

Stereo Review

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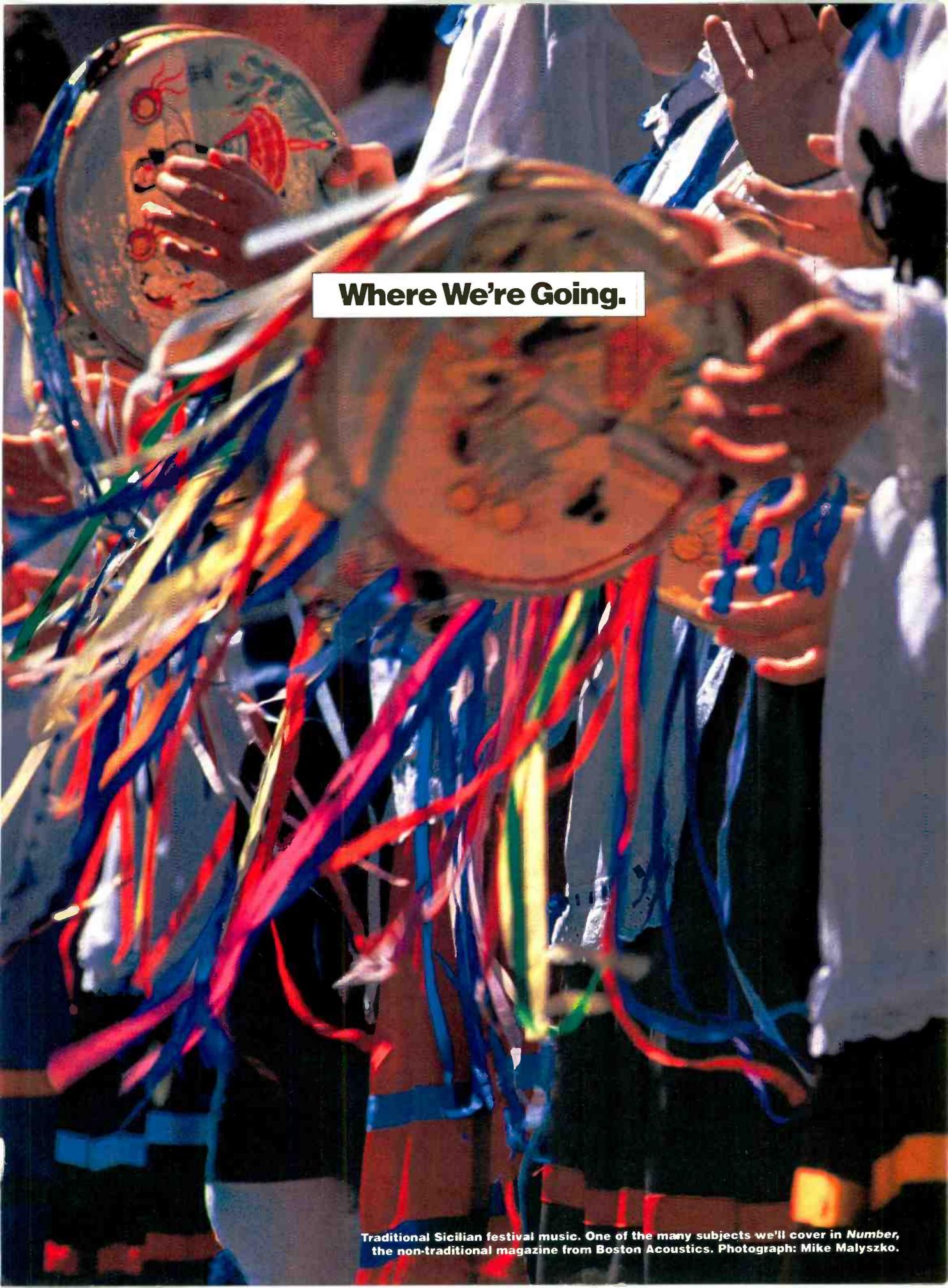


Where We Were.



Boston Acoustics, Up Close #1, February 1990.

The message here is simple. Thanks for the support you've given the Boston Acoustics Up Close ads we've run for three years. We've had over 100,000 responses, letters, calls. And we appreciate it. Now for the "Where we're going" part: introducing *Number*, a mini-magazine of music, sonics, and free (almost) recordings on CD. It's the logical evolution of Up Close. When can you get it? This Fall. Where? Through Boston dealers, and in our new ads starting in September. That's where.

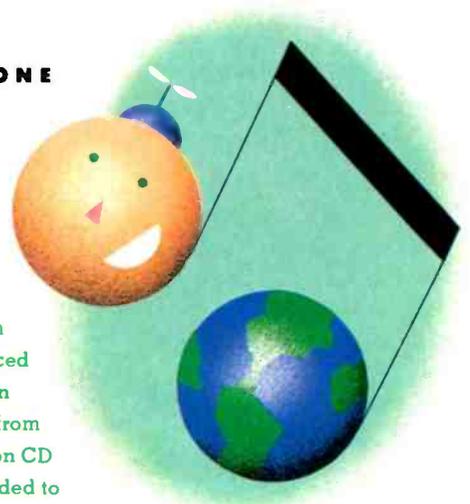


Where We're Going.

Traditional Sicilian festival music. One of the many subjects we'll cover in *Number*, the non-traditional magazine from Boston Acoustics. Photograph: Mike Malyszko.

BULLETIN

BY WILLIAM LIVINGSTONE
AND BOB ANKOSKO



FREE TAPE FROM TDK

If you've recently purchased a new cassette deck, TDK wants to send you a free SA-X high-bias cassette to try out. Send your name and address, the deck's model number, and the original warranty card to: TDK Special Offer, 50 W. 17th St., 3rd floor, New York, NY 10011. The warranty card will be returned with the free tape. The offer expires on January 1, 1994, and is good for one tape per family or address.

COLLECTING CLASSICAL CD'S

Naxos, an international budget classical CD label, was founded in Hong Kong by Klaus Heymann, a former distributor of Bose and Revox equipment. He launched his CD's in the U.S. in 1991, sold 700,000 of them here in 1992, and expects to top 1 million discs priced at \$5.99 to \$6.99 in 1993. Naxos budget MiniDiscs (claimed to be the world's first) should be in stores now at \$6.99 each.

With a catalog of three hundred titles, Naxos averages twenty new all-digital (DDD) U.S. releases by living artists per month. Recorded mostly in Eastern Europe, they feature such artists as Stefan Vladar and Jenő Jandó (pianists), Giacomo Aragall and Thomas Harper (tenors), and Alexander Rahbari and Barry Wordworth (conductors).

For a free pamphlet entitled "How to Build a Classical Compact Disc Collection," write or call Naxos of America, 295 W. Route 70, Cherry Hill, NJ 08002; tel. 609-354-8007.

INTERACTIVE MUSIC

The avant-garde rocker Todd Rundgren's July CD release, "No World Order" on the Forward label, a division of Rhino Records, will also be available in the CD-I format through Philips Interactive Media of America. Billed as the first "completely interactive" music-only CD-I, the disc features thousands of 4- to 8-second musical segments that can be combined in an "infinite" number of ways. "Users would have to play the CD-I disc for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, well into the next millennium to hear the same version of a song twice," Rundgren says.

ALLISON AGAIN

Sammi Sound Technology of Danville, Kentucky, has resumed production of Allison Acoustics' popular AL Series speakers. "We're using the same components and methods as in the past, with no changes anticipated," says Tom Ressler, vice president of Allison Acoustics, which has been established as a subsidiary of Sammi Sound. Production of the speakers ceased last fall when the original Allison Acoustics went bankrupt. The reborn company says it will honor outstanding warranties for Allison speakers.

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

Ella Fitzgerald, jazz singer, 75; Alicia de Larrocha, pianist, 70; John Browning, pianist, 60; Harman Kardon, equipment maker, 40; STEREO REVIEW, world's leading audio and A/V magazine, 35; Tokyo String Quartet, 25; Delos International, record company, 20 (see page 19); "Bulletin," this news and notes column, 15.

KID STUFF

Songwriters and Artists for the Earth (SAFE) have produced "Put On Your Green Shoes," an album from Sony Kids' Music (on CD and cassette) intended to

teach children to respect and

nurture the environment. Among the artists on the album are Cyndi Lauper, Indigo Girls, Kenny Loggins, Willie Nelson, Richie Havens, Olivia Newton-John, and Dr. John. Nine of the thirteen songs were written for this project. Profits go to SAFE, Earth Island Institute, and Save the Children.

The VHS tape "Joe Scroggs in Concert" from Shadow Play Records & Video, much praised by parents' and teachers' magazines, has just been singled out by the American Library Association as a 1993 Notable Children's Video. Our panel of critics (Lauren and Darren Ankosko, aged three and five, respectively) concur. The eleven songs in the 51-minute video include *Deep in the Jungle* and *Bahamas Pajamas* by singer/songwriter Scroggs as well as his biggest hit, *Goo-Goo, Ga-Ga*. To order call 1-800-274-8804.

MOVIES ON CD

Nimbus Technology and Engineering of England recently demonstrated movie clips that were recorded on standard CD's in accordance with the MPEG-1 data-compression standard. Both single-density discs (74 minutes) and double-density discs (128 minutes) were shown on a video monitor connected via a D/A converter with an A/V output to an off-the-shelf \$220 CD player with a digital output. Video experts generally agreed that the picture quality was at least as good as the VHS videotape format, although concern was expressed that some existing CD players might have trouble reading double-density discs.

Nimbus isn't the only company looking into video on CD. Philips plans to offer a full-motion-video cartridge for its CD-I players this fall that's expected to sell for less than \$300.

