perhaps they do not seek the same 'authentic' idiom as do the groups which our European ears take as standard.

Cornago's Mass is followed by a bright collection of courtly secular songs which the Newberry Consort have got just right: elegant and graceful, but filled with vitality. The acoustic suits these well, but does not give the more sombre sonority of the mass nearly enough space. The *Credo* chant, for instance, is seriously constricted; and sensitively sung, imitative passages such as the 'Gloria tua' in the *Sanctus* would have benefited enormously from more freedom to resonate.

To me, this recording is an opportunity lost: a fascinating programme performed with great technical proficiency and sense of phrase, but not sufficiently thought out in terms of vocal tone to bring out the right colours. Early music can be surprisingly demanding!

[B:1/2] Helena Stoward

ELGAR:
Symphony 1 □ **Pomp and Circumstance Marches 1 & 2**
Baltimore SO/Zinman

Telarc CD-80310 (61m 40s) •

Symphony 1 □ **Cockaigne Overture**
LSO/Tate

EMI CDC 754 4142 (71m 39s) •

David Zinman's latest Elgar, so eagerly requested in these pages, isn't quite the performance that his Baltimore *Enigma* seemed to foreshadow, but it came as a breath of summer wind after the laboured glories of Tate and the LSO. If you agree, as I do, with Diana McVeagh's verdict that 'the most moving moments are sometimes the shy withdrawals . . . to an inward, private, tender world', then the Telarc disc may win your lasting affection. It is indeed in those 'Windflower' moments – the whispered idyll for strings which frames the first movement development, the echo-by-the-river effect of solo strings and woodwind (so hard to float) – that the loving intimacy of the Baltimore players comes into its own. The Adagio isn't quite ineffable – the clarinet's nostalgic reflections need a feeling for improvisation missing here – but at least there's a freshness, a sense of tender discovery, on every page. Tate shoots the fragile coda of the movement in the foot well in advance – right from the moment he virtually halves the speed of the scherzo (Elgar's winding-down in the note values should be quite enough) and proceeds at the slowest tempo possible. Again, there are tender

details, but the listener remains aware of the time taken. That certainly wasn't the case with Slatkin and the LPO [RCA], all air in comparison with Tate's self-conscious element of earth.

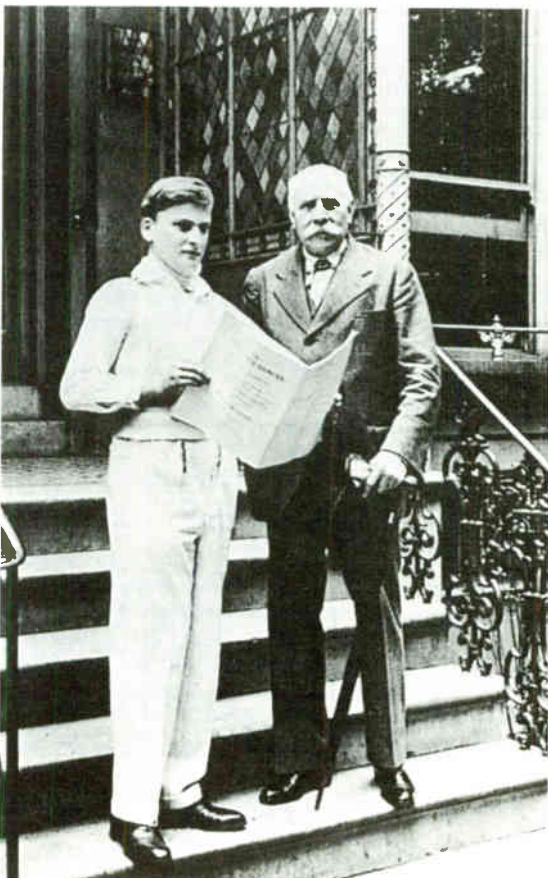
For the big moments, Tate's LSO unquestionably has the right power. Horns and trombones project the chromatic cascades at full force; but when, and for which conductor, do they not? There's a lack of discrimination in the sheer relentless volume, a blowsiness to which the slightly under-focused recording contributes; and Tate seems to run out of sheer physical energy in the finale's development (admittedly, it needs a helping hand). At times like these, I'd rather hear what Zinman and the Baltimore players are able to uncover, with less weight at their disposal, though Tate's last few minutes do suddenly take on a ripe and ready-to-go thrill. Otherwise, his is an interpretation which, outside its more perverse touches, one would be happy to hear in the concert-hall. But for posterity, alongside Boult and the LPO on the same EMI 'British Composers' label (and Barbirolli due for reissue, too)? Surely not.

Zinman has only the first two *Pomp and Circumstances* Marches when, with no repeat taken in the Second, all five could have been accommodated; Tate offers more in the shape of the *Cockaigne* Overture, but – again – so laboured in its lyrical moments (and so overwhelmed by organ at the end) that it turns out to be no bonus at all.

Telarc [A(*)]:1(*)/2], EMI [A/B:2/3].
David Nice

Tate's is an interpretation which one would be happy to hear in the concert-hall. But for posterity?

Master Menuhin at Abbey Road with Elgar – their classic HMV recording of the Violin Concerto has just been remastered. Right: Jeffrey Tate



HANDEL: Opera Arias

Nathalie Stutzmann (contralto)
Hanover Band/Goodman

RCA 09026 61205 2 (68m 42s) ●

I thoroughly enjoyed this recital, a highly effective vehicle for displaying Nathalie Stutzmann's firm, ringing contralto and her considerable powers of characterization. The programme also scores points for an imaginative choice of items, mixing the familiar and unfamiliar in equal measure and covering a wide range of moods and dramatic forms.

The most impressive track is probably the Mad Scene from *Orlando*, 'Ah Stigie larve', done with a fine sense of its bewildering turns of mood; but it is run close by 'Qui l'augel' from *Aci, Galatea i Polifemo*, 'Se dolce m'era gia' from *Floridante*, and a superb 'Ombra cara' from *Radamisto*. Stutzmann's voice is a remarkable instrument, equally powerful throughout the full, wide range of her register, and she blends it most magically with her orchestral counterparts: one would swear the opening syllable of 'Ombra cara' was emerging on a cor anglais. The Hanover Band accompany with spirit, though the sound they make is sometimes on the tubby side.

[A:1*/2] Calum MacDonald



Snowdon/EMI

having created the title role of *Agrippina* at Venice in 1709, she went on to feature in London throughout the 1720s in *Radamisto*, *Muzio Scevola*, *Ottone*, *Flavio*, and as Sesto in *Giulio Cesare* – and concluded as Tauris in *Arianna* in 1733. By all accounts she was a lady of spirit, clearly musically versatile and of considerable dramatic powers.

Might she have been more exciting to listen to than Lorraine Hunt? Coming to this disc immediately after Nathalie Stutzmann's Handel recital [reviewed below], I was struck by its comparative blandness and lowered emotional temperature. Only one item is common to both programmes: *Radamisto*'s 'Ombra cara'. Andrew Porter's notes for Harmonia Mundi quote Winton Dean: 'unquestionably one of the greatest arias composed by Handel or anyone else in the 18th-century'. But it is Stutzmann who makes you feel the truth of that judgement. Hunt is merely pleasant listening.

Her voice is beautiful, though a little deficient in colour, and her phrasing seems instrumental rather than vocal in conception. She is capable of finely-judged ornamentation and some invigorating bravura, but there are few occasions when she seems to use her voice to create a character rather than a musical effect. From this point of view the best parts of the disc are Sesto's arias from *Giulio Cesare*. All five of them are given: Hunt has sung the character on stage in Peter Sellars's acclaimed production, and I think it shows. Another impressive track is the last, the second of Tauris's arias from *Arianna*, with its elaborately-scored orchestral accompaniment. These are well worth hearing; the rest, pretty average.

[B:2/3] Calum MacDonald

HANDEL: Acis und Galatea (arr. Mozart)

Bonney/MacDougall/Schäfer/
Tomlinson/English Concert & Choir/
Pinnock

Archiv 435 792-2 (2CDs, 103m 36s) ●

This makes the third version of the Handel-Mozart *Acis* I've come across in a year: as far as I'm aware, Mozart's tolerably interesting adaptation now outnumbered the available recordings of Handel's original, which is a faintly silly situation. Like Christopher Hogwood on Oiseau-Lyre [HFN/RR October], Trevor Pinnock offers no fill-up on his two discs, though his generally slower tempi fill them rather more effectively. Christoph Spering on Opus 111 [April '92] offers a generous, apt and interesting coupling in the only available recording of Mozart's

HANDEL:

Arias for Durastanti

Lorraine Hunt (mez-sop)
Philharmonia Baroque Orch/
McGegan

Harmonia Mundi HMU 907056
(74m 20s) ●

This disc continues Harmonia Mundi's exploration of the Handel aria repertoire through pieces he wrote for particular singers (Cuzzoni, Montagnana and Senesino have already been covered). Of all his principal artists, Margherita Durastanti had the longest association with him:

arrangement of the *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*.

In *Acis* itself I found honours fairly even between those two versions, though the approaches of Spering and Hogwood are almost diametrically opposed. Pinnock stands somewhere between, more robust than Hogwood, bettering Spering in beauty of sound – but in fact no version yet gives us the ideal Mozart *Acis*, were such a thing worth contemplating. The new Archiv recording seems to me the best in terms of ambience and recorded balance, and fields what is perhaps marginally the strongest lineup of soloists. Opus 111 may still boast the best Polyphemus (Peter Lika), but Barbara Bonney outdoes Lynne Dawson on the Oiseau-Lyre set for sheer vocal lustre; Jamie MacDougall is a touching *Acis*, and Markus Schäfer (Spering's *Acis* on Opus 111) seems more at home here as Damon.

Yet Pinnock's slower tempi are not merely more expansive than his rivals' – they betoken a certain solemnity and ponderousness which ultimately undermines the appeal of his interpretation. In the cumulative lament of the final numbers there's an emotional intensity more appropriate to oratorio than this mellifluously affecting pastoral tragedy. It is Hogwood who captures the music's spirit most faithfully here; but elsewhere I find his approach not merely light in touch but curiously bodiless. All round (and for value for money) I'd still be inclined to go for Spering.

[A* :2]

Calum MacDonald

HAYDN:
Symphonies (Vol.3)
AAM/Hogwood

Oiseau-Lyre 433 661-2

(3CDs, 118m 38s) •

The AAM is playing better than ever. Beautifully incisive string articulation, needle-sharp accuracy, with spirit, taut rhythmic drive and supple phrasing, all captured in faithful

sound. The illusion of a small orchestra in a medium-sized and responsive hall is well conveyed; every note played is heard in its true perspective, so good is the balance. These are some of Haydn's most entertaining early symphonies. The *Morning-Noon-Evening* triptych 6-8 is the best known, 12 is sheer gaiety, 16 and 40 are energetic examples of early-Classical exploration, the latter, like 13, with a fugal finale. No.9 is an overture-like work, 72 divertimento-like, with fireworks for four horns, and played here with pyrotechnical expertise. There are four horns also in 13, giving added harmonic weight.

What these performances lack is character and period flavour. Some of Haydn's effects are so ahead of their time – the bassoon/double-bass duet in 6, the organ-chord horn parts in 13, the dancing fantasy of 40 (ii) – that a period reference point is needed to bring home their originality. This would be achieved if harpsichord continuo were used: as common-sense, historical correctness and most textbooks advise. The bassoon grunt and double-bass mutter of the trio of 6 is given balancing harpsichord sparkle in Goodman's version on Hyperion CDA 66523. Sadly, James Webster has 'got at' Hogwood and convinced him that Haydn's symphonies don't need, and never used, harpsichord. Webster spends many words in the booklet on trying to justify this stance against all that these very performances tell us is missing, then neatly contradicts himself on page 11 by admitting that Haydn was the harpsichord continuo player! Hogwood is his own man enough to use keyboard continuo in Mozart's and Beethoven's symphonies, often with only his own instinct to guide him. A pity he has already recorded many of the Haydn works in which it is most needed. Fortunately, Goodman's series is committed to employing harpsichord, and Derek Solomons's series, which Sony assure me *will* appear on CD, also uses it.

Other points: Hogwood omits timpani in 13 – expected but regretted. In 40 (iii), bar 5 etc, there is a quaver *appoggiatura* to a crotchet. Quantz, CPE Bach and L Mozart all stress that the grace note and the main note should be of equal length: Hogwood clips both to half length – unexpected and gawky.

Although there can be no honest recommendation for this set, it has to be said that Hogwood's 'complete' cycle (which apparently is to exclude 69) promises to be superbly played and superbly recorded – but is it Haydn?

[A* :1/2] for performance, [4] for text.

Robert Dearing

KRAUS:
4 Symphonies
Concerto Köln

Capriccio 10 396 (72m 08s) •

I should apologise to Kraus admirers who followed my recommendation and bought Halstead's recording of three symphonies, an overture and a march [*HFN/RR*, July 1992] – but how was I to know that the present wonderful disc was imminent? It contains two of the symphonies Halstead recorded, the famous one in C-minor, VB142, and that in C-major, VB139, in authentic instrument performances even more exciting than his. In addition, VB143 in D and VB144 in E-flat figure on *Capriccio*, making it even better value: 72 minutes as against 55.

When Kraus reshaped a C-sharp-minor symphony (VB140), he added bassoon and two more horns (making four), replaced flutes with oboes, dispensed with continuo, dropped the Minuet and transposed it to C-minor. The result was VB142. *Concerto Köln* retains continuo harpsichord – always wise in works of the 1780s – to give this gripping performance even more authenticity and bite. The other three symphonies are all penetrated by the *Sturm und Drang* spirit to which the C-minor is dedicated. VB144 in E-flat has alternative slow movements: that recorded here is the C-minor in 6/8 rather than the B-flat in 2/4, a good choice in that it continues the earnestness of (i) and allows us a most sensitive oboe solo. In the first movement a deceptively cheerful start turns increasingly dark and disturbed, at one point leaving second violins spinning confusedly like a sub-atomic particle after some cataclysmic reaction. The C-major, VB139 and the D-major, VB143 are equally commanding, quite different from, but as finely-wrought as anything by Haydn or Mozart.

The tension of the music is ideally matched by the performances, and the recording is well-spread, with good bass weight. A second volume is promised: if it is only nearly as good as the first it will deserve equal grading.

[A* :1*]

Robert Dearing

LOBO:
Requiem
Tallis Scholars/Phillips

Gimell CDGIM 028 (65m 45s) •

What can I say? The Tallis Scholars and Peter Phillips seem to go from strength to strength both in the breathtaking maturity of their performances and in the fascinating musical treasures which they unearth from obscurity.