SAX IN THE WHITE HOUSE

When President Clinton was elected, Ernest Gilbert, president of Video Artists International (VAI), wrote to him offering to upgrade the White House collection of CD's and videos with choice items from VAI's catalog. When he got a gracious letter accepting his offer, President Gilbert put together a selection of opera and ballet videos and added plenty of jazz. Most notable were two tapes of vintage saxophone players—"Reed Royalty" and "Tenor Titans"—hosted by Branford Marsalis. Among the CD's was the new release "Maxwell's Torment" by a group called the Jazz Mentality, featuring Chris Potter, who plays tenor, soprano, and alto saxophones. If you want to upgrade the collection at your house with the same sax recordings that are in the White House, call 1-800-477-7146 to order.

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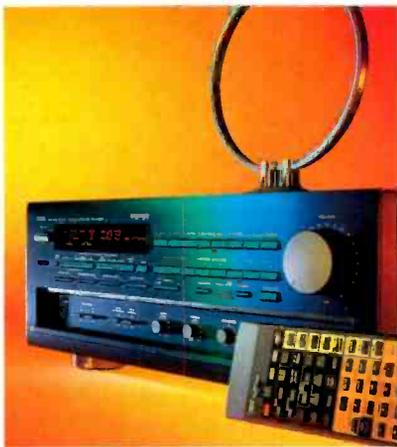
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Cover

A well-chosen A/V receiver, like the Yamaha RX-V1070 shown here, can serve as the audio centerpiece of a home theater system and provides benefits for ordinary music listening as well. For tips on how to buy the right A/V receiver, see page 58.

Photograph by Dan Wagner

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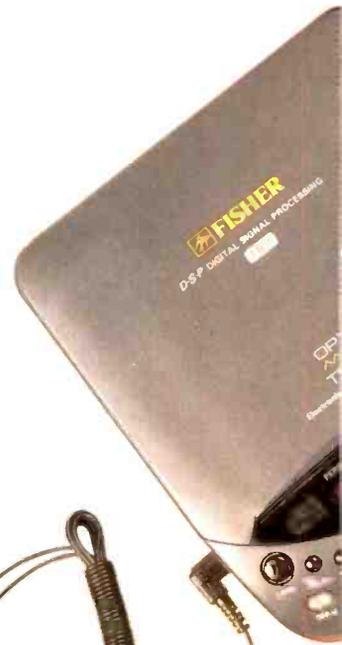
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Stereo Review

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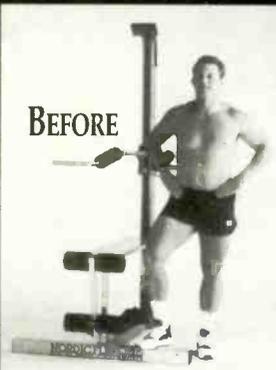
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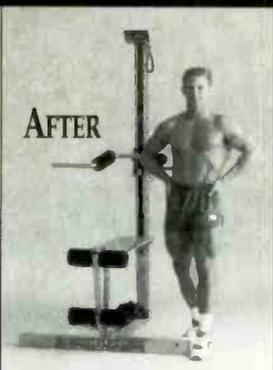
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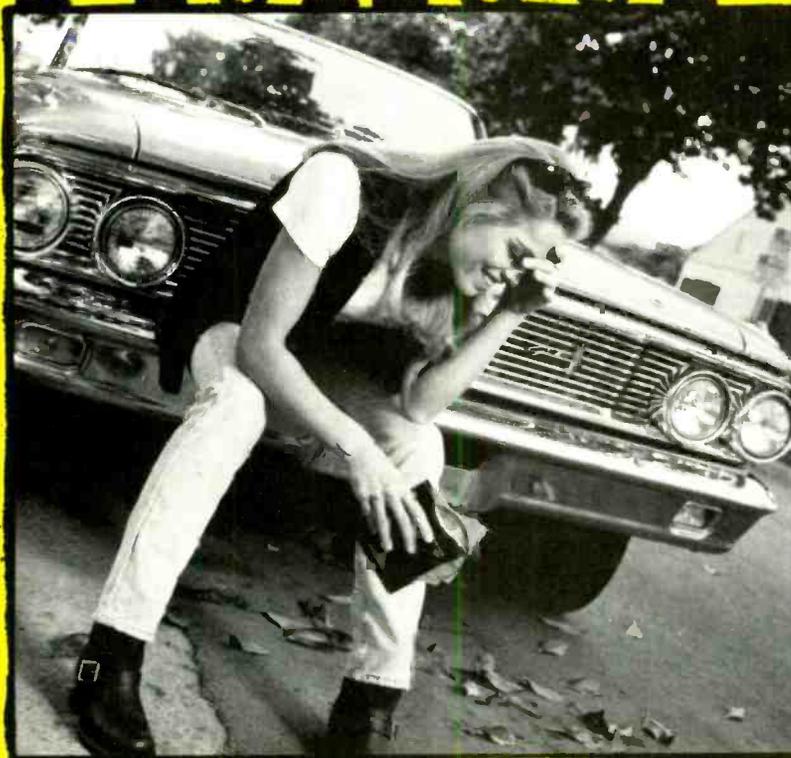
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LETTERS

What Is "Good"?

Just a brief note of gratitude for the refreshingly cogent comments of Julian Hirsch on what makes a product "good" (May "Technical Talk"). His observation that he has "never heard reproduced orchestral music that comes close to duplicating the live sound . . ." is a delightful contrast to periodicals in which the most preposterous claims are made for "high end" hardware in a tormented prose rife with adjectives normally associated with religion or copulation or food.

DICK HEIM
Duluth, MN

Perceptual Coding

Ken Pohlmann likens critics of perceptual coding to critics of digital recording in general (April "Signals"), but the analogy is flawed. Conventional PCM digital recording offers overwhelming sonic advantages over analog recording, but what are the advantages of perceptual coding? He mentions smaller, lighter, and (eventually) less costly. But a DAT cassette will record 2 hours for about \$5 and isn't exactly bulky—in fact, it's about half the size of a DCC. And DAT and CD are the only no-compromise formats available.

KENT ASHCRAFT
Bowie, MD

Ken Pohlmann replies: There's certainly nothing wrong with "brute force" linear recording, but new perceptual coders will stimulate further development in linear coders (to perfect such things as psychoacoustically optimized dither), and they may eventually surpass the fidelity of linear coding as implemented in consumer products.

As the debate over the sins and virtues of the PASC and ATRAC perceptual-coding systems continues to be fueled by theorists and philosophers, many of whom have spent very little time actually listening to the devices (let alone participating in truly unbiased double-blind comparison tests with the CD and DAT formats), it seems wise to reserve judgment until you can "hear the music," not just the rhetoric.

I do, however, have a question about what happens to previously processed information when it is rerecorded from one DCC (or MD) machine to another: Is it further compressed, or left basically unchanged? What would happen to the signal in a transfer from DCC to MD, or vice versa?

D. ALLYN
Waltham, MA

Both DCC and MD have constant, though different, data rates (in other words, 5 minutes of any DCC recording contains the same amount of information as 5 minutes of any other, regardless of the source, and likewise for two MD recordings), so copying from DCC to DCC or MD to MD does not entail any further

data reduction. But because of the way PASC and ATRAC allocate bits to samples, the data in the copies is almost certain to be somewhat different from that in the originals, and after enough passes there might be some audible degradation.

Copying from DCC to MD will result in some additional data reduction because of MD's slightly lower data rate, and even going from MD to DCC will probably create bigger differences than would result from an MD-to-MD or DCC-to-DCC copy, simply because of differences in the way PASC and ATRAC analyze the data. How significant any audible effects of such cross-system copying (or transcoding) might be remains to be seen, but as perceptual coding becomes more common, this question will become increasingly important.

Jerky Movies

The first thing I turned to in the May issue was Ralph Hodges's "The High End." Boy, did he screw up! Motion-picture film is *not* subject to "start-stop jerks" [that could affect the sound] during projection! It feeds smoothly through the projector's sprockets, passing the aperture of the lamp/lens system, and so forth. The framing is done by a mechanical system that moves in time with the picture, allowing light to pass through the film only during each full frame. The timing is adjusted by the operator during setup. Any jerky operation that can be seen is caused by improper adjustment, worn sprocket holes in the film, a worn-out projector drive system, or a combination of those factors. When the adjustment is out of sync with the film, a bar or only parts of the picture appear on the screen, or the picture hops and appears erratic.

MEL YOUNG
Riverside, CA

Ralph Hodges replies: Well, it seems I stand smartly corrected. Obviously I cannot be trusted around a motion-picture projector. Sorry.

Rotten CD's in Paradise

CD "laser rot" has struck here in Hawaii! I began to notice corrosion of the silvery portion of some of my CD's months back. They're getting worse, and the process is starting on more recently acquired discs. I am convinced that the high relative humidity of the Hawaiian islands has something to do with my problem. Do record companies replace deteriorated CD's the way they do laserdiscs?

GERALD V. DE ORO
Kurtistown, HI

A CD's aluminum reflective layer can oxidize if the disc is not properly sealed. The most likely cause would be damage to the coating on the label side of the disc. We have heard of isolated instances of such oxidation of damaged or defective CD's, but not of any widespread problem like the "laser rot" that plagued laserdisc in

its early years. We would expect record dealers to exchange recently purchased discs showing signs of oxidation.

Has anyone else out there encountered a lot of this sort of deterioration in a compact disc collection?

Missing Bests

I always look forward to STEREO REVIEW's compilations of best recordings, but I found your critics' lists of the best of the last thirty-five years in the March issue very disheartening. Why is there no mention of Sinatra and Streisand and others who have contributed so much to music in the past thirty-five years? Are the ten best limited to jazz, classical, and rock?

NINA GUT
Richmond Hill, NY

Your "35 Years of Music" feature provided a fascinating list of listening recommendations that I will enjoy in the months ahead, but I was severely disappointed to find only one recording representing the Broadway stage—arguably equal to jazz as an American musical institution during the past thirty-five years.

SCOTT PARSONS
Sidney, OH

Stay tuned.

Digital Copies

After reading several explanations, I still do not understand the Serial Copy Management System (SCMS). Clearly, if I record a CD using a DCC or MD deck, or a "consumer" DAT deck equipped with SCMS, I cannot make digital copies from that copy. But if I copy analog records onto DCC tapes, can I use a second DCC deck to copy those tapes?

ROBERT J. RICHARD
Fairfax, CA

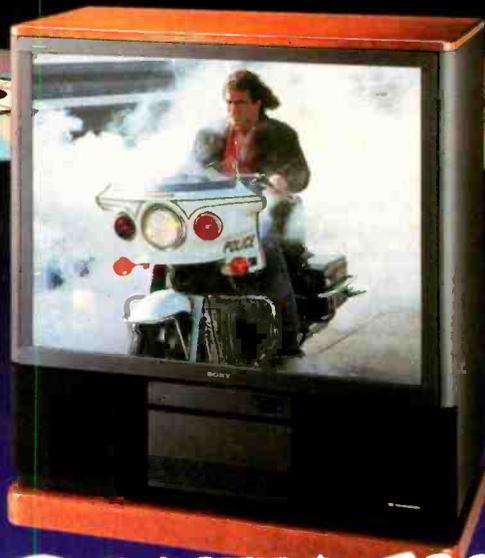
SCMS will treat any recording made through the analog inputs of a digital recorder as a digital original from which you can make an unlimited number of first-generation digital-to-digital copies, just as you can from a CD, so you should not have any problem.

Correction

Because of a mislabeled slide, an incorrect Sony product photo was printed in May's "Pumped-Up Preamps" (page 71). Instead of the TA-E2000ESD preamplifier, the photo shows the company's STR-D790 A/V receiver. We regret this error.

We welcome your letters. Please address correspondence to Editor, Stereo Review, 1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. You should include your address and telephone number for verification. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

FOR THE DISCRIMINATING MOVIE FAN.



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The Last Of The Mohicans (1992)	* 1071406
A League Of Their Own	1078005
Passenger 57	* 1087709
Sneakers	* 1071604
Top Gun	0426908
Alien	0000208
Aliens	0360909
Alien 3	* 1042506
Batman (1989)	* 0642504
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Home Alone	* 0104208
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Lethal Weapon 2	* 0642702
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Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country	* 1001007
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TIME DELAY



35 Years Ago

In his "Sounding Board" column in the July 1958 issue, Managing Editor David Hall noted pianist Van Cliburn's highly publicized win at the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow, and—without hearing Cliburn's debut RCA recording ("anxiously awaited as we go to press")—waxed remarkably prescient about Cliburn's future career. Hall asked: "Can [Cliburn] circumvent the accolade accorded many a musician catapulted to sudden fame—burnout?"

Just Looking: New products this month included the Fisher 400 stereo preamplifier, whose ability to function as a crossover network for a dual-channel amplifier-speaker system was described as "rather unusual," the Fairchild Model 230 Micro-7 phono cartridge (able to track "down to 1 gram in superior tonearms"), and the "smartly styled" Wollensak 1515 tape recorder, which weighed in at "only 20 pounds." Elsewhere on the technical front, an article on turntables and tonearms, "The Silent Partners," concluded with the observation that "A quality turntable kept in good condition can be an immense help in coaxing all the sonic splendor from your discs."

No Nukes: In the Letters column, the manufacturers of

Staticmasters record cleaner responded to a February article by Herbert Reid by pointing out that their product contained radioactive polonium—not plutonium as printed. The editor's response: "This guy Herbert Reid is a creep—he can't find the right particle for his article."



20 Years Ago

Install it and it invades Poland: A test report on the Electrostatic ESS amt 1 speaker system featured an in-depth analysis of an "air-motion transformer" called the Heil Driver.

Less threatening-sounding new products in the same issue included the Sansui model SF-1 speaker system (with a rated bandwidth of 55 Hz to 20 kHz), the Sony PS-2251 direct-drive manual turntable (\$300 with dust cover), and Magitran's Poly-Planar DS60 sound panels, wall-hanging speakers only 2¼ inches deep that could be driven with as little as 5 (!) watts of amplifier power.

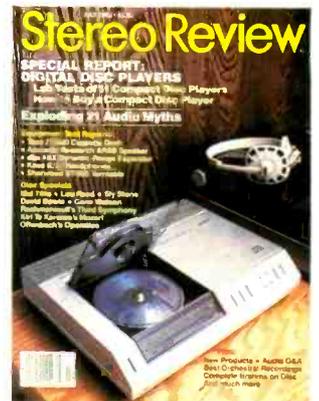


Also tested was the Technics SL-1100A direct-drive turntable, about which an unusually ebullient Julian Hirsch declared, "Except for its rather leisurely arm lift and descent, we found absolutely nothing to criticize."

In Best of the Month, Bernard Jacobson endorsed the Cleveland Quartet's Brahms cycle on RCA ("Performances fit to stand with the best you will ever hear"), George Jellinek cheered Beverly Sills's ABC recording of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* ("A major triumph"), Chris Albertson raved over jazzman Paul Jeffrey's "Family" ("Its naked beauty is quite breathtaking"), and the usually sensible Peter Reilly described Donovan's "Cosmic Wheels" as "the work of a poet who has broken out of his accustomed pastel wonderland."

Elsewhere in the review sections, the legendary rock critic Lester Bangs called the Stooges' "Raw Power" album "the apotheosis of every parental nightmare." Eric Salzman preferred Leonard Bernstein's Deutsche Grammophon recording of *Carmen* to the same performers live at the Met ("One's own inner visualization is not spoiled by the sight of Marilyn Horne wriggling her ample hips"), and Peter Reilly (clearly having a bad month) described the debut album by the former Pink Floyd engineer Hurricane Smith as "consistently bouncy—it bounced as I scaled it into the wastebasket."

PC Alert: Paul Kresh dismissed "Now," the latest effort from *Downtown* chanteuse Petula Clark, as suitable "for retarded teenagers."



10 Years Ago

The *real* beginnings of the Gulf War? A "News Brief" alerted readers that Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman, moved by



Nancy Reagan's recent performance of Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*, had donated \$300,000 to the National Symphony to endow the Nancy Reagan Chair of Narrative Music.

Lenny Rules! In "The Basic Repertoire," critic Richard Freed evaluated performances of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* and concluded that Leonard Bernstein's performance of the famous concert suite was "... even more appealing than Copland's own recording."

Good news for Michael Bolton: Reviewing a Jimi Hendrix medley by Soft Cell, Mark Peel called it "the most dreadful cover of all time."

—Steve Simels

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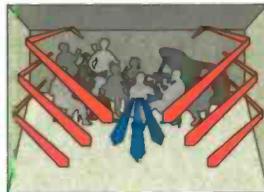
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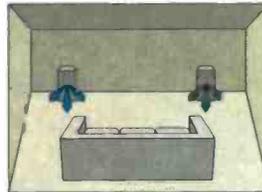
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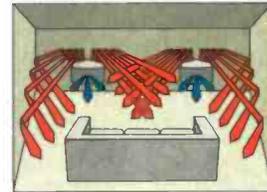
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NEW PRODUCTS



◀ DISCWASHER

Discwasher's CDL² laser-lens cleaner has a way with words: You insert the disc into any CD player, and a recorded voice coaches you through a two-step procedure to remove debris from the lens. There's also a music/voice segment on positioning speakers. Price: \$22. Discwasher, Dept. SR, 46-23 Crane St., Long Island City, NY 11101.

• Circle 120 on reader service card

▼ DESIGN ACOUSTICS

Design Acoustics is billing the PS-24 as a multipurpose home theater speaker that can be used for front left/right, center, and surround applications. Its dual-ported cabinet, measuring 20 x 5 x 10 inches, houses two 4-inch woofers and a 3/4-inch tweeter, all

magnetically shielded. Bandwidth is given as 50 Hz to 20 kHz. Recommended amplifier power is 10 to 75 watts continuous. Price: \$190. Design Acoustics, Dept. SR, 1225 Commerce Dr., Stow, OH 44224.

• Circle 122 on reader service card



▲ KOSS

Koss's HD/6 minispeaker is designed for computers equipped with a stereo sound board. It features a magnetically shielded 4-inch driver and a 5-watt amp with signal sensing for automatic on/off. Operation requires four C

batteries or the supplied AC adaptor. Maximum input power is 100 milliwatts. Price: \$100 a pair. Koss, Dept. SR, 4129 N. Port Washington Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212.

• Circle 121 on reader service card



▲ ROTEL

Rotel's RHT-10 FM tuner, part of the company's new high-end Sovereign line, uses a stereo decoder made entirely of discrete components that is said to outperform conventional IC (integrated-circuit) designs. Features include sixteen station presets, automatic or manual tuning, and buttons for high-blend, wide/narrow bandwidth, mono/stereo, and mute. Capture ratio is given as 1.0 dB. Price: \$1,600. Rotel, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 653, Buffalo, NY 14240.

• Circle 123 on reader service card

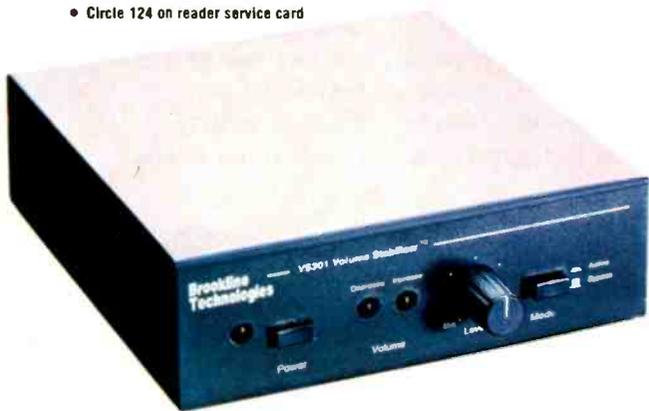
NEW PRODUCTS

▼ BROOKLINE

Brookline Technologies' VS301 Volume Stabilizer is an analog compression device for people who make CD-to-cassette recordings for playback in settings with high background noise—such as an airplane. It evens out soft and loud passages during recording. Available by mail order only for \$133.