Duarte Lôbo, not to be confused



with the slightly better-known Spaniard, Alonso Lobo, flourished in Portugal in the late 17th-century. Like many composers from that area, he continued writing in the traditional, Palestrinian *a cappella* (unaccompanied) style until well into the late Renaissance and long after the new *stile concertato* (literally 'concerted' or playing off instrumental and vocal groups against each other) had taken hold in the progressive musical world of Venice. The six-voice Requiem recorded here is firmly anchored in the *prima pratica* but there are passages, such as the Kyrie, which approach the vertically based, harmonic structures of Baroque writing. Needless to say, the Scholars' dynamic shaping of these surprising, rich blocks of sound is quite wonderful.

It is the range and versatility of their interpretation which lets masterpieces like this really come alive. For instance, in the *Communio* they pass in the space of only a few phrases from the fervent 'et lux perpetua', where the carefully tempered, tensile strength of their tone is apparent, to a delicate, cascading interplay of parts on the word 'pia' at 'quia pia es'. They receive superb acoustic support from the isolated Norfolk church where they now make all their recordings, and so I can only suggest that you sample the sheer splendour of this recording for yourself.

[A*:1*] *Helena Stoward*

MOZART:
Symphonies 38 in D, 'Prague' □ 40
in G (2nd version)

London Classical/Norrington

EMI CDC 754 3362 (69m 39s) •

Here is a very exciting and impressive account of two marvellous symphonies that are rather seldom paired in this way. Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players give us very full value for our money, with every repeat observed (including those in the *da capo* of the menuetto of the G-minor). The stature of the works is enhanced, their proportions interestingly re-evaluated, through this punctilious generosity. Those who have sometimes found Norrington's tempos uncomfortably fast in Mozart will find nothing to worry them here – if the Andante of 40 initially seems quick, it makes perfect sense in context. There is some superb playing in both works, with lithe, clearly articulated strings balanced quite beautifully by the winds, and with the timpani coming through tellingly. The first movement of the 'Prague' here plays for over eighteen minutes – not a second too long, with such attention to detail

offset by an impressively cumulative sweep. David Murray's recording is as responsive to dynamic gradations as it is rounded, natural and fresh. Two familiar masterpieces sparkle and glow as if new-minted.

[A:1*] *Peter Branscombe*

MOZART:
Die Entführung aus dem Serail
*Orgonasova/Sieden/Olsen/Peper/
Hauptmann/Minetti/MonteVerdi Ch/
EBS/Gardiner*

Archiv 435 857-2 (2CDs, 132m 37s) •

John Eliot Gardiner's first recording of one of Mozart's comic operas turns out to be a very serious and austere affair. Its fundament is a bold, forthright realization of the orchestral score, rich in detail and incisive in rhythm. The 'Turkish' instruments have a field day, and the timpani thunder threateningly. There is lovely, poised wind playing in the serenade-like passages, and the coloration from horns and bassoons is a further attractive feature.

The quality I most miss is vocal relish. True, there is pause after expressive pause at the *ad libitum* markings in 'Martern', and there is cultured phrasing in plenty from Stanford Olsen, the Belmonte. Technically, Luba Orgonasova's Konstanze is very fine, but the impression she creates is more one of musical instrumentality than psychological insight. If the words seem to mean little to her, that is still more true of Cyndia Sieden's Blonde, who can insert a little laugh into her second aria yet seems on this evidence to lack a sense of fun. Gardiner though must bear some of the blame for the unsmiling rigidity of several numbers. Uwe Peper is a reliable Pedrillo, and Hans-Peter Minetti, like Wolfgang Hinze in Christopher Hogwood's year-old version, is a Pasha to be reckoned with. Cornelius Hauptmann is a likeable Osmin, once or twice even formidable, but he lacks the essential weight towards the bottom of the range. The two CDs could easily have coped with a somewhat more extended version of the dialogue. (Klaas alas is one casualty of the cuts.)

The recording is clear, well balanced, with a feeling for space and distance; the slap, and footsteps, help suggest the action. More's the pity that the ladies' descent by ladder smacks more of the firemen's pole than of long-skirted decency: a longer silence here would have strengthened the drama. This is an interesting *Entführung*, but to my ears, and heart, it lacks the warmth as well as the all-round vocal qualities of Hogwood's version from Oiseau-lyre.

[A:2] *Peter Branscombe*

New period-instrument Mozart recordings from John Eliot Gardiner & Roger Norrington



Zoe Dominiczak/Arcteo



Trevor Leighton/EMI



Norrington and the London Classical Players give us very full value, with every repeat observed

PROKOFIEV:**Symphony 5** □ **Lieutenant Kijé Suite**
*St Petersburg PO/Temirkanov***RCA RD 60984** (63m 44s) •

Unlike several colleagues, I welcome Temirkanov's idiosyncrasies at the start of this Prokofiev Fifth: hanging on the cellos' and later the bass clarinet's sly E-natural, he undermines calm beginnings and creates expectations of darker things to come. Unfortunately, those darker things don't materialize as the first movement gathers steam. There are, of course, more distinctive touches – the stinging Russian vibrato of cantabile trumpet at exposition's end, the blasting trombones and heart-attack percussion in the ferocious coda – but rather fast speeds in the development (arrived at by a messy *animando*) allied to an often brittle-sounding ensemble don't really hold us in awe. The scherzo could be more savage still – try Tilson-Thomas on Sony, with LSO playing that is consistently breath-taking – and there are only a few chill blasts at the funereal heart of the slow movement; however, it is a relief to hear Temirkanov respecting the introspective nature of the great, leaping melody, after Ozawa's high dynamic levels throughout [DG]. The fail-safe finale is graced by a fine, reedy clarinet solo but, again, togetherness doesn't hold at the last, enigmatic moment.

There are two or three similar instances of dangerous ensemble in the *Kijé* Suite, but otherwise this is a mesmerising performance, carrying

This portrait of Sergei Prokofiev, by PP Konchalovsky, is at Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery



the seeds of its own bizarre deconstruction from the wedding-song counterpoint onwards. Temirkanov settles on his own tempi, and they all work; there's an outstanding, if unconventionally phrased cornet solo, and fantastical, ghostly mutterings from the St Petersburg strings in the last three numbers.

The sound is faithful to the slightly dry but otherwise admirable Philharmonic Hall acoustics, though with slightly less presence than on the more recent Tchaikovsky symphonies set – a better overall guide, incidentally, to the state of St Petersburg art under Temirkanov.

Symphony [A: 1/2], *Lt Kijé* [1].
David Nice

SHOSTAKOVICH:**Jazz Suites 1 & 2** □ **Tahiti Trot** □
Piano Concerto 1*Ronald Brautigam (pno)/Peter Maseurs (tpt)/Concertgebouw/Chailly***Decca 433 702-2** (58m 33s) •

Tahiti Trot, Shostakovich's glittering orchestration of 'Tea for Two', was completed in 40 minutes in response to a challenge from Nikolai Malko; it became an instant popular success, and later the composer put it into *The Golden Age* as an entr'acte. Rozhdestvensky introduced it to London audiences – he recorded the First Jazz Suite too, as filler to the Fourth on his Olympia symphony cycle. In 1934 Shostakovich had been asked to compose something – Suite 1 – which would 'elevate' café music in status. Four years later his larger-scaled Suite 2 was completed for the new State Orchestra for Jazz. His Concerto is from this same period, fitting Chailly's programme well with its elements of parody, quotation and cinematic allusion. [Its inclusion shows the classical record industry's hyperactivity: Decca released Jablonski/Ashkenazy only a month ago. That said, I'd still like to see the Ogdon/ASM reissued!]

The music is more 'Mack the Knife' or *Cabaret* than jazz, but Concertgebouw polish makes the First Suite trilogy irresistible – where Rozhdestevenky's Ensemble plays with a cruder determination. (The *Polka* reminds one of the *Children's Hour* music for 'Toytown'.) The Second Suite shows Shostakovich writing glossily finished light music, sometimes with comic rib-nudging – tracks such as *Dance 1*, with its manic *Bolero* theme, make perfect quiz material for music snobs. The sustenance is slight, but the presentation could hardly be bettered: hugely enjoyable.

Chailly and Brautigam tear into the first movement of the Concerto in a

tigerish manner, yet the nocturnal *Lento* brings great sensitivity and refinement, nowhere more than in the ravishing *pianissimo* just before a superbly executed trumpet solo. It is a pity that the pianoforte is so close and wide, with 'Phase 4' bass registers. Is it engineering, instrument or pianist responsible for a narrow range of colour here? Brautigam sounds happier in toccata-like virtuosity than in expressive lyricism. But, if he is too 'plain-speaking', Chailly and his orchestra are richly eloquent.

[A/(B):1] *Christopher Breunig*

SCHUBERT:**Hyperion Edition – Vol 15***Margaret Price (sop)/Graham Johnson (pno)***Hyperion CDJ 33015** (72m 92s) •

The latest volume in this magisterial series brings one of our most exciting singers in a programme of expertly selected and winningly presented night songs. Favourites like 'Der Wanderer an den Mond' and 'Die junge Nonne' are set in a context that contains almost totally neglected songs, and as so often with previous volumes, Graham Johnson's advocacy makes their neglect incomprehensible. Seven of these seventeen lieder are not otherwise available; they include a deceptively simple 'Der Mondabend', a rapturous 'Der Morgenkuss', and in 'Kolmas Klage' an Ossianic narrative of rich variety – and testing technical challenges. Quiet different again is the once-popular 'Ins stille Land', delicate, full of suppressed yearning – and demanding (here receiving) the kind of deft modification of the vocal line that strophic settings are subject to. The expected high standard of the recording and the detailed booklet of notes and German-English song-texts is triumphantly maintained. And the partnership of soprano and pianist gives pleasure after pleasure – superbly alert, perceptive piano playing in total harmony with a singer whose generosity of response, shapely phrasing and sensitive response to, and projection of, the words are the equal of anything yet heard in this wonderful undertaking.

[A:1*] *Peter Branscombe*

STENHAMMAR:**Piano Concerto 1** □ **2 Sentimental Romances** □ **Florez & Blanzeflor***Love Derwinger (pno)/Ulf Wallin (vln)/Peter Mattei (bar)/Malmö SO/Järvi***BIS CD-550** (67m 55s) •

The rediscovery of Stenhammar's First Piano Concerto, his Op.1, long thought lost, was described in my review of the Chandos recording [OCT



Peter Tchaikovsky – this historic photograph is from Berlin's Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte

'92]. This version, conducted by Neeme Järvi's son, and played with great expressiveness by Derwinger, a young Swede (b.1966) of tremendous talent and potential, is quite the equal of the Widlund-Rozhdstvensky performance. In some respects, notably in its unforced espousal of Stenhammar's ardent romanticism (strongest in the lovely third movement) it has the edge, though the Chandos team have the advantage in their fleet-footed Scherzo.

The concerto is of Brahmsian length, and Chandos were able to add only the brief sketch of Stenhammar's Third Symphony. BIS are more generous. The *Sentimental Romances*, mature Stenhammar (1910), enjoy a reputation well deserved among those not averse to rich, full-blown emotion. They are most attractively played by Wallin, whose broad bosomy tone suits them admirably. *Flores and Blanzeflor*, another example of the composer's early manner, taxes Mattei's voice at the climaxes, but he compensates with a performance full of commitment. Altogether a most enjoyable record, technically well up to BIS's highest standard.

[A:1] **Kenneth Dommett**

TCHAIKOVSKY:
The Nutcracker (complete ballet)
LPO/Jansons

EMI CDS 754 6002 (2CDs, 86m 49s) •

(with Eugene Onegin – Waltz & Polonaise)
RPO/Temirkanov

RCA RD 60465 (2CDs, 103m 42s) •

What a coincidence: two St Petersburg Philharmonic conductors in the same score, doing their best away from home ground, and putting forward their very different approaches as distinctively as possible. Jansons immediately reveals his preoccupation with good, clean ensemble at a high dynamic level in the *fortissimo* rounding-off of the Miniature Overture, and sets briskly about his business, not very much helped by (or perhaps caring enough to be helped by) LPO woodwind. Temirkanov could hardly be more characterful by way of contrast: not a very polished ensemble at curtain rise, but marvelously lugubrious violas, lower brass and clarinets as the nutcracker-bearing Doctor Drosselmeyer appears on the scene. Later in the act, as the magic spell begins to work, it's swings and roundabouts: the RPO respond keenly to Temirkanov's magic in the transformation scene and there's a terrific battle between the toy soldiers and the mice (it could well be 1812 here), but the next climax (the journey through the snow) begins to sound overblown, while Jansons comes to life at this point and moves the Waltz of the Snowflakes crisply along without a hint of false sentiment.

In the characteristic dances and the aristocratic set-pieces of Act Two, Temirkanov wins hands down. It's curious that he should have cared to do so much damage to the shape of the act in concert performance – in both of his Barbican performances, the sequence jumped from flutes to flowers, from sugar-plum fairy back to an inflated *Pas de deux* by way of grand finale – since he makes such a splendid distinction between the Waltz of the Flowers and a broader, more sweeping Valse Finale; after that, our heroine is returned to real life with suitable speed. And the *Pas de deux*, stripped of concert-hall vulgarity until the very last bar, has both muscle and room to breathe.

The *Onegin* dance-sequences make a short but brilliantly-lit filler on RCA; Jansons has nothing, which is surely bad news for EMI – neither does Previn but, as reissued on CfP, he's both the cheapest and the best [see 'Reflections']. Engineering on both recordings is irreproachable.

EMI [A/B: 1/2], RCA [A:1(*)].

David Nice

TCHAIKOVSKY:
Symphonies 4, 5 & 6
St Petersburg PO/Temirkanov

RCA 09026 61377 2

(2CDs, 144m 57s) •

The one undeniable advantage of CD over vinyl is 'armchair control': no-one nowadays wants to get up in the middle of a 50-minute work to fiddle around changing discs. Yet, having despatched equipment and a first-rank production team [Mallinson/Faulkner] to work in St Petersburg's Philharmonic Hall last April, what do RCA then do? They adopt a penny-pinching two-disc format which (just as with the Karajan, Klemperer, Ashkenazy, Haitink and Mravinsky reissues) involves splitting the Fifth. Such an arrangement is insulting to artists and purchasers, a disgrace for RCA. Surely, here was a potential challenger to one of the greatest of all recorded Tchaikovsky triologies – same orchestra, new name and conductor?

That out of the way, all that really needs to be said is that the four key words to describe Temirkanov's interpretations all lie in the opening sentences of David Nice's interview this month. Very different from his predecessor's, these are idiosyncratic versions, endlessly fascinating, which one will either hate or love (perhaps both).

Mravinsky's autocratic manners imposed an austere resilience upon music where Temirkanov shows us a raw vulnerability: *eg*, in his slow-paced *Andantino* from the Fourth Symphony where pathos seeps from the page, notably in sighing wind phrases. The symmetries are shaped in a world-weary way; landscapes prettified by other observers are here forlornly grey. Listen to Temirkanov's way with woodwind decoration – that's the mark of the true Tchaikovsky conductor (you hear it in Markevich's LSO cycle too). There's a fluttery nervousness to the pizzicato scherzo, the twang of strings beautifully caught in Faulkner's recording. In the middle section, Temirkanov gives us rustic dancing, charmingly pointed, in place of Mravinsky's stiffer, heavier troupe (more akin to regimented dance steps in ballet). One must not, however, deny the marvellous sense of fantasy in string pizzicati under Mravinsky – plainer by far on RCA. In fact, Temirkanov's composer will sound weaker, more feminine wherever you compare him with Mravinsky's.

The horn solo in 5(ii) wafts in over a drowsy haze (low strings again register tellingly); this whole passage, up to the oboe entry, is like an awakening. With some unusual

tempo relationships, Temirkanov's account is very thrilling, and the flickering ebb of the *Andante cantabile* is done with exquisite tenderness, yet is prefaced by a clenched-fist gesture with the full weight of St Petersburg brass, a reminder that Temirkanov likes, at times, to be noisy! [I didn't expect to experience that old sensation of stomach-flutters when listening to Tchaikovsky. But, oh, that side-break!]

The *Pathétique* registers subtle hues of colour in its opening pages; where Tchaikovsky summons his forces there's much subtle, delicate, soft playing, but the famous string theme is heard in a laudanum trance-like state – very Berliozian, this! The dreaminess pervades the big *descrecendo*, abruptly broken into here, with the scurrying *allegro* development more fragmented than usual. Temirkanov's waltz is more extravert than I expected; his march-scherzo deliberate, not rushing: grand, almost pompous, fired with brass punctuations always carefully thought out in terms of balance. The final swirls, bass-drum thwacks full force, remind one momentarily of *Nutcracker*: this slightly exaggerated coda makes the slide down into the last movement even more precipitate. Perhaps the Sixth, although interesting, is not quite as inspirational as the two companion works – I find the finale a shade calculated, notwithstanding some very lovely orchestral playing. But these discs certainly focus the very responsible Temirkanov, not the showman.

[A: 1*/1] Christopher Breunig

VERDI:

La Traviata

Gruberova/Shicoff/Zancanaro/
Ambrosian Singers/LSO/Rizzi

Teldec 9031-76348-2

(2CDs, 130m 18s) •

Studer/Pavarotti/Pons/Met Op Orch
& Ch/Levine

DG 435 797-2

(2CDs, 122m 12s) •

Recorded at Abbey Road in February 1992, the Teldec set suffers from 'telescope' sound, whereby everything seems to be taking place a long way away. There's not enough warmth, though the disparate elements have been nicely separated.

The elements themselves are mixed. An experienced and – from a purely vocal point of view – accomplished Violetta, Gruberova triumphs over all the coloratura difficulties of Act 1 without establishing herself as a character. This she undertakes in the searching scene with Germont (Giorgio Zancanaro) in Act 2, adding personality to her

portrayal almost by the bar, going on to an Act 3 of some dramatic depth. It's a frustrating reading, suggesting at best a notable Violetta and at worst a merely accurate and somewhat brittle one.

Neil Shicoff's brash and charmless Alfredo never rises to the musical and dramatic potential of his role – again a pity since his voice is well suited to it. If only he could develop some variety. Zancanaro gives the richest portrayal of the three, perceptibly warming to Violetta's goodness in their scene together – the heart of the opera – and showing a considered approach throughout.

Rizzi gives us every note in the score, and brings an energy to his conducting that would be more welcome if it were less relentless: he clearly wants both party-scenes to go with a bang, but his choral forces (the solid Ambrosians), and even his principals, sound uncomfortable in places. Generally distinguished playing from the LSO, with a lovely string sheen.

On the DG recording (made at the Manhattan Center in June 1991) the Met orchestra, which could probably manage *Traviata* in its collective sleep, has the edge over the Londoners from the fragility of the opening string chords on, while the Met chorus registers (unsurprisingly) as the genuine theatrical article. James Levine's conducting is more natural in pace than Rizzi's yet has just as much dramatic impetus, and he provides perfect support for his singers.

Cheryl Studer (Violetta) may not have Gruberova's technical bravura (her coloratura is occasionally too feathery) but her utter conviction and acute perception would allow her to hold her head up at any gathering of Great Violettas. Amidst the feverish gaiety of Act 1 she makes the part her own in a reading shot through with moments of intimacy. Pavarotti's Alfredo may no longer sound the impetuous youth (the bloom at the top of his voice duller than of yore), but he makes a generally good showing in a performance notable for its clarity of diction – even though he doesn't always appear to be thinking about the words he's articulating. Juan Pons (Germont), once past a blustery entrance, delivers a fine all-singing, all-acting performance, charting Germont's development with rare delicacy. An underrated artist.

In general, then, DG's is the more involving *Traviata* of the two, though none of the voices is flattered by the sound, with its healthy bass, rather edgy middle and lack of brilliance at the top.

Teldec [B/C:1/2/3], DG [B:1*/2].

George Hall

VIVALDI:

Concerti da camera – Concerto in C, RV87 □ in G, RV103 □ in C, RV88 □ in F, RV100 □ in D, RV95 'La Pastorella' □ Sonata in d, RV63 'La Folia' (Vol.2)

Concerto in F, RV97 □ in D, RV94 □ in G, RV106 □ in D, RV93 □ in D, RV91 □ Sonatina in a, RV86 (Vol.3) Concerto in F, RV99 □ in a, RV108 □ in G, RV105 □ in D, RV92 □ in G, RV107 □ Sonata in c, RV53 (Vol.4) *Il Giardino Armonico*

Teldec 9031-73268-2, 9031-73269-2, 9031-74727-2

(52m 33s/53m 13s/51m 37s) •

The first volume from this youthful Milan group (playing period or copy instruments) comprised the Op.10 Recorder Concertos. Warning about pitch manipulation, Robert Dearling was nonetheless enthusiastic in his review last March, whilst I (and JMH) thought it possibly the most exciting Baroque disc of the year. Vols. 2-4 offer 'chamber concerti without orchestra': mixed concertos for three or more soloists with varied bass continuo (RV92 excepted: this has no continuo). RV97 is for six soloists – viola d'amore/2 oboes/2 corni da caccia/bassoon – whilst only RV93 (lute/2 violins) is without winds. RV53 is an oboe sonata, performed here with bassoon, theorbo and harpsichord continuo; Op.1:12 [RV63] for two violins, an Adagio with 19 variations based on the then popular theme *La Follia*, is also played with varied continuo instruments. Contrary to the old complaint, Vivaldi didn't write and rewrite the same piece – as the booklet essays indicate, he was at pains to vary form and textures, silencing this or that instrument for a slow movement (RV105), letting other voices accompany or double, eg: RV108/Largo where violins in thirds engage in dialogue with recorder.

These Lugano RTSI co-production studio recordings date from Dec '90-June '92; sound quality is consistent with Vol.1 (and, redesigned, Vol.1 artwork is now similarly matched to its successors). These recordings, fine though they are, are not easy to reproduce correctly: level setting is critical to avoid discomfort at sustained treble winds. At the same time, *Il Giardino* employ extremes of dynamics (much as did *Concentus musicus* in their pioneering Baroque LPs), with *ppp* echo effects then strong instrumental attacks which could coarsen on less capable systems.

What makes these discs appealing is the balance of various elements: there's an obvious determination to play well together and to communi-



photo: BMG Classics

Cheryl Studer makes the part her own in a reading shot through with moments of intimacy

cate, a concern for authentic practices and sound (consistent with Teldec's *Das Alte Werk* imprint), yet a good deal of fun and exuberance is generated.

[A:1/1*] *Christopher Breunig*

VIVALDI:

Concerto for oboe and violin in B^b, RV548 □ **Oboe Concertos – in C, RV450** □ **in a, RV463** □ **in D, RV453** □ **in a, RV461** □ **in C, RV447**

Douglas Boyd (ob)/Marieke Blankestijn (vln)/COE

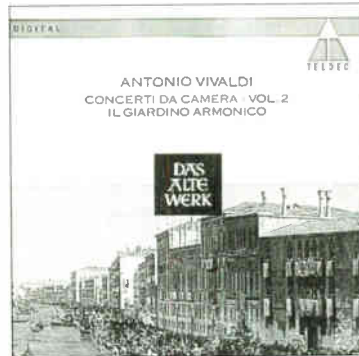
DG 435 873-2 (59m 29s) •

Recorded fifteen months ago in the chamber-music hall of the Philharmonie, Berlin, these concertos date from the early 1720s to 1730s (when Vivaldi rescored RV450/463 from bassoon to oboe, leaving the string accompaniments unchanged). The oboe parts are formed on the lines of the violin concertos (whereas, for example, Albinoni's were more consciously modelled on vocal style); in the final Allegro from RV453, the soloist sometimes counters the giga rhythm with his own four-in-three motif – deftly handled by Boyd.

After listening to the *Alte Werk* discs, the comfortable plush of modern strings and the forward placing of the oboe (in *Il Giardino Armonico*'s recordings all the players are balanced as one integral unit) came as quite a jolt. As sometimes happens, the busy tinkling of harpsichord continuo sounds, paradoxically, more 'old fashioned' than 'authentic'. What I miss here is IGD's sense of

closeness, of genuine identification with the spirit of Vivaldi's music. But a lively manner, the clean intonation of the COE strings and Douglas Boyd's musicianly expertise are nonetheless enjoyable. The acoustic, I think, somewhat distances the listener and the string textures can clog very slightly – more hall depth would have been nice. The affable double concerto is most attractively performed.

[A:1] *Christopher Breunig*



WAGNER:

LOHENGRIN

Studer/Schnaut/Frey/Wlaschiha/Schulte/Schenk/Bayreuth Festival Ch&Orch/Schneider

Philips 434 602-2

(4CDs, 212m 25m) ■

Unlike other releases in the Philips *Bayreuther Festspiele* edition, this new *Lohengrin* was recorded outside the festival, in June 1990, and is not a live performance. There is a small, standard cut in the final scene (authorised, in fact, by Wagner himself). The recorded quality tends towards the glassy but opaque, though the voices come over well even if without much sense of space or perspective.

The set's least attractive feature is the flat-footed reading of Peter Schneider, one of the more indifferent Wagner conductors Bayreuth has heard over recent years. *Lohengrin* is not a score that plays itself, and too much of this performance is earthbound and ponderous, with no visionary quality. The chivalric formalities of Act 1 become just a touch tiresome.

In the title-role, Paul Frey has an appropriately ethereal, other-worldly (one might uncharitably say hollow) quality, but lacks knightly brightness and ring; his 'In fernem Land' is nevertheless notable for its poetry. Cheryl Studer's Elsa is from most points of view a sovereign performance, cleanly articulated and with a characteristically searching approach to interpretation, though she could arguably do with a shade more weight here and there. Gabriele Schnaut's Ortrud, on the other hand, has an almost terrifying vocal vastness and a rather unruly wobble. This is large-scale singing, never less than urgent and even occasionally alarming, but in the context of this wild and crazy woman far from inappropriate. She is well matched with Ekkehard Wlaschiha's Telramund: he wastes not a syllable in elucidating the character's weak but evil nature in baleful, edgy tone, while successfully avoiding crudity. Eike Wilm Schulte is the excellent Herald, Manfred Schenk a rather mild mannered King Henry. The opera contains some of Wagner's finest string writing, which the Bayreuth orchestra revels in, and the vital choral contribution is unflinchingly impressive.

[B/C: 1*/3] *George Hall*

Cheryl Studer's Elsa is a sovereign performance, cleanly articulated and with a characteristically searching approach to interpretation



J S BACH: Organ Works
CD 1: Preludes & Fugues;
Fugues □ **CD 2: Toccatas &**
Fugues □ **CD 3: Partitas;**
Pastorale; Canzone; Allabreve □
CD 4 & 5: Orgelbüchlein □ **CD**
6: Fantasias & Fugues;
Fughettas □ **CD 7 & 8: Leipzig**
Chorales; Arnstadt/Weimar
Chorales □ **CD 9: Trio Sonatas**
 □ **CD 10 & 11: Chorale Preludes**
in Clavier-Übung (iii); Schübler
Chorales; Canonic Variations □
CD 12: Later Preludes & Fugues
Lionel Rogg (org)
Harmonia Mundi HMX 290772-83
 (12CDs, 753m 41s) © 1970 ■

In the mid-1960s, then aged about 30, Lionel Rogg recorded Bach's complete oeuvre for organ on the Metzler instrument

of the Grossmünster, Zurich, in his native Switzerland [for Oryx]. In 1970 he recorded the works again on the splendid organ by Johann Andreas Silbermann in Arlesheim Cathedral, and this set has now been re-issued in digital transcriptions (with minimal information provided in the otherwise commendable booklet, which contains lengthy notes by Rogg himself in French and English, as well as the specification of the instrument, and a note on its history and the restoration undertaken around 1960 by the firm of Metzler).

No claim of completeness is made: spot checks suggest that a few authentic works are absent, including the concerto arrange-

ments and some isolated fantasias and preludes; conversely a few spurious pieces (such as the much recorded Fugue in G, BWV577 and one or two chorales) are included. The layout of the (flimsy) box is reasonably satisfactory, and the booklet has a useful index to discs and tracks. The performances and the recorded quality are both variable – in the former case, from the brilliant and assured to rather tentative, even dull tracks, and in the latter from spacious, well focused full glory to some distinctly edgy, overloaded climaxes, noted particularly on CD 12 at the end of works that close with a loud flourish. The organ itself is a beautiful instrument, its more

exotic timbres sparingly invoked by Rogg – his approach is consistently sober, measured, with only occasional evidence of the virtuosity he undoubtedly commands. He is content to let Bach's music speak for itself – which in these circumstances it does, most eloquently, if lacking the excitement and variety that other leading exponents have no difficulty in finding in it. I felt that his imagination was more readily challenged by some of the less familiar music, such as the early preludes and fugues, than by late, great masterpieces. In the latter, his care for line, melody and clear registration is more evident than his own sense of excitement and commitment. The trio sonatas, with their

TELDEC DAS ALTE WERK



The German Telefunken firm began its *Das Alte Werk* series in the late 1950s as competition for DG's Archiv label. While it did not adopt the same militarily severe approach to repertoire planning as its rival, *Das Alte Werk* trod a similar path of presenting well-known works and rarities in authentic performances. Much effort was spent in booking specialist performers – many of them now famous, such as Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Frans Brüggen, and members of the Kuijken family – who in turn employed historically correct instruments. Today, authentic performance itself has developed: even the mild vibrato of Alice Harnoncourt and Eva Braun (Eva Braun?) in *Concentus musicus* sounds 'wrong', but it is nonetheless a pleasure to welcome back some familiar old performances in smart new packages.