Brookline Technologies, Dept. SR, 2035 Carriage Hill Rd., Allison Park, PA 15101.

• Circle 124 on reader service card

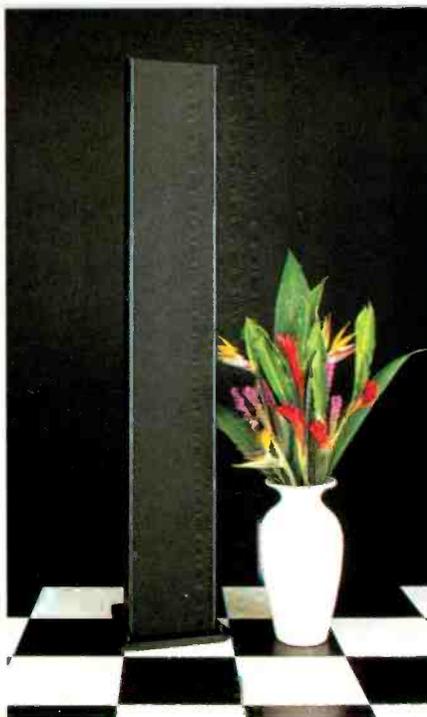


▼ STANDESIGN

Standesign's 34½-inch-tall Multidesign component rack features adjustable 20 x 16-inch shelves finished in black-ash

veneer. Price: \$600. Melody Audio, Dept. SR, 1940 Blake St., Suite 101, Denver, CO 80202.

• Circle 126 on reader service card



◀ MAGNEPAN

Magnepan designed the MG-10 for use as a front, side, or rear speaker in a home theater system. The 10½ x 65 x 1¼-inch dipole speaker uses a 340-square-inch planar-magnetic woofer element that operates from 80 Hz to 1.5 kHz and a 56 x 1½-inch quasi-ribbon tweeter that plays between 1.5 and 22 kHz. Recommended power is 50 to 200 watts. Price: \$1,175 a pair. Magnepan, Dept. SR, 1645 Ninth St., White Bear Lake, MN 55110.

• Circle 125 on reader service card



▲ CERWIN-VEGA

Cerwin-Vega's Sensurround home theater speaker package boasts four 11¼-inch-tall HT-S6 two-way satellites with 6½-inch woofers, one 16⅝-inch-wide HT-CTR center-channel speaker with two angled midrange drivers, and a pair of 17½ x 13 x 24½-inch HT-110 bass modules rated down to 38 Hz. All of the drivers are magnetically shielded, and all the cabinets are finished in woodgrain vinyl. Price: \$1,660. Cerwin-Vega, Dept. SR, 555 E. Easy St., Simi Valley, CA 93065.

• Circle 127 on reader service card

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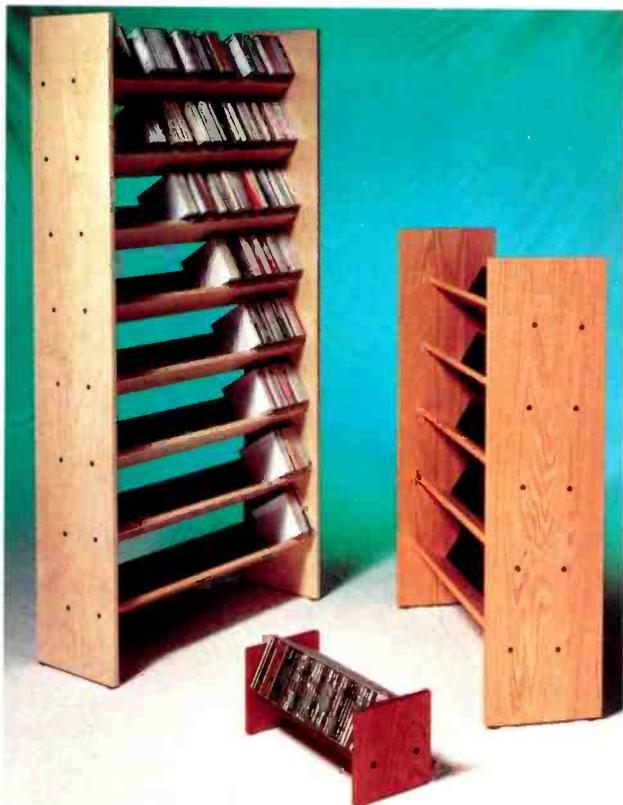
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▲ STORADISC

Davidson-Whitehall's Storadisc CD racks come in four sizes (numbers indicate capacity): the LS-576 (left, \$245 to \$625), LS-360 (right, \$185 to \$475), SS-50 (not shown, \$32 to \$56), and SS-

36 (center, \$29 to \$52). Prices depend on finish; nine are available. Davidson-Whitehall, Dept. SR, 555 Whitehall St., Atlanta, GA 30303.

• Circle 128 on reader service card

▼ PARASOUND

Parasound's HCA-2200II power amplifier is said to operate in Class A mode until its output reaches 6 watts, at which point it switches to the more efficient Class AB mode. It is rated to deliver 220 watts per channel into 8 ohms and can be bridged for 750 watts mono. Signal-to-noise

ratio is given as 114 dB and total harmonic distortion as 0.05 percent at full power. The amplifier's RCA input jacks and biwired speaker terminals are gold-plated. Price: \$1,695. Parasound, Dept. SR, 950 Battery St., San Francisco, CA 94111.

• Circle 129 on reader service card



▶ SOLUS

The Solus ir8 in-wall speaker uses a 7-inch planar-magnetic ribbon to reproduce frequencies above 2,000 Hz and an 8-inch woofer for those down to 50 Hz. Power handling is given as 200 watts. Price: \$450 each. Solus, Dept. SR, 118 West Julie Dr., Tempe, AZ 85283.

• Circle 130 on reader service card



▲ TUFF BOX

Advantage Plus says that its Tuff Box can take far more abuse than standard CD jewel cases. Price: three-pack, \$5. Advantage Plus, Dept. SR, 7113 Halifax Ct., Tampa, FL 33615.

• Circle 131 on reader service card



◀ DCM

DCM's SUB-712 powered subwoofer has an 8-inch woofer, a 12-inch passive radiator, a 75-Hz crossover, and an 80-watt B&K amplifier with distortion-limiting circuitry. The low-frequency limit is given as 28 Hz. Dimensions are 14½ x 16 x 15⅝ inches. Price: \$699. DCM, Dept. SR, 670 Airport Blvd. Ann Arbor, MI 48108.

• Circle 132 on reader service card

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Vladimir Horowitz in previously unreleased recordings of Chopin, Liszt, etc. *Discovered Treasures*, indeed! (Sony Classical)...450-502

Meissiaen: Quartet Pour La Fin Du Temps. Trio Fontenay & Ed. Brunner, clarinet. (Teldec) 457-333

Szymanowski: String Quartets 1, 2, etc. Cammina Quartet. (Denon) 456-293



Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto; more. Sarah Chang; Colin Davis, London Phil. (EMI Classics) 457-341

Sarah Chang—Debut (EMI Classics) 448-431

Barber, Shostakovich: Violin Concertos. Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg (EMI Classics) 443-234

Leonard Bernstein—Orchestral Dances And Showpieces (Sony Class.) 421-610/391-615

Elgar: Pomp And Circumstance Marches; more. Menuhin, Royal Phil. (Virgin Classics) 420-596

Rossini Overtures. Norrington, London Classical Players (EMI Classics) 420-521

Mozart: Syms. 39 & 41, "Jupiter." Norrington, London Class. Players. (EMI Classics) 420-513

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Tchaikovsky, Sibelius: Violin Concertos. Nigel Kennedy; Rattle cond. (EMI Classics) 439-885

Dvorak: Symphony No. 9, Slavonic Dances. Masur, NY Phil. (Teldec) 435-602

Debussy: Nocturnes; La Mer. M.T. Thomas, cond. (CBS Master.) 435-149

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The Symphonic Lloyd Webber. Stratta, Royal Phil. (Teldec) 431-320

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Mozart: Mass In C Minor. Abbado, Berliner Phil. (Sony Classical) 429-738

Live Berlin '90—Wald-bühnenkonzert. Baranboim, Berliner Philharmoniker (Teldec) 428-169



Christopher Parkening—Rodrigo: Concierto De Aranjuez; Walton: 5 Bagatelles Guitar & Orch. (EMI Classics) 455-170

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Rostropovich—Return To Russia. Tchaikovsky: *Symphony No. 6*; more. (Sony Class.) 428-151

Midorl—Encores! Faure, Kreisler, Paganini, more (Sony Classical) 452-466

Beethoven: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 7. Giulini cond. (Sony Classical) 452-458

Dvorak: Violin Concerto; more. Midori; Mehta, cond. (CBS Mast.) 386-573

Horowitz In Concert 1967-68 (CBS Mast.) 386-532

Handel: Messiah (highlights). Battle, Quivar, Aler, Ramey, et al (EMI Classics) 381-277

John Williams—Spanish Guitar Favontes (CBS Mast.) 378-646

Mahler: Symphony 2 "Resurrection". Kaplan, London Sym. (MCA Classics) 376-517/396-515

The Segovia Collection, Vol. 4—Baroque Guitar. (MCA Classics) 375-998

Bach: Violin Concertos #1, #2 & "Double". Stern, Perlman, Mehta (CBS Great Perform.) 368-076

Luciano Pavarotti—Pavarotti Premieres (CBS Master.) 349-811

Andrew Lloyd Webber: Requiem. Domingo et al. (EMI Classics) 338-814

Ravel, Prokofiev: Piano Concertos For Left Hand. Leon Fleisher (Sony Classical) 453-985

Beethoven: Piano Sonatas, Op. 109 & 111. Vladimir Feltsman (Musicmasters) 453-977

Bartók: Violin Concertos 1 & 2. Midori; Mehta, cond. (Sony Classical) 414-748

Valdai: The Four Seasons. Nigel Kennedy, Eng. Chamber Orch. (EMI Classics) 414-672

Schumann: Symphonies Nos. 3 & 4. Norrington, London Class. Players (EMI Classics) 414-094

Mussorgsky: Pictures ... Stravinsky: Firebird (Suite). Giulini cond. (Sony Class.) 413-625



Gorecki: Symphony No. 3. Dawn Upshaw, soprano; Zinman, cond. (Elektra/Nonesuch) 441-923

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▼ NAD

The Model 502 CD player from NAD is a no-frills design featuring a 1-bit MASH D/A converter with 18-bit resolution and a five-pole (30-dB-per-octave) analog output filter that is said to remove sampling artifacts. Highlights

include a wireless remote control with a numeric keypad for direct track access and a coaxial digital output. Price: \$299. NAD, Dept. SR, 633 Granite Ct., Pickering, Ontario L1W 3K1.