Music at the Court of Mannheim [4509-91002-2, 53m 45s ▲] sadly does not offer the sizzling symphonies of Jan Stamic, Filtz or Beck that the record industry so studiously

ignores. Instead, *Concentus musicus* plays tuneful chamber works by Richter, Holzbauer, JC Bach (our dear old John Christian at Mannheim? This Quartet may have been played there but it was played elsewhere as well. Why not call the disc 'Music at the Stoke Poges Tea Rooms?') and, yes, Jan Stamic. His *Orchestral Trio Op.1:2* at least shows some flair, even though it is played as a quartet; but this 1963 recording, rather constricted in sound, is a little dull and the booklet never mentions the music once. [C:2]

Much better are Rameau's imaginative *Pièces de clavecin en concert I-V* from 1971 [9031-77618-2, 52m 27s ■] with Gustav Leonhardt leading Frans Brüggen, flute, Sigiswald Kuijken, violin, and Wieland Kuijken, gamba. The performances match the music's fantasy, the combination producing some piquant sounds, and the recording has survived two decades with hardly a wrinkle. Excellent booklet notes. [B:1].

Much the same may be said of 9031-77617-2 [2CDs, 134m 24s ■] on which Quadro Hotteterre plays six suites by Marin Marais, recorded in the summers of 1975 and 1977.

Marais is known primarily for his deeply-felt gamba music but here two recorders (Kees Boeke and Walter Van Hauwe) are accompanied by cello and harpsichord in varied music ranging from sad sarabandes to jolly giges.

Each suite comprises many short movements, but I find the variety offered is not enough to

engage the attention for more than one suite at a sitting. The recorders produce a mournful cooing which will appeal to specialists but may put off the less committed listener. The sound, however, is faithful and neatly balanced. [A:1/2]

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's 'Prussian' and 'Württemberg' Sonatas (H24-29 and H30-35 respectively) are played by Bob van Asperen on a harpsichord – an instrument I prefer in this music to clavichord or fortepiano, for it seems to reflect better the composer's vivid invention. The twelve sonatas take three discs [9031-77623-2, 175m 56s ■], the third being completed by a rare oddity: the Concerto for unaccompanied harpsichord, H190, a substantial work in which the composer seems consciously to avoid the influence of his father's *Italian Concerto*.

In fact, this least predictable of composers is well represented by Asperen's fiery playing since he understands his lightning mood changes. All these works are in three movements but there is never a feeling that Bach is merely filling and refilling the same old moulds. They constitute a kind of compendium of effects and moods available to the imaginative player, and Asperen exploits every opportunity. The recordings from 1977 and 1978 are as fresh as one could wish. These astonishing works are rarely recorded, so should be snapped up forthwith, for it is doubtful whether they will ever be done better. [A:1*]

Robert Dearling

J S BACH: 6 Brandenburg Concertos

Concentus musicus/Harnoncourt
Teldec 9031-77611-2

(2CDs, 105m 19s) © 1964 ■

These are the earlier *Concentus Brandenburgs*, not the 1981-82 digital recordings, made with a substantially different group of players – harpsichord, recorder, horns, trumpet, bassoon and some strings. Timings are significantly longer here in 1(iv), 2(i)(ii), 4(i), 5(i)(ii), the two string works showing the most consistency; in the later set, the linking cadenza 3(i)-(iii) is much sparer in texture. Both these features are indicative of the more ascetic, sometimes more extreme, later approach. Yet the warmer manner here will probably be wider in appeal. This set has various delights: a clean, lively finale to 3, and one relaxed and springy for 4; gloriously bucolic textures with the corni da caccia in 1(i)(iii); a less fussy treatment of 4(i). Some drawbacks too: a plodding *Adagio* to 6 (this was to develop into something more delicate and plastic, avoiding the 'souful'); a suspicious change of acoustic – empty hall – for Georg Fischer's 5(i) cadenza, beautifully played though it is; relatively cautious speeds in 2, doubtless constrained by the clarino (more accurate in the later set, where the tempi flow more naturally). In sum, a worthy reissue, in remarkably good sound for its date – though the digital alternatives are superior. [B:2] more or less, sound/perf.

Christopher Breunig

inbuilt swift alternation between tempos and moods, struck me as more impressively handled than, for instance, many of the chorale preludes from Book 3 of the Clavier-Übung which, if never perfunctory, lack the fervour that might be thought appropriate for the Catechism Preludes.

To sum up, this large-scale project is certainly not the last word in terms of digital sound, but though touches of congestion and edgy tone do occur, they are not frequent and hardly inhibit one's admiration for clear and atmospheric recording of Silbermann's instrument. The playing is very reliable, clean and impressive, though it does lack flamboyance and tension. [A/B:1/2] **Peter Branscombe**

BARTOK: Bluebeard's Castle/BERG: Wozzeck – excerpts*
*Szekely (bass)/Szonyi, *Pilarczyk (SOPS)/LSO/Dorati*
Philips 434 325-2
(72m 57s) © 1961-62 ■

The three *Wozzeck* scenes certainly left indelible sonic images: the closing of the window as the soldiers march by; the child's 'hop hop' after Marie's stabbing. They were last to be found on a comparatively poor 'Golden Imports' LP transfer; the Bartok opera had long been unavailable. With the noble-voiced Hungarian bass who had studied the role with the composer, Dorati and the LSO gave a concert performance preceding these Watford Mercury sessions, where a special effect was devised for the 'sighs' of the castle walls. (Dorati also conducted the first US performance of *Bluebeard*, at Dallas in the late-1940s.) The absence of libretto is serious, especially when 10 booklet pages are given over to promotional material. Hungarian/English texts are included with both the Solti 'Enterprise' and Sawallisch '20th Century Classics' mid-priced alternatives. Mercury's tradeoff is 20½m of extra music by Berg, memorably done. Alas, *Bluebeard* is very badly dated. Unlike Solti's, which benefits enormously from the 1979 Kingsway sound, and which is properly 'staged' (complete with spoken prologue), the Mercury is static, and in the case of the soprano part surely offers little more than a sight-reading. Szonyi's hard, at times shrill singing, with strained phrasing, only spasmodically conveys any

sense of a dramatic relationship (not surprisingly, Varady and Fischer-Dieskau on DG score here). Even Szekely tends to become monotonous. Dorati had worked hard to provide the right idiom, but his is a lean, workmanlike achievement where Solti carries greater authority and, with the LPO, realised greater flexibility, richness and incident. But that said, and given that F-D is evidently not a Hungarian bass, the DG is ultimately the one that moves the listener most.

[C:3][1*] **Christopher Breunig**

BEETHOVEN: Symphony 7/DVORAK: Symphony 7
LSP/Monteux
Decca 433 403-2 (74m 18s)
recordings from 1961, 1959 ■

Though he was associated with French/Russian schools, Pierre Monteux's greater love was the Austro-German music of the 19th-century. His Dvorak Seventh was first issued on RCA (the original LP sounded technically superb though CD exposes some deterioration at the end). This was a famous recording, yet faulted by some for the freedom of tempi, not to mention that trumpet doubling added at (iv) 425 [track 4, 8m 14s]. I don't think it's anywhere near Mackerras's for authentic Czech feel: Monteux brings a somewhat generalised weight and romantic flexibility to the work. Nevertheless the marvellous warmth and exuberance can now be savoured once more.

Significantly, his Beethoven Seventh first appeared on a Victrola mid-priced LP, in 1982 on Decca's bargain SPA stereo label. Monteux's geniality didn't quite fit the prevailing tastes either for Klemperer or for the demonic Toscanini. 'Brilliance is all' declared one review. Thomas Heinitz wrote more shrewdly of Monteux's 'straight from the shoulder' manner, but regretted (apart from specific musical shortcomings such as the abrasive *Allegretto* climax and dragged trios) technical insecurities, which robbed the fast tempi for (i)(iv) of true exhilaration. I agree; however, I do find the bracing *Poco sostenuto* introduction genuinely stimulating, if unconventional. Incidentally, Monteux was then just 86 – and he'd asked the LSO for a 25-year contract as chief conductor!

[B/C:2] **Christopher Breunig**

BERLIOZ: Overtures – Benvenuto Cellini □ Le Corsaire □ Romeo & Juliet excerpts – Romeo Alone & Fete, Queen Mab Scherzo, Love Scene □ The Trojans – Royal Hunt & Storm
Paris Conservatoire/Munch
Decca 433 405-2 (61m 39s) ©
recordings from 1946, '48, '49 ■

Transferred from 78rpm originals and available for a while on two 'LXT' LPs in the early 1950s, these six pieces offer rather variable sound quality, rough at some climaxes, with hum and other noises coming and going inexplicably. The *Cellini* (Walthamstow 1946) is dimmer and more distantly set than the other items, the latter recorded a little later in Paris, where Charles Munch promoted Berlioz's music with enthusiasm before moving on to Boston. Much of his intensity and fire comes across here despite the sonic limitations, although I suppose this CD is unlikely to be of more than historical interest to most gramophiles.

In the above blurb I've subtracted a minute from the total time as given, since the *Royal Hunt & Storm* is followed by over 60s of clocked silence. Also, the last two *R&F* pieces are reversed on the inset/booklet.

[H:1] **John Crabbe**

BERLIOZ: L'Enfance du Christ □ Les Nuits d'Été
Valletti (ten)/Kopleff (con)/Souzay (bar)/Tozzi (bass)/New England Cons Ch/Boston SO/Munch/Price (sop)/Chicago SO/Reiner
RCA 09026 61234-2 (2CDs, 125m)
recordings from 1956, '63 ■

More rummaging from RCA's archives give us two pioneer stereo recordings. The *Childhood* from Munch/Boston (1956) is something of a curate's egg whose CD rationale has to be primarily historical, despite much fine singing; but, despite critical disagreement elsewhere, the *Nuits d'Été* magnificently justifies itself as one of the work's great performances. Leontyne Price's moving and masterly rendition, alertly accompanied by Fritz Reiner not long before his death, obliges me to recommend this package (two CDs neatly if somewhat inextricably encapsulated in a single-size jewel box) just for the sake of the 31m song-cycle. But that's life, and



Charles Munch (photo: Decca)

anyone wanting a superb *Nuits d'Été*, with a *Childhood* simply for the highlights, would be well served. The Chicago recording has a lovely open, spacious feel, and is marred only by a momentary touch of tape print-through not eliminated during remastering.

Childhood [B/C:1/3], *Nuits d'Été* [A/B:1*]. **John Crabbe**

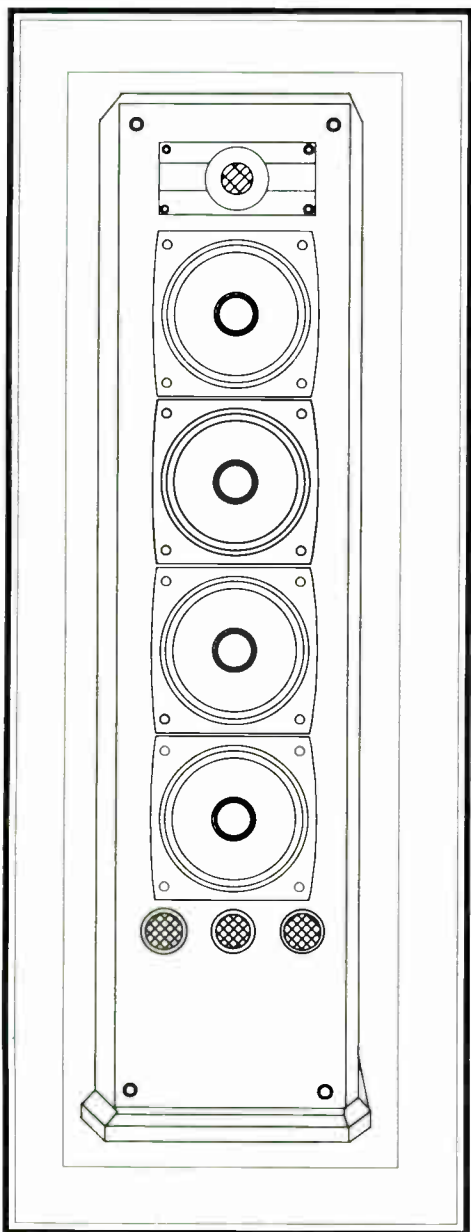
BRAHMS: Alto Rhapsody □ Schicksalslied □ Nänie □ Gesang der Parzen
Lipovšek/Ernst Senff Ch/Berlin PO/Abbado
DG 435 791-2
(56m 52s) © 1990-92 •

This useful reissue of the choral fill-ups to Abbado's cycle of the Brahms symphonies handily groups together the short choral works with orchestra, which almost define a genre of philosophical meditation that is all their own. In a sense they're more piercing confessions of individual belief (mainly sceptical, pagan and pessimistic) than anything in the *Deusches Requiem*. They are among his most personal works, and vital to any understanding of him. They are also superbly composed and darkly eloquent – the less-familiar *Nänie* and *Gesang der Parzen* almost more powerfully so than the two other, better-known items. Taken together, they constitute, albeit fortuitously, an impressive cycle of meditation upon and mourning for the human condition.

All four come across well in these deeply felt and resonantly recorded performances. Abbado builds the refugent choral textures of *Nänie*, the most polyphonic of the four, with

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great skill; *Gesang der Parzen* (the least so) strides along with a tragic inevitability that foreshadows the Fourth Symphony. The slow sections of the *Schicksalslied* manifest an instrumental refinement and maturity far surpassing Abbado's earlier, impressive account for Decca with the New Philharmonia in 1969, though the contrasting, harried fast music now makes a rather less visceral impact. The *Alto Rhapsody* is exquisitely shaped, and has in Marjana Lipovšek a superbly authoritative soloist, recalling Janet Baker in her classic EMI recording for Boult.

All in all a highly recommendable disc for any prospective purchaser in search of these works in modern sound.

[A:1/2] **Calum MacDonald**

DVORAK: Symphony 9 'New World'/SIBELIUS: Symphony 2
Detroit SO/Paray
Philips 434 317-2 (74m)
recorded 1960, 1959 ■

Paul Paray, still conducting in his last, 93rd year, built up the Detroit Orchestra to a high standard during a tenure 1952-63, as these Mercury reissues testify. They were recorded at different auditoria: on LP, both stereo productions were felt to be analytical but hard in their upper registers, and the Dvorak stereo coarse at climaxes. Such comments, which I am afraid stopped me from investigating this conductor and orchestra, largely reflected current stereo pickup limitations – for the Dvorak proves a quite magnificent taping for its time. The earlier Sibelius is poorer, messy in texture with the tapes grubby; even so the dynamic range is impressive. Evidently I was depriving myself: Paray's Sibelius 2 is a musical revelation, largely because he rejects the brooding paces of other conductors. Listen, for example, to how the clear rhythms of plucked strings in (ii) at quite a fastish tempo alter perception of

the music. Similarly, the *Vivacissimo* is properly observed for (iii), and it becomes grippingly exciting.

The Dvorak is less remarkable: speeds are fast yet the performance is finely nuanced; the wide-open sound picture certainly shows that Mercury's technical reputation was well founded.