• Circle 133 on reader service card



▲ RECOTON

No more tedious wire snaking with Recoton's W440 wireless speaker system, which includes a 900-MHz RF (radio-frequency) transmitter with line-level inputs and a pair of 6 x 9 x 6-inch two-way speakers, each with a built-in RF receiver and a 10-watt amp.

Operating range is said to be about 150 feet, and bandwidth is given as 50 Hz to 15 kHz. An AC adaptor is supplied for each speaker. Price: \$250. Recoton, Dept. SR, 46-23 Crane St., Long Island City, NY 11101.

• Circle 134 on reader service card



◀ B.I.C. AMERICA

The 54-inch-tall Venturi Reálta tower speaker from B.I.C. America (*reálta* means "truth" in Italian) sports a pair of 10-inch woofers, two 5¼-inch midrange drivers, and a 1-inch titanium-dome tweeter. Its "modified D'Appolito" driver alignment (midrange-tweeter-midrange) is said to improve vertical dispersion and imaging. Bandwidth is given as 28 Hz to 27 kHz and sensitivity as 90 dB. Price: \$1,199 a pair. B.I.C. America, Dept. SR, 883-E Hampshire Rd., Stow, OH 44224.

• Circle 135 on reader service card



▲ SOTA

Sota's Comet belt-drive turntable features a "drift-free" twenty-four-pole AC synchronous motor, a high-density-polymer platter, and a bearing cup made of a self-lubricating material called Turcite. The company's LMT-II straight, fixed-head tonearm is included. Price: \$550. Sota, Dept. SR, 1318-B Marquette Dr., Romeoville, IL 60441.

• Circle 136 on reader service card

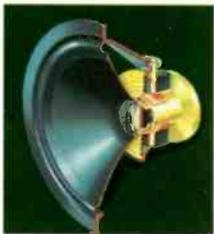
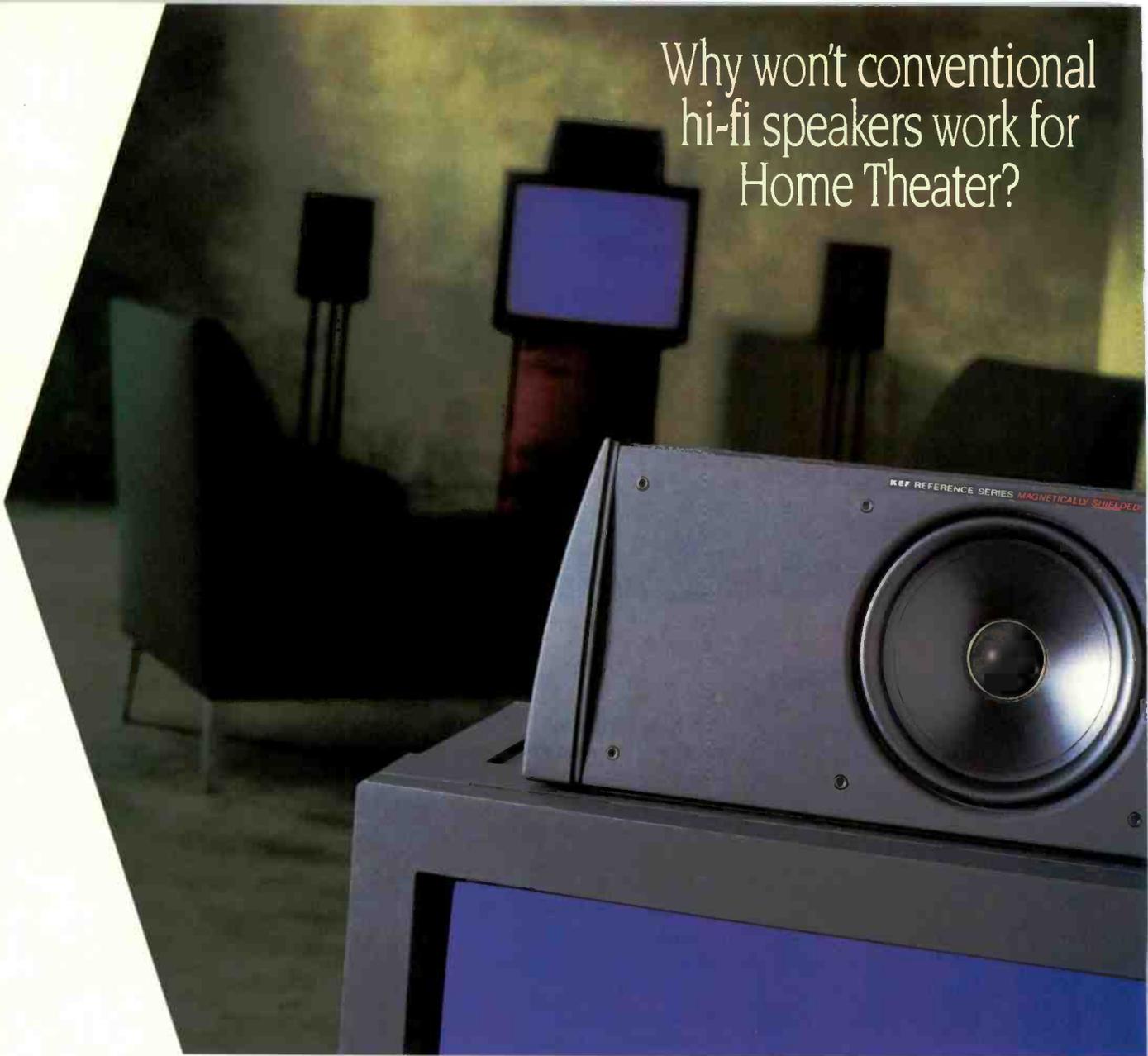
ESOTERIC AUDIO USA ▶

The latest interconnects from Esoteric Audio are available in 1-meter pairs. Top to bottom, the Artus (\$595), the Graphis (\$50), and the Primus (\$395). All have 24k-gold-plated plugs. Esoteric Audio USA, Dept. SR, RR3 Box 262, Winder, GA 30680.

• Circle 137 on reader service card



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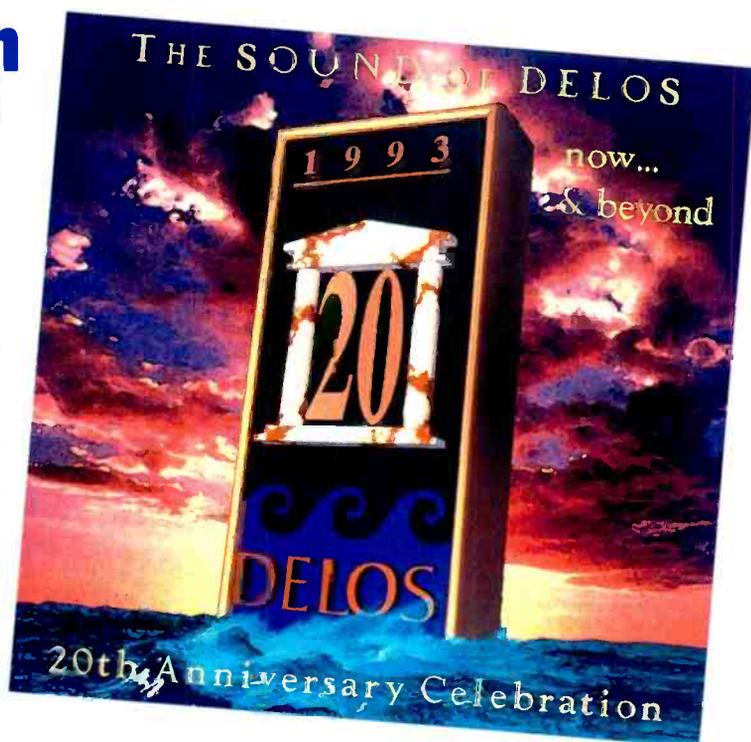
DELOS International is celebrating its twentieth anniversary this year, and as part of the festivities the company is offering a special CD sampler to readers of *STEREO REVIEW*, which is celebrating its thirty-fifth anniversary. The 70-minute sampler demonstrates the wide range of music and artists in the Delos catalog, and it's yours for a mere \$4, which covers postage and handling. Send in your check or money order with the coupon below.

Founded in 1973 by Amelia S. Haygood, who is still the company's president, Delos was intended from the beginning to provide a platform of high quality for American musicians, both soloists and musical groups. They were not to be limited to playing American music but would be presented in great music from any nation. Delos has, however, been a leader in recording music by American composers, and with a certain patriotic pride the company bills itself as Delos, the Great American Label.

Artists closely associated with Delos include the conductors Gerard Schwarz and James DePreist, the Seattle Symphony, Chamber Music Northwest, the pianist Carol Rosenberger, and the clarinetist David Shifrin. They are all represented on the sampler with the singers Arleen Auger, Vinson Cole, and Alessandra Marc; the organists George Baker, David Higgs, and Todd Wilson; the Helsinki Philharmonic; the Moscow Radio Symphony under Joel Spiegelman; and the Glorian Duo.

Newer to the Delos roster and also on the 20th Anniversary Celebration Disc are the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet and the Ascension Music Chorus. Coinciding with the anniversary, Delos announced signing a contract with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center under David Shifrin, and they perform a Dvořák serenade on the anniversary sampler. Other composers represented range from Palestrina, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, and Saint-Saëns to the Americans Diamond, Hanson, Fine, Hovhaness, and Piston. James Earl Jones narrates a passage from Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* on the CD.

Technically, Delos has maintained a cutting-edge position in recording and manufacturing. A pioneer in digital technology, the company bought the first Soundstream digital recorder. It was the first independent classical company to market its CD's in the United States, and in 1985 it was the first to abandon LP records in favor of CD's. Delos was an industry leader



in increasing playing time with its "Concert Length" CD's, many over 70 minutes. Today all technical aspects of Delos's projects are under the supervision of the distinguished author, engineer, and pedagogue John Eargle.

As more and more recording activity has left this country for Europe or Japan, the editors of *STEREO REVIEW* have monitored the progress of Delos with interest. We have reviewed their recordings and given awards to several (such as Mozart's Clarinet Concerto and Hanson's Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2). We salute Delos on its birthday, and we are proud to offer the 20th Anniversary Celebration Disc to you, our readers.

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MUSIC MAKERS

BY ROBERT RIPPS,
MARYANN SALTZER,
AND STEVE SIMELS

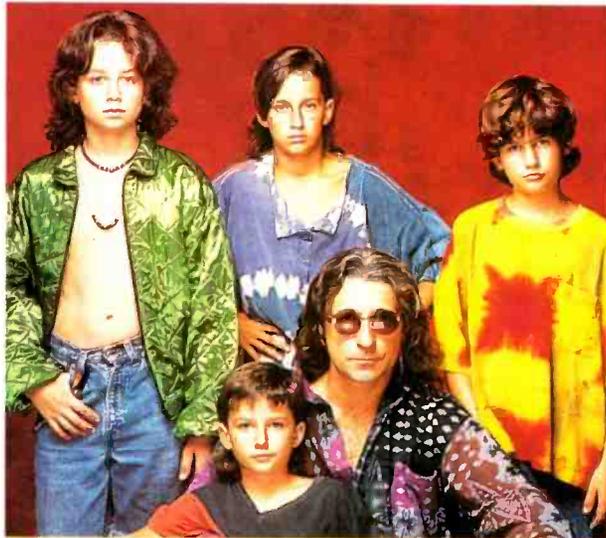
FAB FOUR

BRITAIN'S Brodsky Quartet has been visible a lot more than your average string quartet since their recent collaboration with former New Wave enfant terrible Elvis Costello in "The Juliet Letters." They've actually been a group for over twenty years, having started making music together as pre-teens (the oldest is now thirty-two). And while their Issey Miyake clothes have led people to compare them to a much funkier American ensemble, the Kronos Quartet, the Brodskys have a style of their own—musically as well as sartorially speaking. Their latest release on Teldec, due out this month, couples Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* with George Crumb's *Black Angels* (which the Kronos has also recorded).

BACK IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

THE conductor Semyon Bychkov returned to his native city to conduct the Leningrad Philharmonic back in June 1991, and last season he became principal guest conductor of what is now the St. Petersburg

The Brodskys: violinists Michael Thomas and Ian Belton, cellist Jacqueline Thomas, and violist Paul Cassidy



WILLIAM HAMES/SUZAN GRAME

WHY DON'T THEY JUST LISTEN TO METALLICA AND KILL THEMSELVES LIKE NORMAL KIDS?

Lynyrd Skynyrd fans who attended the band's most recent concerts and arrived early enough to catch the opening act, Litl Willie, may be excused for thinking they were hallucinating. That's because four of the five members of the Tucson-based blues-rock band are actually aged seven to thirteen. And if that wasn't enough, the quintet (dad Mark Babani on rhythm guitar, his sons on everything else) played really, really well, sort of like Stevie Ray Vaughan meets the Allman Brothers. No way, you say? Then look for Litl Willie's debut album on Cry Baby Records (a custom label run by former Bon Jovi manager Doc McGhee, which you can call toll-free, 1-800-753-5555). Also look for the group to open one of this summer's big tours; we can't mention the name of the headline act, but they're from Texas and they're famous for their beards.

Philharmonic. Bychkov emigrated to the U.S. in 1975 at the age of twenty-two and was the music director of orchestras in Grand Rapids and Buffalo before assuming the post of music director of the Orchestre de Paris in 1989. Philips has recorded him with his Paris orchestra and also with the Berlin Philharmonic. Scheduled fall releases from Paris include music from the French and Russian repertoires: a Poulenc-Milhaud-Honegger disc and Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*, with the Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky.

ELEKTRA CLASSICS



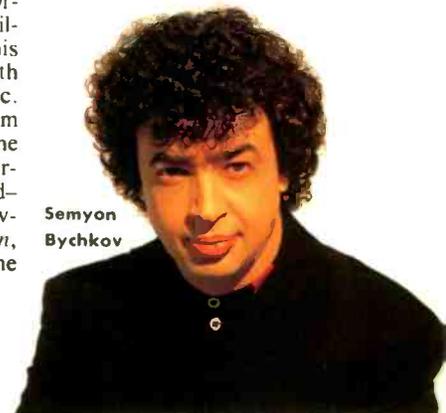
KOCH INT'L

UP, UP, AND AWAY!

WHILE Jack Larson claims that "the nicest thing that ever happened to me was that I played Jimmy Olsen," he's got to be proud of having collaborated with as venerated a member of American classical music's inner circle as Virgil Thomson. How did the cub reporter of the *Daily Planet* on TV's *Adventures of Superman* (which ran for seven seasons from 1953 to 1959 and has been in syndicated reruns ever since) get promoted to writing a libretto for Thomson's opera *Lord Byron*? "Because I was so typed as Jimmy when the series ended, I quit acting," Larson says.

Now a successful film producer, Larson turned to writing, mostly plays, in the Sixties, when a commission from Lincoln Center brought *Lord Byron* his way. The opera, first performed in 1972 and televised (on Live from Lincoln Center) in 1986, has just received its world-première recording on Koch International. Thoughts of Lois Lane and Clark Kent are obviously far behind Larson, since he's currently collaborating with the composer Charles Fussell on a new music-theater work titled *The Astronaut's Tale*.

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Semyon Bychkov


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- 7/2 - Burgettstown, PA
Star Lake Amph.
- 7/4 - East Troy, WI
Alpine Valley

ALBERT COLLINS & THE ICEBREAKERS

- 7/25 - Philadelphia, PA
River Blues
- 7/30 - Snowbird, UT
Jazz & Blues Fest
- 7/31 - Telluride, CO
Koto Concert Series

STEVE MILLER

- 7/1 - 2 - Wantagh, NY
Jones Beach
- 7/3 - Saratoga Springs, NY
Perf. Arts Center
- 7/6 - 7 - Holmdel, NJ
Garden State
- 7/9 - 10 - New York, NY
Paramount
- 7/14 - Atlanta, GA
Lakewood
- 7/15 - Nashville, TN
Starwood Amph.
- 7/16 - St. Louis, MO
Riverport Amph.
- 7/17 - Kansas City, MO
Sandstone Amph.
- 7/20 - 21 - Denver, CO
Red Rocks
- 7/23 - Oklahoma City, OK
Zoo Amph.
- 7/24 - Dallas, TX
Starplex Amph.
- 7/25 - Woodlands, TX
Woodlands
- 7/29 - Los Angeles, CA
Greek Theatre

MOODY BLUES

- 7/2 - Saratoga, NY
Performing Arts Ctr.
- 7/6 - 7 - Vienna, VA
Wolf Trap
- 7/10 - Burgettstown, PA
Starlake Amph.
- 7/12 - Holmdel, NJ
Garden State Arts Ctr.
- 7/16 - Stowe, VT
Performing Arts Ctr.
- 7/17 - Wantagh, NY
Jones Beach
- 7/18 - Mansfield, MA
Great Woods
- 7/21 - Toronto, ONT
Ontario Place
- 7/25 - St. Louis, MO
Riverport Amph.
- 7/26 - Cincinnati, OH
Riverbend Amph.

POISON

- 7/2 - Bakersfield, CA
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- 7/3 - Laguna Hills, CA
Irvine Meadows Amph.
- 7/4 - San Bernardino, CA
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- 7/12 - Portland, OR
Portland Coliseum
- 7/13 - Seattle, WA
Seattle Center Coliseum
- 7/15 - Mountain View, CA
Shoreline Amph.
- 7/16 - Sacramento, CA
Cal. Expo Amph.
- 7/18 - Park City, UT
Park West Amph.
- 7/20 - Englewood, CO
Fiddler's Green Amph.
- 7/22 - Wichita, KS
Kansas Coliseum

- 7/23 - Bonner Springs, KS
Sandstone Amph.
- 7/24 - St. Louis, MO
Riverport Amph.

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- 7/8 - Stanhope, NJ
Waterloo Village
- 7/9 - Wantagh, NY
Jones Beach
- 7/10 - Holmdel, NJ
Garden State Arts Ctr.
- 7/11 - Philadelphia, PA
Mann Music Center
- 7/13 - Mansfield, MA
Great Woods
- 7/14 - New Haven, CT
Coliseum
- 7/15 - Middletown, NY
Orange Cty. Fairgrounds
- 7/16 - Hershey, PA
Hershey Pk. Stadium
- 7/18 - Buffalo, NY
Darlen Lake Amph.
- 7/19 - Maple, ONT
Kingswood
- 7/20 - Cuyahoga Falls, OH
Blossom
- 7/21 - Clarkston, MI
Pine Knob
- 7/24 - Noblesville, IN
Deer Creek
- 7/25 - Tinley Park, IL
World Music Theater
- 7/26 - Minneapolis, MN
Northrup Audit.
- 7/27 - Omaha, NE
Civic Audit.
- 7/29 - Cincinnati, OH
Riverbend Amph.

- 7/30 - St. Louis, MO
Riverport Amph.
- 7/31 - Bonner Springs, KS
Sandstone Amph.