[B:1][C:1*]

Christopher Breunig

LISZT: Années de pèlerinage
Lazar Berman (pno)
DG 437 206-2

(3CDs, 176m 06s) ® 1977 ■

Even by today's standards promoted extravagantly, Lazar Berman appeared in the West bright as a comet in the mid-1970s. Or, as Saga were quick to remind us (they'd recorded him in Liszt and Beethoven sonatas years before) *reappeared*. Karajan immediately wanted to re-record Tchaikovsky's First with him, and LPs appeared on CBS, EMI/Melodiya, DG and Murray Hill. In this country, admiration was short-lived – I remember the remark of someone from EMI at one concert, 'I thought at first it was the piano, then I realised it was *him!*'. Berman's bear-like heaviness showed his playing did not, after all, miraculously fuse all that was admired in Richter's playing and Gilels's. Nevertheless, Liszt's complete *Années* – conveniently set out here with one Book per CD, *Venezia e Napoli* coupled with 'Italie' – were regarded as typifying his best work. Indeed, he's more withdrawn and subtle than expected – although, in individual pieces, artists such as Hough and Arrau plumb greater expressive depths. A powerful *Dante Sonata* crowns 'Italie'. Beautifully recorded at the Munich Herkulessaal, these performances complement Bolet's full-price Decca cycle (on a Bechstein), and must be recommended to Lisztians who missed the 3LP box.

[A:1/1*] **Christopher Breunig**

KHACHATURIAN: Gayaneh – excerpts/SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony 5
LSO/Dorati/Minneapolis SO/Scrowaczewski
Philips 434 323-2

(63m 51s) ® 1962-3 ■

The music of Shostakovich has burgeoned on CD. When this Mercury Fifth was released there were already four listed, but, of the symphonies then written, only two others were represented on LP. That short list, however, included two Fifths of 'classic' status: the NYP/Bernstein, and Rowicki's fine, earlier, Warsaw recording. Scrowaczewski keeps a tight grip on the work, but the playing is utilitarian and stressful, and the recording discolours badly under strain. In spite of the very dry Northrop Auditorium acoustic it has more openness than Dorati's eight movements from *Gayaneh*, where a combination of immediacy and over-brightness – Watford Town Hall was the venue – makes listening tiring in such a crowded score. (And, to be fussy, one replay setting doesn't suit both productions here. But then, the juxtaposition of LSO opulence with such prosaic struggles at Minneapolis further makes this an unwise coupling.) One way and another, it's hard to take pleasure in these performances.

[B/C:1][C:2/3]

Christopher Breunig

PAGANINI: Violin Concertos
Salvatore Accardo (vln)/LPO/Dutoit

DG 437 210-2
(3CDs, 221m 08s) ® 1974-75 ■

One of these days we shall no doubt hear the six Paganini concertos with an authentic-instruments band – that would be something! – although it is unlikely that a soloist could be found to surpass Accardo. Incidentally, one hopes the couplings and the supplementary LP material [*Sonata Napoleone, I Palpii, Maestosa Sonata sentimentale* etc] will reappear on CD. These recordings received some criticism for the prominence of front-desk strings and for the spotlighting of the soloist. I think we can discount the first suggestion, whilst to hear solo playing of such finesse slightly exaggerated does no harm. What does warrant mention is the very distinctive

enveloping bloom of the Barking Town Hall acoustic: a feature which underlines Paganini's now-very-delicate-now-explosive dynamic ploys. With spirited, singing accompaniments, this set shows Dutoit in very favourable light, too.

[B:1*] **Christopher Breunig**

SCHUBERT: Winterreise
Tear (ten)/Ledger (pno)
ASV CD QS 6085

(69m 11s) ® 1982 ▲

I find this latest *Winterreise* (which was actually made a dozen years ago) doesn't come up to my memories of the original LP. Robert Tear starts with the advantage over other singers whose versions I have recently been listening to, that transpositions are unnecessary (though Schubert himself transposed). Tear conveys the wanderer's grief and torment, but is over-inclined to do so through constricted tone and idiosyncratic projection of the text (he doesn't sound at home in the German – and a major drawback of this ADD reissue is that one has to write away to ASV to request the word-book). Philip Ledger accompanies sensitively but without special insight, and the recording is rather close and reverberant, which does nothing to soften the singer's asperities.

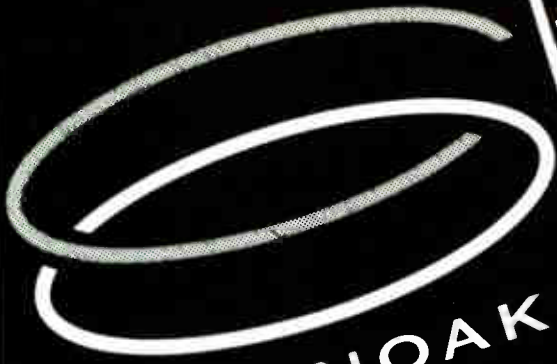
[B:2] **Peter Branscombe**

TCHAIKOVSKY: Nutcracker
Ambrosian Singers/LSO/Previn
EMI CD CFPD 4706

(2CDs, 86m 04s) ® 1972 ■

When Previn took over the Royal Philharmonic, he re-recorded *The Nutcracker* for EMI. Produced at Kingsway Hall by Christophers Bishop/Parker, his earlier set nevertheless remained the more pleasurable. With the admitted intention of just sampling here and there, I soon found the urgent narrative flow and the committed LSO playing taking me right through both discs. At first I thought the remastering – drier and a little brighter than before – less attractive than CIP's very good, mellow LP transfers. But, after fiddling with different level settings, I felt that the original tape quality is probably more accurately reflected here. We should have had a filler, whereas the CDs simply correspond to the Acts I/II 2LP break.

[B:1] **Christopher Breunig**








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SOUL THE WAY IT IS?

CHARLES & EDDIE DUOPHONIC

Stateside/Capitol CDP7803172
(58m 00s) •

Note the label, a giveaway as to where Charles Pettigrew and Eddie Chacon's soul-fuelled time machine eventually landed, somewhere in the late 1960s or early 1970s. 'NYC', kitted out with hints of 'What It's Worth' and Otis Redding's 'Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa (Sad Song)', documents the duo's first encounter. From then on, the twosome, to use the apt vernacular, moved right up, higher and higher, until today, in the wake of 'Would I Lie To You?', one of 1992's better chart-topping singles, they've fashioned the sort of album soft-soul snoozers dream about, where sinnerman Marvin meets the Reverend Al Green at the entrance to heaven, where the pearly gate's pillars are formed from Stax and Philly records piled high. In short, this is the sort of release you play to yourself several times, because you don't believe how good it is the first time around, then continue to reprise to any self-confessed music-lover within earshot. Soul the way it was and, thanks to Charles & Eddie, still is.

[A*:1/1*] **Fred Dellar**

Unfortunately, this isn't a cross between Chas & Dave and Flo & Eddie which might, at least, have been fun. Instead, it's state-of-the-art blue'n'brown-eyed soul, containing a Number One smash hit and enough sex appeal to render the duo as prime pin-up fodder for viewers of *TOTP*. What it offers in sheer professionalism and slick beauty is undermined by the kind of 'derivativeness' which makes sampling almost forgiveable. OK, so you have to be over 38 to remember the songs being pillaged but these guys are no better than other musical thieves. The guitar motif from Buffalo Springfield's 'For What It's Worth' (about as distinctive a little lick as the Sixties ever produced) is lifted wholesale,

while The Association and one or two other acts ought to be talking to their solicitors. George Harrison was sued for less. But, much as I want to slam this because of the pillfering, I have to admit it's an excellent fifth-rate facsimile of Hall and Oates, which probably makes it 2000 times better than anything else in the charts at present.

[A:1/2] **Ken Kessler**

It's hard to be cruel to an album as impeccably conceived and beautifully performed as this, no matter how derivative the material may be. Certainly the critics (apart from our own dear KK) have gone for it hook, line and sinker. *Q* gave it four stars, praising not only the duo's vocal pyrotechnics but the classy, understated production job by Josh Deutsch. *The Observer* noted many points of 'homage' to 1970s' soul (additional to those rips from Sixties rock mentioned by KK), but concluded they carried it off rather well. *The Independent* was impressed by their 'range of styles and emotions', and *The Times* compared their harmonies favourably with the Everly Brothers, but concluded that 'for all its charm and craft, it is a slight affair compared to the work of true soul greats' like Otis Redding. History may well file Charles & Eddie under 'pleasant, proficient and irrelevant', but for the moment, just forget history and enjoy.

[A*:1] **Johnny Black**



John Campbell - one to seek out

This is the sort of release you play to yourself several times, because you don't believe how good it is the first time around

Charles & Eddie, the dynamic duo



JOHN CAMPBELL HOWLIN' MERCY

WEA 7559 61440-2 (53m 27s) •

Jeff Healey, the last interesting-new-white-bluesman-to-watch, has so far failed to live up to his early promise, so what's a poor white boy to do? The answer is to check out John Campbell who, two albums down the line, is proving himself to be a unique voice and a supremely committed performer. Anyone who remains unmoved by the brooding intensity of Campbell's re-interpretation of Tom Waits's 'Down In The Hole' needs soul replacement therapy as a matter of urgency. As a slide player, he demonstrates astonishing virtuosity in both acoustic and electric modes, and he's just as convincing when he rocks out as when he inooches around in the blackest pits of blues hell. His band keeps things simple, tight and effective, leaving room for Campbell to establish his identity with memorable songs and gutsy playing. Buy this now, then seek out his 1992 debut, *One Believer*.

[A:1] **Johnny Black**



CARNIVAL ART
WELCOME TO VAS LLEGAS
Beggar's Banquet

BBQ CD 132 (45m 06s) •

Weirdo grunge meets Tom Petty in heavy metal mood? Could be. Carnival Art (above) hails from Los Angeles, although this (dare we say it?) concept album deals with life in a thinly disguised Las Vegas. The first cut, with casino noise mixed into buzzsaw guitar mayhem sets a mood of whimsy that recurs throughout the album and, by the fifth track, initial impressions of a severely limited musical perspective are being banished by

well-considered arrangements, concealed harmonies and intriguing guitar textures. 'Blue Food' finds them combining slow blues riffs with Nuggets-era psychedelia to devastating effect, while 'Gold Plated Crazy' has roots reaching back to garage bands like The Standells or Amboy Dukes. 'Bullet Surprise' almost swings, 'Crepitus' is rich in Cheap Trick moves and the whole album is suffused with the twisted realities of the tacky denizens of the imaginary Vas Llegas. Second albums are often a band's biggest hurdle, but Carnival Art is jumpin'. [B:1] *Johnny Black*



Enuff Z Nuff: a new sub-cult?

ENUFF Z NUFF
ANIMALS WITH HUMAN
INTELLIGENCE

Arista 07822 18587-2
 (58m 56s) •

American journalists find it impossible to describe this Chicago hard-rock quartet without resorting to comparisons, rip-offs and influences, and I'm no different. Donnie Vie's vocal style has been accurately tagged 'heavy-metal Elvis Costello' and, although The Beatles seem an obvious reference point, it would be more accurate to observe that they really rip-off those mid-1970s American bands who originally ripped-off The Beatles, like Cheap Trick, Raspberries and Dwight Twilley, although there's a higher percentage of Aerosmith and sundry glam-rockers in Enuff than there ever was in any of those cult outfits. So that puts them in the same bag as Jellyfish and, to a lesser extent, Carnival Art. Are we seeing the birth of a new sub-cult? Whatever, it's a very listenable album, except that guitarist Derek Frigo, perfectly competent in a backing role, suffers from delusions of adequacy whenever given the opportunity to solo. [A:1] *Johnny Black*

FISH
SONGS FROM THE MIRROR

Polydor 517499-2 (45m 16s) •

Anybody who admits the oldies on this album shaped his young years is without shame and, in the final analysis, that's an admirable quality. When he was barely out of his transparent egg, Derek Dick was inspired by The Moody Blues singing 'Question', Genesis doing 'I Know What I Like' and Pink Floyd's 'Fearless'. If this means he doesn't have a politically correct grounding in Elvis, Motown/Stax, the Brill Building, or The Byrds, it doesn't invalidate his perspective on pop, because he also covers The Kinks's 'Apeman', and Bolan's 'Jeepster' with enough wit and verve to suggest he'd acquit himself well if asked to sing backing vocals for Chuck Berry. But, even when he's dredging the realms of prog-rock, Mr Dick revitalises the material, making even the cornball metaphysics of 'Question' sound almost relevant to something or other. Nice one, Derek. [A:1] *Johnny Black*

GENESIS
THE WAY WE WALK VOL 2

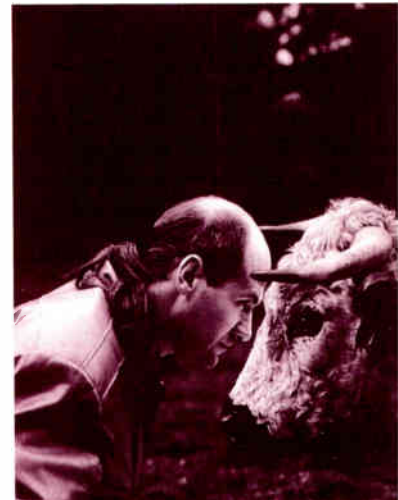
Virgin GENCD 5 (71m 03s) •

Recorded, like Vol 1, during their 1992 We Can't Dance tour, this is essentially a concert souvenir. Vol 1, being hit-single oriented, was subtitled The Shorts, whereas this goes by the alter-ego of The Longs, indicating the presence of just six of the band's more, um, conceptual pieces, ranging in length from the merely interminable 'Drum Duet' (actually 6.06) to the apparently eternal 'Old Medley', which takes nineteen and a half minutes before collapsing in a heap. That's longer than Jimmy Cagney ever managed. While listening, I found myself switching from periods of lethargic insomnia to stark moments of lucid terror, when I would check my room to see if Beelzebub, or possibly even Bill and Ted, had materialised behind me to take me downstairs. Folks, this one is for pomp rock addicts only. [A:2] *Johnny Black*

JOOLS HOLLAND
THE A-Z GEOGRAPHER'S GUIDE TO
THE PIANO

Alter-Ego ALTOGOCD 1
 (45m 49s) •

London has long since proven an inspiration to piano players. Indeed, Fats Waller fashioned a memorable six-part 'London Suite' back in 1939. Now the ex-Squeeze man has embarked on a similar musical bus ride around the capital, pointing out the sights by means of a miscellany of instrumentals that mainly encompass boogie, gospel and funk. The trip begins at El's 'Brick Lane' where, amid clips of interviews with the mar-



Fish

ket inhabitants, Holland does the funky Tika-chicken, apt for the featured Indian take-away owner. A visit to 'Seven Dials' proves more Debussy-like in concept, while 'Newgate's Knocker' reiterates the kind of hard-headed boogie approach that made pianist/organist Milt Buckner such a favourite during his stint with Lionel Hampton. And though, unexpectedly, there's no nod in the direction of Jools's beloved Greenwich, he gets close with 'Tranquil Passage', which, if my knowledge of London serves me well, is just around the corner from Glenn Tilbrook's place.

[A:1/2] **Fred Dellar**

DARLENE LOVE & LANI GROVES BRINGING IT HOME

Shanachie 9003 (40m 05s) •

Now, this is starting to look like a trend which I don't want to end. After the magnificent Cissy Houston/Chuck Jackson pairing a month ago, Shanachie has teamed the legendary Darlene Love (Spector protégé, member of The Crystals and subject of a recent EMI Best Of) with Lani Groves (back-up singer to Stevie Wonder, Roberta Flack, Carly Simon, Steely Dan and others). The recipe is similar to that on the Houston/Jackson set, including the donation of 50% of the royalties to the Rhythm & Blues Foundation. The ladies work their way through Curtis Mayfield's 'It's Alright', Bill Withers' 'Use Me', The Beatles' 'Let It Be' and seven other classics, sung so soulfully and seductively that the disc should come packed with a condom. High point? You've gotta hear these two tackling James

Brown's 'It's A Man's World' and Fontella Bass's 'Rescue Me'. Hot? If this were an amp it'd be pure Class-A.

[A:1] **Ken Kessler**

ROBERT LUCAS BUILT FOR COMFORT

AudioQuest AQ-CD1011
(45m 44s) ♦

I owe Lucas an apology, having recently described *The Power of Seven* as the only act on an audiophile label worth hearing. How could I have forgotten his first two blues extravaganzas? His third is more of the same, only slightly raunchier and definitely twangier. It's almost like a hi-fi serial: a handful of originals, a smattering of classics. But Lucas has impeccable taste so, as with Nesmith below, it's hard not to sit in for another helping. Then again, how much can the blues progress without turning into another genre entirely? Lucas does the biz with Robert Johnson and Elmore James, as well as the Willie Dixon title track, purist yet modern and sounding simply terrific. This guy plays some of the slipperiest slide I've heard in recent years, and that alone is reason enough to award him the highest accolade.

[A*:1*] **Ken Kessler**

MAGNA CARTA HEARTLAND

SSPH SPHCD 7813 (66m 22s) •

The story of Magna would take too long in the telling. Suffice to say that mainman Chris Simpson set out on his folk-rock way in 1969 with an album for Mercury that established the group, a partnership with vocalist Glen Stuart, as Britain's answer to Simon and Garfunkel. Simpson moved on, working with a miscellany of musicians that has included Davy Johnstone (once a regular Magna member), Tim Renwick, Rick Wakeman, Pick Withers, Danny Thompson, Harold McNair etc, establishing a catalogue of around 15 albums. Though the band's popularity has faded in Britain, where they have remained in vogue in the Netherlands, hence this release through Sound Products Holland. Now basically a duo, formed by Simpson and his wife, guitarist-vocalist Linda, Magna appears to be gaining confidence from the 'back to acoustic' swing and their coun-

try music hoedowns, like 'Country Born-City Heart' and 'Blues Bar Cafe' are full of back-slap bonhomie. 'Perfect Lovers', a ballad bestowed with a kind of 'She Moves Through The Fair' mysticism is Linda's best moment, while 'Diamond In The Dust' which benefits from some studied piano chords and Paul Burgess's (ex-10CC and Jethro Tull) so-right drumming, is a rough-edged love song that figures among the best things Simpson has placed on offer. Elsewhere, 'Ticket To The Moon' is too close to Suzanne Vega's 'Tom's Diner' for comfort and a few more trademark Magna harmony vocals wouldn't have come amiss. Even so, it's evident that things are on the up and up for a band that has never received the kudos it deserves.

[A:1/2] **Fred Dellar**

MIKE NESMITH TROPICAL CAMPFIRES

Pacific Arts PAAD-5000
(58m 19s) •

Nesmith, yet again, leads the charge. A decade ago he was first off the mark with a feature-length pop video. This time he's recorded his new CD entirely in Dolby Surround, and its historical importance can hardly be overstated. As a hardcore Nes fan, I don't mind another hour of his gentle country rock, but I'd be the first to admit that it differs little from most of his previous work – the same cosy, lilting friendly stuff which some find addictive. It's also the most hype-free New Country on the planet which you can buy without feeling like a chronic, impressionable Q reader. What the Dolby adds is interest with an upper-case 'I'. Most previous releases in this format were soundtracks or test CDs, so this is a real indication of what tomorrow may hold. Y'see this is not a sound-FX-laden Pink Floydian studio wank but a semi-acoustic folkish album containing pure music. So shouldn't two channels suffice? No. Switch out the rear speakers and the ambience suffers. In surround form, the music becomes much more involving, details are easier to enjoy and the experience is that much more vivid. It almost makes you wish Ambisonics had been handled by professionals. Here's hoping Papa Nes has kick-started the future. [See 'Headroom', p.25 – Ed]

[A/A:1/2] **Ken Kessler**

ON SCREEN

You've got to watch these soundtrack pages if you're a completist. I mean – who'd have thought that a third-rate 'yoo'f comedy like *California Man* (Hollywood/Sony HWDCD26 570057-2) would contain rare cuts from the Smithereens and Cheap Trick? Their contributions are overshadowed by the inclusion of Vince Neil's hit 'You're Invited (But Your Friend Can't Come)', as are those from Queen, Steve Vai, Tone Loc, Edgar Winter and others. And while you're at it, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Columbia 472076 2) features Toad The Wet Sprocket, Susannah Hoffs, The Cult, diVinyls, Matthew Sweet, Ozzy Osbourne and more. To think you'd miss these if I hadn't warned you.

Among the more conventional releases this month are *Malcolm Arnold: Film Music* (Chandos CHAN9100), five of his film scores recorded by the LSO, *The Big Battalions* (Air Edel/Chrysalis AHLCD 6) from the Channel 4 mini-series, and seven from Varese Sarabande. These include a second volume of John Carpenter's *Greatest Hits* (VSD-5336); the first volume of *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* (VSD-5381); *Breaking The Rules* (VSD-5386) with a Jan & Dean cut; *Hollywood Backlot* (VSD-5361) containing 20 themes from Varese Sarabande titles; *Nails* (VSD-5384), a TV score from a film starring the great Dennis Hopper; *Storyville* (VSD-5347) which features James Spader of *Sex, Lies and Videotape* fame; and – last but hardly least – the stupendous Basil Poledouris score to Big Arnie's *Conan The Destroyer* (VSD-5392).

Soundtrack of the month: *Wattstax – The Living Word* (Ace/Stax CDSXE2 079 ♦) is the double-disc recording of Soul's answer to Woodstock. On 20 August 1972 at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, Isaac Hayes, The Staple Singers, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Eddie Floyd, Albert King, the Soul Children and the Bar-Kays, played a live seven-hour benefit with cameras running to help causes including the Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation and the Martin Luther King Hospital. And what you get here is a live soul set to rival the best of the Stax revues.

Ken Kessler

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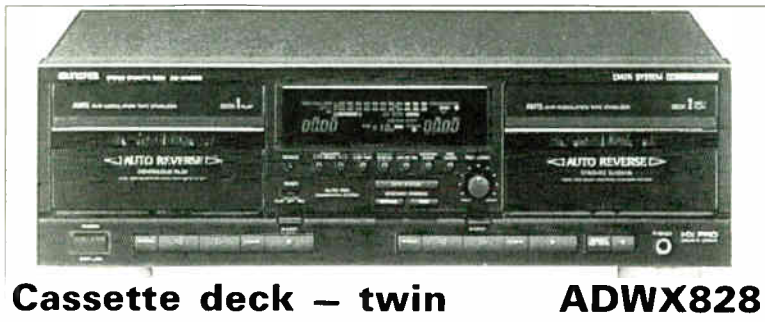
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Gerry Rafferty – reflecting on his wilderness years?

**GERRY RAFFERTY
ON A WING AND A PRAYER**

A & M 517495-2 (58m 01s) •

After a decade in the wilderness, interest in Gerry Rafferty is rekindled by Undercover's Top Ten success with a version of his biggest hit, 'Baker Street'. The timing is good, because this album is stronger than anything he's done in yonks and it's certainly a worthwhile outlay for Rafferty fans, full of the kind of laid-back wistful love songs he handles so well. At times, as on the lovely, 'I Could Be Wrong', he and the band hit their stride perfectly, while 'Don't Speak Of My Heart' should appeal to anyone with fond memories of the Jackson Five's 'I'll Be There'. There are, however, several cuts which don't invite further investigation. On balance though, *On a Wing and a Prayer* won't do Rafferty's rep any harm and might deservedly put a few quid in his current account.

[A:1] *Johnny Black*

**CHARLIE RICH
PICTURES AND PAINTINGS**

Sire 7599-26730-2 (49m 58s) •

Charlie Rich's problem is that he's never really fitted into any definable 'file under' category. At one point someone even invented a special classification, 'Countryopolitan', to cover what Charlie was doing at that moment. But Rich couldn't stick around to provide that kind of fare all of his life. So he retreated to the sanctity of his home recording studio and a series of mid-1980s sessions to fashion a fine album that, arguably for the very first time, gives full rein to the Grey Fox's ability as a singer/songwriter/pianist. Working basically with a trio that comprehends his unwillingness to stay put, Rich wends his way through such standards as 'Mood Indigo' and 'Am I Blue', instilling them with the kind of world-worn weariness that was once Billie Holiday's trademark. He turns in a performance on

'You Don't Know Me' that invites favourable comparisons with the Ray Charles version; and contributes an array of self-penned songs that such current mainstreamers as Harry Connick would kill to get their hands on. Let's simplify things. Forget Charlie Rich, the country singer. Think in terms of, maybe, Dr John. And if the mention of that sort of name makes you smile, go out and purchase *Pictures and Paintings*. There'll be few regrets.

[A*:1] *Fred Dellar*

**MIKE PENDER'S
SEARCHERS
MIKE PENDER'S SEARCHERS**

**Wienerworld/Object Enterprises
ONN81** (25m 55s) ▲

Or what happens when two musicians have the right to the same band name. Pender has assembled a crew which looks exactly like your worst club circuit nightmare, the dinner jackets and blow-dried hair in

the cover shot telling you exactly where they'll be gigging. In his attempt to wrest the credibility away from the McNally/Allen version which – while also boasting only one original – has had the same core for over 20 years, Pender comes off the bitter fool. And the other team is brave enough to issue new material. Pender's disc contains 11 note-for-note covers of the Searchers' classics: unneeded, unwanted and unlistenable. Covers are only worth hearing when they're reinterpreted, right? As if the purists and the fans can't tell the difference.

[A/B:3] *Ken Kessler*

**VARIOUS ARTISTS
HANDEL'S MESSIAH – A SOULFUL
CELEBRATION**

Reprise 7599-26980-2

(76m 02s) •

Viewed purely as the basis upon which to create a celebration of black music history, much in the manner of Quincy Jones's 'Back On The Block', this version of the 'Messiah' not only makes sense but also provides an invigorating line in entertainment. Indeed, Quincy was involved on this project as conductor of the all-star choir (Patti Austin, Andrae Crouch, Al Jarreau, Joe Sample, Johnny Mathis, Gladys Knight, Edwin Hawkins, Venessa Williams) that performs 'Hallelujah!', but it's really Mervyn Warren's show. He fashioned most of the Overture, which runs the gamut from roots music (African, spiritual, gospel and blues), with big band blasts, contemporary funk and hints of jazz fusion, hip hop and house. All these facets of black music are reiterated throughout the rest of the project: The Yellowjackets turning 'Behold The Lamb Of God' into so-so jazz of almost new age pretensions; Dianne Reeves edging out of reggae with 'And The Glory Of The Lord' and The Boys Chorus Of Harlem providing what might be termed the 'House' of The Lord via 'Glory To God'. But the most impressive track is probably 'O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings To Zion', a chunk of prime *acappella* on which Stevie Wonder is prodded to vocal glory by Take 6, whose harmonies and rhythmic abilities make you wonder why anybody bothers to engage musicians.

[A:1] *Fred Dellar*

**ALL ABOUT EVE
WINTER WORDS – HITS AND
RARITIES**

Mercury 514 154-2 (73m 52s) •

A worthy 19-track compilation featuring (did you guess?) hits and rarities: 13 singles tracks, an unreleased version of 'Our Summer', four rare B-sides and two tracks never released before, reminiscent in places of the original line-up of Renaissance or the music of the Steeleye/Fairport post-brown-rice period. Gorgeous. [A:1/2]

**KEVIN AYERS
BANANAMOUR**

BGO BG0CD142 (35m 48s) ♦

SWEET DECEIVER

BGO BG0CD98 (34m 53s) ♦

Away from his early, totally spacey period and into a song-writing groove, Ayers produced these gems in 1973 and 1975. *Bananamour* remains his most cohesive, accessible release yet; it also features the most sympathetic backing outfit he ever fronted. *Sweet Deceiver* is almost a sequel, but it veers between the commercial and the bizarre with less fluidity. Currently on tour, Ayers remains one of the UK's most enjoyable, if enigmatic, eccentrics. [A:1*]; [A:1/2]

**THE CHALLENGERS
THE MAN FROM UNCLE**

Edsel EDCD 350 (63m 35s) •

Twenty-five tracks from yet another undistinguished, sub-Ventures, guitar-led instrumental act. Twangy covers of the title track, 'Cast Your Fate To The Wind', 'Walk Don't Run', 'Rebel Rouser', 'Pipline', 'Raunchy' . . . who the hell buys this? And why is it on Edsel instead of See For Miles? [A/B:3]

**THE CHAMPS
TEQUILA**

Ace CDCH 227 (50m 43s) •

Phew – an instrumental reissue that's a break from Ventures/Shadows clones. This band was sax-led, and the title track probably appears on 99% of all the 'rock'n'roll' compilations ever released. Unfortunately, almost every track on this set sounds like a reworking of 'Tequila', even the familiar covers. Strictly for Teds. And collectors, of course. [A/B:2]

**THE CRYSTALS
THE BEST OF**

**Phil Spector Records/
EMI PSCD 1007** (48m 40s) •

Nineteen from one of the finest of all girl groups; this trio did, after all, number Darlene Love among its members. This is classic Phil Spector, majestic and mushy all at once – probably the most authentic 'teen' music ever released. And it's also noteworthy for containing the first single ever purchased by one KK. [A/B:1]

**THE EARLS
REMEMBER THEM – THE VERY
BEST OF THE EARLS**

Ace CDCND 366 (64m 58s) •

'Re-mem-mem-Re-mem-mem-mem-mem' . . . Ring a bell? The Earls produced some white doowop on a par with even Dion and the Belmonts, the smash hit 'Remember Then' being but one high point. Ace has gathered 25 tracks together, including four previously unissued tracks and the stereo is so good that you can position each vocalist in the room. Luscious four-part harmonies, great material. [A:1/2]

**THE EVERLY BROTHERS
THE MERCURY YEARS '84-'88**

Mercury 510 909-2 (75m 39s) ■

A fine 22-track set covering the Everlys' 'rediscovered' period, which shows what hanging around great British session players can do for those in semi-retirement/obscurity. Purists might recoil at any arguments suggesting this stuff stands up to the best of the early material, but the less fastidious will revel in both the harmonies and the material. The mix includes LP tracks as well as live performances from the reunion tours. And for Macca fans everywhere: here's another to add to the discography. [A:1/2]

**FUNKADELIC
MUSIC FOR YOUR MOTHER**

Westbound/Ace CDSEW2 055
(56m 57s; 54m 43s) ♦

Mind-blowing double containing 34 Clinton 45rpm epics, and probably the only way you'll get 'em all without setting up a tent at a record fair. The material runs from 1969 to 1976, programmed chronologically, and Ace has seen fit to include a couple of previously unissued tracks. As such, it serves as a

dandy history of the band up to '76, while the booklet is a muthaload of Parliament/Funkadelic lore. Unquestionably, some of the most influential funk ever issued.