TINA TURNER

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Forum
- 7/5 - Ottawa, Canada
Civic Center
- 7/8 - Burgettstown, PA
Starlake Amph.
- 7/10 - Buffalo, NY
Darlen Lake Amph.
- 7/12 - 14 - New York, NY
Radio City Music Hall
- 7/16 - 17 - New York, NY
Radio City Music Hall

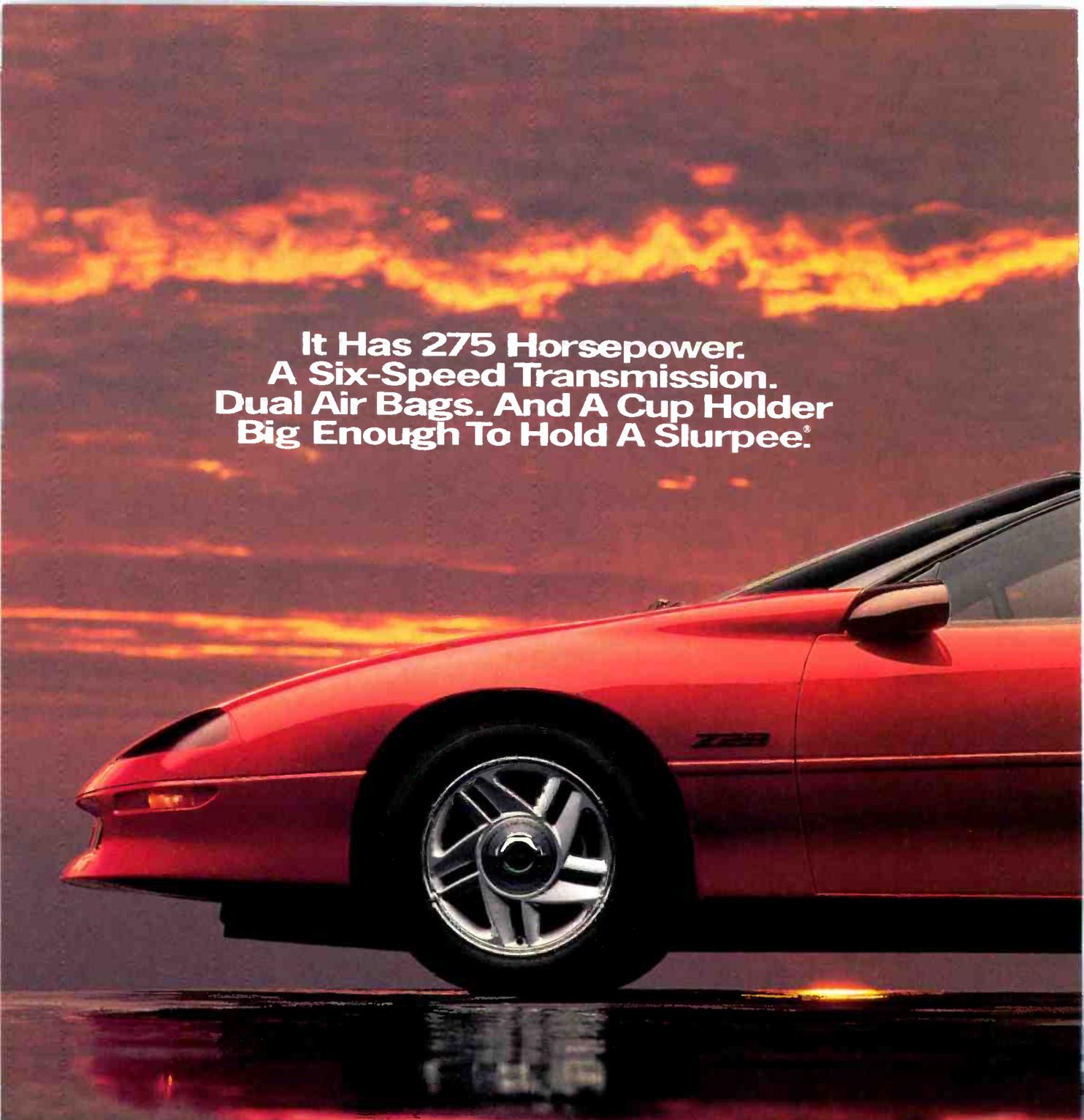
AUGUST

ALBERT COLLINS & THE ICEBREAKERS

- 8/1 - Winter Park, CO
Winter Park Jazz Fest
- 8/6 - Gresham, OR
Mt. Hood Jazz Fest
- 8/7 - Seattle, WA - Backstage

SPIN DOCTORS

- 8/1 - Oklahoma City, OK
Zoo Amph.
- 8/3 - New Orleans, LA
Municipal Audit.
- 8/7 - Dallas, TX
Starplex Amph.
- 8/17 - Vancouver, B.C.
Pacific Coliseum
- 8/21 - Berkeley, CA
Greek Theatre
- 8/26 - San Diego, CA
Open Air Theater
- 8/28 - Los Angeles, CA
Greek Theatre

A red Chevrolet Camaro Z28 is shown from a side profile, driving on a wet surface that reflects the car and the sky. The background is a dramatic sunset with orange and red clouds. The car's headlights are on, and the Z28 badge is visible on the side.

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CHEVY CAMARO

MUSIC MAKERS

A TOUGH CROWD, BUT A FAIR CROWD

AUDIENCES at Milan's Teatro alla Scala are often as vocal as the singers onstage. They're a loyal bunch too, and the memory of Maria Callas's legendary mid-1950's performances of Verdi's *La Traviata* had made it all but unthinkable to remount this popular opera. Well, it took decades before anyone tried a new production at La Scala, but music director **Riccardo Muti** scored a triumph in 1990 with a youthful all-Italian cast headed by the unknown **Tiziana Fabbricini** as Violetta. The soprano's



Fabbricini: Ghostbuster?

performance was greeted with mixed reviews at the Met last March, but she is scheduled to repeat the role at several major European opera houses. Has the ghost of Callas been put to rest? You can judge for yourself: Sony released a CD version in May, and laserdisc and videotape versions are due in September.



CMP RECORDS

THOSE FABULOUS SIXTIES

YOU may have noticed that bell-bottoms are back, so it is perhaps no surprise that yet another Sixties artifact—the legendary rock trio **Cream**—is reliably rumored to be reuniting for a fall album and tour, their first (of both) since 1968. The group—Eric “Mr. Grammy” Clapton, drummer **Ginger Baker** (currently with Cream-wannabes *Masters of Reality*), and peripatetic bassist **Jack Bruce**—apparently got along so well during their January induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame that they decided to crank the amps up to eleven and do it one more time. Hard to say whether this is a good idea, but a listen to Bruce's just-released “Something Else” album on CMP, on which he and Clapton collaborate for the first time since Cream's “Goodbye,” should provide some insight. As will, we suspect, Bruce's upcoming “New Blues” album, which will feature (you guessed it) Ginger Baker.



ROSE MARIE MATTREZZO ENTERTAINMENT

SOMEONE ALERT BILL COSBY

LATEST alternative rock types to sell out (sort of): **Green Jello**. Currently ubiquitous on MTV with their *Three Little Pigs* clip, the L.A. outfit—marketed as the world's first video-only band until they started to make it, whereupon they changed their sales strategy, released a CD, and went on tour—has cravenly changed its name to **Green Jelly**. Why? Because of a threatened lawsuit by General Foods Corp., makers of you know what. We ask you—is there nothing left to believe in?



THE LIZZIE BORDEN AWARD GOES TO . . .

AND speaking of Eric Clapton, we found it strange that nobody at the Grammy ceremonies seemed to notice that **Jim Gordon**—the guitar great's co-writer for *Layla*, this year's winner for Best Rock Song—is famous for a reason unrelated to music: To wit, he's a convicted axe-murderer. A member of Clapton's band *Derek and the Dominos* in the early Seventies, and later one of the most highly paid session drummers in the world, Gordon developed mental problems that by the early Eighties had him “hearing” voices urging him to hack his mother to bits—which he did. Now institutionalized in California, Gordon nonetheless “watched the [Grammy] show and is pleased to have won,” according to his business manager, **John Arthur Thomas** (who, incidentally, will keep the actual trophy, because “Jim asked me to hang onto it for him”). Asked if Gordon is the first matricidal Grammy winner, the president of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, **Michael Greene**, would say only, “That would be a safe assumption, at least for Rock Song of the Year.”



Jim Gordon:
Hi, Mom!

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TLC: Oooooohhh... On The TLC Tip (LaFace) 50167

Enya: Shepherd Moons (Reprise) 53190

Elvis Costello & The Brodsky Quartet: The Juliet Letters (Warner Bros.) 00885

Guns N' Roses: Use Your Illusion I (Geffen) 35469 †

Guns N' Roses: Use Your Illusion II (Geffen) 25534 †

The Best Of Joe Cocker (Capitol) 01338

James Brown: 20 All-Time Greatest Hits (Polydor) 01342

Frank Black (Elektra) 01370

P. M. Dawn: The Bliss Album...? (Gee Street/Island) 01353

Dwight Yoakam: This Time (Reprise) 01360

Black 47: Fire Of Freedom (SBK) 01418

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Best Of The Grateful Dead: Skeletons From The Closet (Warner Bros.) 83892

Roxy Music: Avalon (Warner Bros.) 01246

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Perlman: Brahms, Violin Concerto (EMI Classics) 01321

k.d. lang: Ingenue (Warner Bros./Sire) 44370

Red Hot Chili Peppers: What Hits! (EMI) 00144 †

Soundgarden: Badmotorfinger (A&M) 05637

George Duke: Snapshot (Warner Bros.) 00176

Pavarotti: Amore (London) 74149

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Yellowjackets: Like A River (GRP) 009E5



Depeche Mode: Songs Of Faith And Devotion (Reprise/Sire) 01362

The Kentucky Headhunters: Rave On! (Mercury) 01202

Lemonheads: It's A Shame About Ray (Atlantic) 01240

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Olivia Newton-John: Back To Basics-The Essential Collection 1971-1992 (Geffen) 25334