[A/B/C:1/2]

**SLIM GAILLARD/BABS
GONZALES
SHUCKIN' AND JVIN'**

Charly CD CHARLY 279
(57m 32s) •

Twenty of Gaillard's recordings for the King Label from 1945-55, some with fellow Bebopper Babs Gonzales – and wild tracks they are. Gaillard, who enjoyed a high-visibility revival in the years leading up to his passing in 1991, became a patron saint of (jazz) hipsters, a sort of barometer of cool, and this material attests to his talents as a bona fide performer as opposed to being famous for being famous. The lyrics border on the incendiary and some are so politically incorrect that you wanna drive up to the nearest university and play 'em at 200dB outside the Student Union. [H:1]

**JUDY GARLAND
ALWAYS CHASING RAINBOWS**

ASV CDAJA 5093 (65m 28s) ♦

Twenty-two Garland masterpieces, including 'Over the Rainbow', numerous standards and plenty from her films. Muddy, vintage sound can't obscure the brilliance. For younger fans, this should have been titled *Remember Her This Way*. [H:1/2*]

**BILL HALEY AND THE
COMETS
THE VERY BEST OF**

Music Club MCCD0068
(52m 09s) ▲

Does anybody still not own Haley's hits, surely the most popular of all rock-comp entries? If so, relax: this 20-track set costs less than a Chicken Madras or 60 fags. The sound is terrific – MCA must have found the master tapes – and it still swings, however corny Haley was compared to his counterparts 'of colour'. Lame, yes. Twee, perhaps. But it did start a revolution. [A:1/2/3]

**THE IKETTES
FINE, FINE, FINE**

Kent/Ace CDKEN 063 (62m 03s) •

A juicy 24 tracks from Ike'n'

Tina's backing group, easily on a par with the girl groups which weren't thought of merely as the line-up behind the stars. Very serious funk, like an adult version of Motown, and surprises aplenty, including the bizarre 'Sally Go 'Round The Roses', which rivals 'MacArthur Park' and 'Everyone's Gone To The Moon' for the Syd-Barrett-Nonsense-Under-the-Guise-of-Art Commemorative Strait Jacket. [B:1/2]

**NILS LOFGREN
FLIP**

Castle CLACD 311 (78m 17s) ♦

CODE OF THE ROAD

Castle CLACD 311 (78m 17s) ♦

Two from 1985/6, though they show quite blatantly that the poor acrobat was hooked up with the Bore, er, the Boss. The sub-Springsteenisms compromise Lofgren's work, but underneath there's still some chunky, unpretentious rock. *Code of the Road* is the more enjoyable, because it comes off as a spirited 'best of', and it shows Lofgren as he's best-regarded: onstage.

[A:2]; [A/B:1/2]

**MELANIE
GATHER ME**

C-Five Records C5CD59
(40m 35s) ■

Archetypal Melanie fare, featuring the trademark warbling, the sensitivity, the angst . . . like James Taylor with PMT. And the disc is almost a perfect example of the stay-in-your-dorm-room genre. Alas, it contains 'Brand New Key', which historians will note did as much for her reputation as 'My Ding-A-Ling' did for Chuck Berry. Sweet stuff nevertheless, and well timed for today's hippie revival. [A/B:1/2]

**JONI MITCHELL
WILD THINGS RUN FAST**

Mobile Fidelity UDCD 570
(36m 49s) ♦

Joni's superguest-laden 1982 effort, so good it almost doesn't need the loving-care-gold-disc treatment. What's so nice about this is that it exploits the sense of humour only rarely glimpsed. This folkie-cum-jazz singer can rock, and – if this disc is new to you – she actually manages a funky Elvis Presley cover. A delight. [A*/1*]

**PAICE ASHTON LORD
BBC RADIO 1 LIVE IN CONCERT**

Windfall WINCD 025 (50m 54s) ♦

A 1977 concert recorded at the Golders Green Hippodrome by what is essentially Deep Purple's rhythm section between DP reunions. Minus Blackmore and Gillan, Paice and Lord added Tony Ashton (prior to joining Family) to form an undeniably heavy band, one marginally less plodding than the juggernaut they left, but to PAL's credit, this session sounds remarkably modern. [A/B:1/2]

**TERRY REID
ROGUE WAVES**

BGO BGOCD 140 (32m 15s) ♦

Another shouldabeneahit album from Reid, who could produce the kind of short, sharp attacks which deserved AM radio air-time. This release, from '78/79, is doubly curious because it mixes some Reid originals with a cluster of Phil Spector tunes, an Everly's cover and a gorgeous remake of the Left Banke's 'Walk Away Renee'. Weird? No odder than his debut LP, which at least developed a cult following. A hearty nod to BGO for keeping the faith. [A/B:1]

**THE SEARCHERS
THE EP COLLECTION VOL 2**

See for Miles SEECD 359 (72m 59s) ♦

Curious 30-tracker culled from their French EPs. Some familiar material - 'Sugar and Spice', 'Needles and Pins' - plus oddities including four tunes sung in the Gallic tongue. And they don't translate very accurately, which will give the bilinguals among you something to laugh about. Interesting set, but superfluous if you own last year's anniversary box. [A:1/2/3]

**VARIOUS
BEWARE OF THE TEXAS BLUES
VOL 2**

Blue Moon/Magnum CDBM 085 (51m 24s) •

Fifteen Texas blues obscurities, from authentic gut wrenchers to a Johnny Winter track he'd probably like to forget. Oddly this set reveals extreme diversity rather than generic similarities, so don't expect a dozen Texas Cannonballs or a slew of Fabulous Thunderbirds soundalikes. [B/C:1/2]

**VARIOUS
1 AND ONLY - 25 YEARS OF
RADIO 1**

Band of Joy BOJCD 25 (65m 49s; 65m 02s) ♦

Live-at-the-Beeb tracks from a roster of artists to make your mouth water, and covering just about every genre experience during the past quarter century. From The Move, (early) Status Quo and The Yardbirds, through T-Rex, on to Elvis Costello, a cluster of punks, loads of Indie outfits, reggae artists and technoids. [A/B:1*]

**VARIOUS
ROCK'N'ROLL PARTY SMASHES**

Instant/Charly CD INS 5064 (61m 46s) ♦

A licensing nightmare, but Charly did it: 25 certified, original rock'n'roll classics including Jerry Lee Lewis's 'Great Balls Of Fire', Carl Perkins's 'Blue Suede Shoes', Chuck Berry's 'Maybelline', 'Runaway' by Del Shannon, 'Stagger Lee' by Lloyd Price and others of the same calibre. On a budget label, to boot. Even if you have all this stuff scattered throughout your collection, it's nice to possess the lot on one slim CD. Like the title says, a party-time cert. [A/H:1/1*]

**VARIOUS
2000 VOLTS OF STAX**

Stax/Ace CDSXD 074 (52m 26s) •

Another feast of soul treasures from the Stax vaults, 18 collectors' items from Booker T & the MGs, Rufus Thomas, Johnnie Taylor, Carla Thomas and the rest of the stable. Only two tracks have appeared before - both of them rare singles sides - while the rest consists of alternate takes and completely unknown material. Any soul fan worth his weight in grits must buy this, especially for alternate versions of William Bell's 'You Don't Miss Your Water', Albert King's 'Crosscut Saw', and two Otis goodies. [A/B:1/2]

**VARIOUS
YOUR STARTER FOR TEN**

See for Miles SEACD 5 (71m 27s) ▲

Stunning 20-track celebration of the label's first decade. Where else do you find Ace, Marmalade, Mike McGear, the Zombies, Climax Blues Band, Hon-

eybus, Melanie, the Kinks, Donovan, the Lovin' Spoonful, Family, Marsha Hunt, the Small Faces and more on a single CD? [A/B:1/2]

**GENO WASHINGTON & THE
RAM JAM BAND
TWO ORIGINAL LIVE SHOWS**

C-Five Records C5CD 582 (72m 08s) ■

Two LPs on one CD, the brilliant pairing of a brace of mouthfuls: Hand Clappin' Foot Stompin' Funky-Butt . . . Live! and Hipsters, Flipsters, Finger-Poppin' Daddies! from 1966-7. Maybe this legendary Anglo-American soul band didn't click because people couldn't be bothered spouting off the titles. A shame, because everything Geno released sounded like an extension of the great live Stax Revue LPs. [B:1]

**YELLO
ESSENTIAL YELLO**

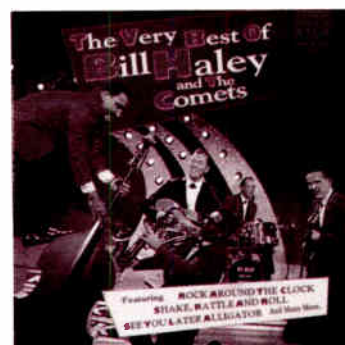
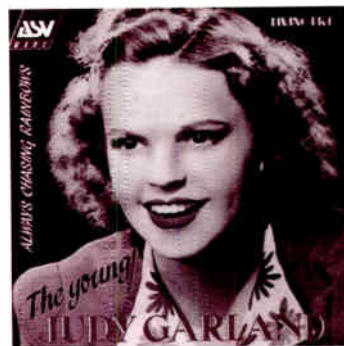
Mercury 512 390-2 (62m 23s) •

From the most cynical, or maybe sarcastic of the synth operators, 16 tracks in a set subtitled 'The Singles Collection'. Hard to believe that the Swiss can produce hit records; then again, the deliberate approach Yello employed for topping the charts is as Swiss as it gets: Better Living Through Technology. Best thought of as Euro Devo or Zappa without a soul, Yello makes dance music for the end of the Millennium, and it is catchy. Saved only because the tongue is somewhere in the cheek. [A:1/2]

**THE ZOMBIES
THE EP COLLECTION**

See for Miles SEECD 358 (62m 53s) ♦

This 26-tracker contains primarily Zombies material which appeared on EPs, but is also something of a 'best of' and a rarities disc. In addition to the early smashes, it contains a couple of tracks off Odessey (sic) and Oracle, one previously unreleased song, a rare live performance and some singles tracks. And - are you ready for this? - a true stereo 'She's Not There'. This band has been 'compilation'd' to the point of stupidity, but See For Miles's set deserves attention. Sublime jazz-rock that you won't believe dates from the early 1960s. [A/B:1/2]



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- Celestion 1 £99.90
- Mordaunt Short CS-1 £99.95
- Mission 760 £119.90
- Wharfedale Diamond 5 £129.90
- Canon S-30 £149.00
- B&W DM600 £159.00

LOUDSPEAKERS - £201 - £600

- Epos ES11 £350.00
- Tannoy 611 £399.99
- Ruark Templar £479.00
- Mission 753 £599.90

★ LOUDSPEAKERS - above £601

- Ruark Talisman £699.00
- Acoustic Energy AE1 £763.00
- B&W Matrix 805 £795.00
- KEF 103/4 £995.00
- Celestion 300 £999.00
- Monitor Audio Studio 2000 £2,000.00

★ DIGITAL

- Celestion DLP600 £349.00
- Arcam Black Box 5 DAC £450.00
- Audiolab 8000DAC £700.00

Which hi-fi or music magazine have you found most informative on hi-fi?

.....

Which journalist has written the most thought provoking article on hi-fi?

.....

Which is the most memorable hi-fi advertisement of 1992?

.....

Name

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Which of the above products (up to the value of £1,000) would you like to win?

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Only one entry per person will be accepted. Return this page to the Federation of British Audio, Landseer House, 19 Charing Cross Road, London WC2 0ES by the 26th March 1993. HFN

ACCESSORIES CLUB

A round-up of essential accessories no audiophile should be without . . .

THE ALL TIME GREATS

Far be it for me to accuse anyone of short memories. Rather, we're indulging in a pursuit which revels in 'newness'. We discard accessories and tweaks the way Royals discard spouses. And I'm as bad as anybody - worse, when you consider that I'm driven to find a new toy each month to keep everyone enthused and busy. But it's high time I reminded you of what lurks inside the KK toolbox, the Accessory Club items without which I cannot face the thought of setting up a system and which keep me from ram-raiding the local Tandy at 3am.

The Chesky Sampler CD: I just cannot live without that LEDR height test, which tells me (1) how well a product resolves three-dimensional information, (2) how well I've set up a pair of speakers and (3) how everyone who insists that there is no such thing as image height is deaf, stupid and should have his/her ears reamed out with a Black & Decker.

The Toggle Cable Stripper: We live in the only country this side of Uranus where electrical goods still come without mains plugs. And when you take delivery of some tasty Yank high-end goodie, complete with a US mains plug fixed to cable thick enough to double for de Sade's fave prop, you wanna get that plug off and a new one fitted toot sweet. This pocket-sized gem is the best cable stripper I've used for wire up to 8.5mm in diameter. Love it to pieces. (Hack off the old plug with an axe or whatever other blade you have to hand.)

Black Tak: No, I haven't A/B'd it with the bluey-grey stuff, but I don't care. I just prefer black to bluey-grey. Cheap and cheerful and still the best all-round damper and speaker sticker on the market. Good, too, if you've run out of Post-It notes, but watch the wallpaper!

Kontak: No question - the finest plug'n'socket cleaner on earth. I've yet to use it without hearing some sonic improvement, even on new gear fresh out of the box. Wouldn't dream of reviewing a product before it has been treated with a Kontak bath.

Other items in my toolbox which you don't have to buy from the Club include a super-sharp, all-purpose locking-blade pocket knife (Kershaw and Gerber make nice ones), a decent selection of Philips and flathead screwdrivers, imperial and metric Allen keys, Tylenol or Nurofen, Willy De Ville's 'Assassin of Love' on CD, a cheapo SPL meter, needle-nose pliers, an adjustable spanner, extra mains plugs, Q-Tips, sticky tape, surgical spirit, plastic cable ties (not that daft thing we gave away last year), spare RCA and banana plugs, a Mag Light mini-torch and a jeweller's loupe.

Why the latter? Nothing to do with hi-fi. I keep one with me at all times in case somebody happens by who shows me a nice watch.

Ken Kessler

Use this form to order accessories

- Nagaoka LP inner sleeves: pack of 50, £7.25 ; pack of 100, £13.50 ; pack of 500, £62.50
- PVC heavy-duty LP outer sleeves: pack of 50, £15.00 ; pack of 100, £27.00 ; pack of 500, £120.00
- 12in poly bags for LPs: pack of 50, £5.00 ; pack of 100, £9.00 ; pack of 500, £40.00
- HFN/RR 001 Fluxdumper: black-ash box £22.95
- HFN/RR 004 Blackhead: m-c step-up transformer; £60.95
- HFN/RR 005 Spikes: timber steel , inc fixing kit, set of 8, £10.25
- HFN/RR 006 Flutterbuster: 33.3/45rpm. 220/240V only, OK for most synchronous t/t (specify type); black-ash case £81.95
- HFN/RR 007 Carrydisc: 14 CDs in a 40mm travel pack! £12.25
- HFN/RR 009 Headcase: headphone amplifier. 40mW Class A unit allows use of headphones; black-ash case; 220/240V-only £81.95
- HFN/RR 010 News Stand: 19in/430mm housing, 36in high, complete with 5 shelves (3 adjustable) black finish £142.95
- HFN/RR 011 Mushcrusher: 220/240V mains filter. 5A rating £25.95
- HFN/RR 012 Software Storage System: satin black timber (Medite), stackable, supplied in kit form. LP unit (120 capacity) £55.00 CD/cassette unit (40/25) £35.00 singles unit (200) £40.00.
- HFN/RR 013 Walnut: wall mounting two-level turntable support complete with two shelves; finish, black £50.95
- HFN/RR 014 Stylus Cleaner: ultrasonic cleaner; £19.95
- HFN/RR 015 Test CD II: 99 tracks, 75mins. £12.25
- HFN/RR 016 Software Storage: 4-high CD storage unit £70.00
- Cobra Indoor FM antenna: indoor aerial, built-in amplifier £49.95
- Audioquest vacuum tube dampers: set of 4 £12.25
- Audioquest damping sheet: sorbothane, 6in x 6in self-adhesive £12.25
- Good Sound: Laura Dearborn's paperback £11.25
- HFN/RR self-build loudspeakers: details available for DCI & Bassett
- Audiophile records: Cantate Domino £7.95 Jazz at the Pawnshop (2LP) £15.95 Casino Royale CD £10.95 ; J Boyk Stereo Miking CD £12.25 Pictures At An Exhibition (Boyk) £13.95 LP £13.95 CD Good vibes at the Pawnshop Jazz Club £8.95 LP Jazz at The Pawnshop II £8.95 LP £13.95 CD
- Reissues James Taylor 2LP CD ; Hopkins 2LP CD ; Lomax 2LP CD ; Preston 2LP CD . 2LP £8.45, CD £10.95
- Alphason Tonearm Lifter: Yes, it really does! £14.25
- CD Feet: Audioquest Sorbothane. Pack of 4 £25.95
- Decca record cleaning brush: £9.95
- CD Jewel Cases (packs of 10): standard, 5in complete £6.50 ; 5in, outer £5.00 ; slimline 5in £6.50 ; Double Jewel Case, complete (each) £1.75 . 5in clear protective sleeve (pack of 5) 75p
- Calotherm: CD cleaner cloth £2.25 Hi-Tech Lenscloth £1.60
- Kontak two-bottle cleaning kit: £19.95 Tweek £16.95
- Audio Anthology, Vols 1,2,3 (each) £17.25 ; Loudspeaker Design Cookbook, £16.25 ; Killer Car Stereo, £16.25
- Finyl: Starter pack, 100 discs, £15.25 ; Finyl, 200 discs £25.95
- Isopod: ceramic feet. Set of 3 £25.95
- Insert Audio banana plugs (per pair) £3.95
- The Audio Glossary: J Gordon Holt's paperback £9.95
- High Performance Loudspeakers Vol 4: Martin Colloms £28.50
- TDK Digital Noise Absorber £8.95
- Moth record cleaning machine, kit £180 complete £333
- Duo Tech Cable Enhancer, £175
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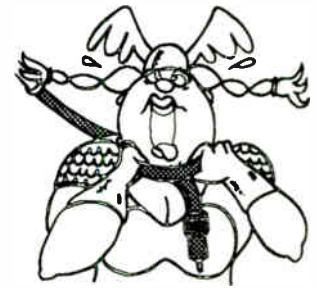


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ADVERTISERS' INDEX

Absolute Sounds	8,38	Heinitz T Mr	22	Phoenix	22
Acoustic Arts	46	K.J. Leisuresound	10, 24	Progressive	24
Audiofreaks	46	Kef Audio	6, 7	Ron Smith Aerials	22
Audio Synthesis	42	Mana Acoustics	22	Sennheiser UK	IFC
Audio-T	50	Meridian Audio	IBC	Sequence Design Ltd	4
Audio-Technica Ltd	13	Mike Manning Audio	66	Sevenoaks Hi-Fi Centre	84, 85
Billy Vee Sound System	82	Mission	OBC	The Listening Room	42
Cambridge Systems Tech	4	Movement Audio	12	Trim Records	24
Connections Ltd	42	Musical Images	44, 90		
Groove Tubes UK Ltd	66	Oxford Audio Consultants	38	West Midlands Audio	86
Harrow Audio	12	PM Components Ltd	20	Wilfred Audio	18
		Path Ltd	14, 20	Wilmslow Audio	46
				Wollaton Audio	4



Finale.

One of the founders of modern jazz, the late Dizzy Gillespie is still under-represented on CD

Playing it straight: Gillespie in the early 1950s, before his trumpet got its trademark bend



Near the end of a set at the Royal Festival Hall with his United Nation Orchestra in 1989 came an announcement that was typical, half-serious, half mock-professorial: 'And now we would like to give you a version of a tune that has been very closely associated with me over many, many decades... mainly because I wrote it. It has withstood the vicissitudes of the contingent world, and moved in an *odyssey* into the realm of the metaphysical. And may we offer at this time "A Night In Tunisia".'

Gillespie wasn't exaggerating about the decades: he wrote a 'A Night In Tunisia' in 1942. And, when he died on 6 January, 1993, it was forty years to the day since someone fell over his trumpet at a party, leaving it bent upwards at 45

degrees. Gillespie decided he could hear it better that way while he was playing, and it became his trademark.

The United Nation Orchestra, with such luminaries as Paquito D'Rivera, Slide Hampton, James Moody, Arturo Sandoval, Airtio Moreira and Flora Purim was really Dizzy Gillespie's last big band. And, although he is credited with the co-invention of the modern form of small-group jazz, Gillespie was also one of the supreme big band exponents of all time. On his best big-band records, Gillespie's solo trumpet took on a concerto-like relationship with the orchestra, far beyond the usual roles of soloist and accompaniment.

With Teddy Hill's band, the 19-year old Gillespie made his first records (in May 1937) and travelled to Europe, but his earliest notable recorded solo is to be heard on Lionel Hampton's 'Hot Mallets' (September 1939). By then he had joined Cab Calloway's band, and he appeared on about 50 of Calloway's records: but, in his own view, only 'Pickin' the Cabbage' (1940), which he wrote, arranged and soloed on, hinted at what was to come.

Early in 1945 he cut his first records as leader of a small group, and made his first recordings with Charlie Parker, 'Groovin' High' and 'All The Things You Are'. An unsuccessful attempt to launch a big band was followed by a trip to the West Coast with a sextet including the increasingly unreliable Parker. The February 1946 recordings for the Dial label marked the end of their regular working relationship, although later recordings document some astonishing reunions at various concert dates.

Later that year, Gillespie launched his second big band and this time, with Sonny Stitt, John Lewis, Ray Brown, Milt Jackson and Kenny Clarke in the ranks, he was successful. A current CD, *Groovin' High* (Savoy V-0152) includes some June 1946 big-band numbers as well as the 1945 Guild small-group sides. Listening to this chronologically-programmed CD you can hear the dramatic uplift in the music as Gillespie discards the chugging guitar/bass/drums beat of the swing era, setting the soloists free to fly; you can hear the fantastic unison playing of Gillespie and Parker; and you can hear the equally amazing section playing of the big band, working at truly unbelievable tempos. Another CD issue, *Shaw 'Nuff* (Musicraft MVSCD-53CD), offers more titles including the archetypal Dizzy-bop novelty, Sarah Vaughan singing 'He Beeped When He Shoulda Bopped'. Some of

the 1947-1948 band's Victor recordings are to be found on a 1990 CD *The Bebop Revolution* (RCA Bluebird, ND82177), while broadcast recordings have also been reissued by independent labels.

The band, which lasted until 1950 provided the vehicle for a first exploration of Afro-Cuban polyrhythms, when Gillespie introduced the conga player Chano Pozo in 1947. 'Manteca', 'Tin Tin Deo' and 'Cubana Be, Cubana Bop' remained in the repertoire. In 1951, he founded his own record label, Dec Gee and began making unashamedly commercial small-group records, with vocals by Joe Carroll and others. In 1953 he folded the label and sold the masters to Savoy. Once to be found on a single RCA/Ariola CD *Dec Gee Days* (ZD70517), the 20-odd tracks featuring Gillespie are now reissued on *Schooldays* (Savoy SV-0157) and *The Champ* (SV-0170).

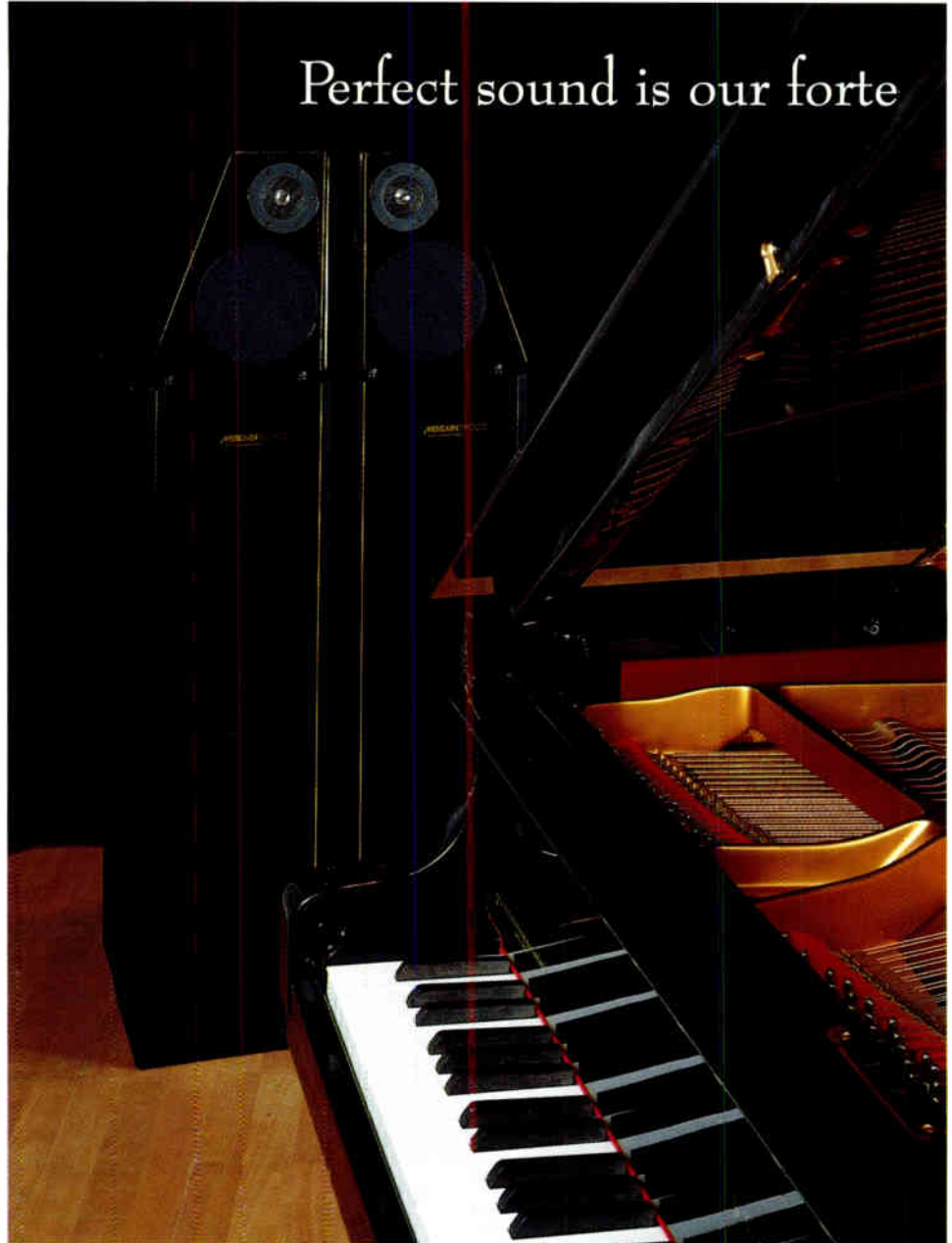
In 1954 Gillespie signed with Norman Granz's Verve Records and persuaded Granz to finance some new big band recordings. When the State Department sponsored Dizzy for a 'Jazz Ambassadors' overseas tour early in 1956, he assembled a new big band which he kept together until the end of 1957, and with which he produced some of the best big band records ever made. A good selection of these titles is on Disc 1 of the three-CD box *Dizzy Diamonds: The Best of the Verve Years* (513875).

This Verve box features a couple of Parker tracks from 1950 (Parker was under contract to Granz from 1948 until his death in 1955) as well as recordings Gillespie made with Sonny Rollins, Sonny Stitt, Stan Getz and others.

In later years he continued to tour, usually with a quintet or quartet and made countless special appearances with all-star groups. In the early 1980s he worked with musicians ranging from Herbie Hancock to Mongo Santamaria. By then, Gillespie had been showered with awards and honours and (in June 1978) had even sung 'Salt Peanuts' with President Carter at the White House.

Paying an obituary tribute to 'Bebop's fiery genius' for the *Independent on Sunday*, Richard Williams put Gillespie 'among the dozen most significant figures in the history of jazz'. There can be no doubt about that: or about the fact that, over the years, Gillespie remained true to his own genius and to the revolution he started, consistent even when age prevented him from playing as much trumpet as his audiences would have liked. The United Nation RFH concert (issued on CD as Enja 6044) may not be his most significant work, but it is a happy memento. *Steve Harris*

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