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Chub MTV: Party To Go, Vol. 1 (Tommy Boy) 00754

Best Of Dire Straits: Money For Nothing (Warner Bros.) 00713

The Best Of White Lion (Atlantic) 93654

R.E.M.: Eponymous (I.R.S./MCA) 00701

Ugly Kid Joe: America's Least Wanted (Mercury) 01204

George Strait: Pure Country (MCA) 83064

Vanessa Williams: The Comfort Zone (Wing/Mercury) 25066

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Van Morrison: Moondance (Warner Bros.) 64585

Pcison: Native Tongue (Capitol) 01194

The Cars: Greatest Hits (Elektra) 53702

Guys & Dolls: New Broadway Cast (RCA Victor) 61964

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Fleetwood Mac: Greatest Hits (Warner Bros.) 00796

Amy Grant: Heart In Motion (A&M) 25182

The Very Best Of Righteous Brothers: Unchained Melody (Verve) 44658

David Benoit: Letter To Evan (GRP) 00251

Vince Gill: I Still Believe In You (MCA) 21063

Carreras, Domingo, Pavarotti: 3 Tenors (London) 35078

The Best Of Blondie (Chrysalis) 01245

Snow: 12 Inches Of Snow (EastWest) 01266

Dinosaur Jr.: Where You Been (Sire/Warner Bros.) 01325

Peter Gabriel: Shaking The Tree-16 Golden Greats (Geffen) 11089

Bobby Brown: Bobby (MCA) 11121

U2: Achtung Baby (Island) 25174

Lee Ritenour: Wes Bound (GRP) 01327

R.E.M.: Automatic For The People (Warner Bros.) 00121

The Baltimore Consort: The Art Of The Bawdy Song (Donan) 00657

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Patty Smyth (MCA) 25090

Steve Winwood: Chronicles (Island) 34501

Elvis Presley: The Number One Hits (RCA) 72190

Van Halen: For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge (Warner Bros.) 10016

Megadeth: Countdown To Extinction (Capitol) 63340

Chieftains: The Celtic Harp (RCA) 00323

SWV: It's About Time (RCA) 00151

Nine Inch Nails: Broken (Interscope) 00145 †



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Wreck-N-Effect: Hard Or Smooth (MCA) 00627 †

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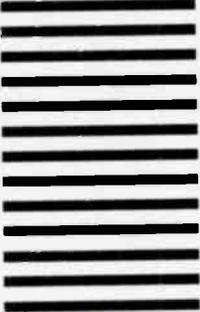
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Clint Black: The Hard Way (RCA) 35458

Fleetwood Mac: Rumours (Warner Bros.) 24025

Tears For Fears: Tears Roll Down (The Hits 1982-1992) (Fontana) 80162



Reba McEntire: It's Your Call (MCA) 00422

Patsy Cline: 12 Greatest Hits (MCA) 53849

Linda Ronstadt: Greatest Hits, Vol. 1 (Elektra) 63905

Heart: Rock The House "Live" 1 (Capitol) 05603

Bon Jovi: Keep The Faith (Jambou/Mercury) 00868

Jennifer Warnes: The Hunter (Private Music) 00355



Aladdin/Sdtk. (Disney) 00411

Best Of Robert Palmer: Addictions (Island) 10819

Sling: The Soul Cages (A&M) 25218

Pretenders: The Singles (Sire) 33248

Natalie Cole: Unforgettable (Elektra) 83452

Vanessa Rubin: Pastiche (Novus) 01267

Jethro Tull: Original Masters (Chrysalis) 63846

Eagles: Hotel California (Asylum) 30030

John Mellencamp: Whenever We Wanted (Mercury) 74582

Kennedy: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons (EMI Classics) 43419

Michael Crawford: Songs From Stage And Screen (Atlantic) 53704

Peter Cetera: World Falling Down (Warner Bros.) 63423

Alr Supply: Greatest Hits (Arista) 34424

The Judds: Greatest Hits, Vol. 2 (RCA) 74054

Billy Idol: Vital Idol (Chrysalis) 54038

The Rascals' Greatest Hits: Time Peace (Atlantic) 00357

Garth Brooks: Ropin' The Wind (Liberty) 25535

Wilson Phillips: Shadows & Light (SBK) 40763

Nelson Rangel: Truest Heart (GRP) 01166

Alan Jackson: A Lot About Livin' (And A Little 'Bout Love) (Arista) 74074

Yes: Classic Yes (Atlantic) 50248

Joe Henderson: Lush Life (Verve) 05611

Phish: Rift (Elektra) 01238

Blues Brothers: The Definitive Collection (Atlantic) 43711

En Vogue: Funky Divas (East West) 61717

Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814 (A&M) 72586

Jade: Jade To The Max (Giant) 01191

Roger Whittaker: All About Love (Liberty) 14696

Genesis: We Can't Dance (Atlantic) 00423

Cecilia Bartoli: If You Love Me (London) 00862



Brooks & Dunn: Hard Workin' Man (Arista) 00857

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Michael W. Smith: Change Your World (Geffen/Reunion) 20936

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Stephanie Mills: Something Real (MCA) 00626

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Frank Sinatra | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> COUNTRY
Reba McEntire
Brooks & Dunn | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> HARD ROCK
Aerosmith
Bon Jovi | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> POP/SOFT ROCK
Madonna
Sting |
| 5 <input type="checkbox"/> CLASSICAL (1)
Luciano Pavarotti
Itzhak Perlman | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> JAZZ
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Yellowjackets | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> HEAVY METAL
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The 9th Rodrigues Cartoon Caption Contest

LET'S hear a round of applause for Brian Hoffman of New York City! Mr. Hoffman is the winner of the Ninth Rodrigues Cartoon Caption Contest, and his winning entry is printed under the drawing.

As we did in previous years, in our issue of January 1993 we published a drawing by our regular cartoonist, Charles Rodrigues, and invited readers to submit captions for it. The prize for the one the judges considered to be the funniest is \$100 and the original drawing.

The editors of STEREO REVIEW congratulate Mr. Hoffman and thank the thousands of other readers who also submitted captions. We received entries from across the United States and Canada and

from such faraway places as Brazil, Germany, Poland, the Philippine Islands, and Trinidad and Tobago.

We also thank the previous winners, who served as judges: Thomas Briggie (Wadsworth, Ohio), Michael Binyon (Weaverville, California), Bruce Barstow (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Matthew Mirapaul (Evanston, Illinois), Marc Welenteychik (Richmond, Virginia), Douglas Daughhettee (Birmingham, Alabama), Kelly Mills (Raleigh, North Carolina), and Diane Sullivan (New Brunswick, Canada).

There were a few entries similar to the winner or runners up, but in every case we chose the one we received first. There were a great many entries about declawed cats, air-suspension systems, and pumping up the volume, but none of them quite made it. Many readers' minds were on safe-sex audio, anatomical correctness, and inflatable dolls. There was even a disgusting entry about an inflatable sheep!

As usual the most frequently mentioned composition was Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. Madonna was the most frequently named performer, and famous people mentioned for the first time in Rodrigues contests included Salvador Dali, Christian Slater, Al Gore, Jesse Helms, and Rush Limbaugh. Companies mentioned in the entries included Amoco, Bose, Goodyear, JBL, Klipsch, Polk, Reebok, and Victoria's Secret.

Mr. Hoffman, a second-year student at Mt. Sinai



"And wall-mounting is easy. You don't need brackets; just rub 'em on your head."

School of Medicine in New York, describes himself as an audiophile and says his collection of classical CD's is expanding more rapidly than the "distinguished" pop group. He has a couple of keyboards at which he composes and makes arrangements, and he conducts an *a cappella* group he founded at the medical school.

If you like one of the runners up below better than Mr. Hoffman's winning caption, we hope you will exercise restraint and not tell us about it. We expect to announce next year's contest in the issue of January 1994.

—William Livingstone

RUNNERS UP

"That slight hiss? That's what tone controls are for."

—Alvin Stein, Freehold, NJ

"You think that's strange, you should see what's happening down at the tire store."

—George Emmons, Media, PA

"We sell them mostly to virile males in their late twenties who have subwoofer-satellite systems but still need that 'macho big-speaker' look."

—Jim Bennett, Medina, OH

"Who said vinyl is dead?"

—Dwight Smith, Tempe, AZ

"For the best sound you have to take out all the old analog air and put in fresh new digital air."

—Steven Mark Popko, San Diego, CA

"Well, I could give you a pretty good deal on a display model."

—Jeremy Mattson, Modesto, CA

"You like their tires. You like their blimps. You're gonna love their speakers."

—Richard Kenyada, Lithonia, GA

therefore seem to be located between the two rather than at the extreme left.

Dolby Pro Logic and some ambience-enhancement systems not only route the center material to the appropriate speaker but effectively remove it from the main stereo channels, thus maintaining separation. To get that effect, you'll need either an outboard processor or a new receiver.

Amplifier Polarity

Q My amplifier inverts polarity, although I understand that many others don't. What is the advantage, if any, to inverting the polarity of an audio signal?

GARFIELD FRANCIS
Rego Park, NY

A An audio signal is a form of alternating current (AC), but unlike the stuff the electric company delivers to your wall plugs, it's asymmetrical: The positive and negative portions of the waveform have different shapes. It may seem important, therefore, to maintain the proper polarity of the signal (also called its "absolute phase") throughout the chain, from the originating microphone to your speakers, so that an air compression in the recording studio would be a compression in your listening room, and a rarefaction a rarefaction. There are those who hold this principle as an article of faith, but in fact it doesn't seem to matter a whole lot. For one thing, even if you were sure that your own system had phase integrity throughout—that none of your components inverted polarity—you still wouldn't know what had happened between the performance in the studio and the mastering of the recording.

Even in the few instances where a difference can be heard when polarity is switched back and forth, the difference is extremely subtle, and it's virtually impossible to determine which is "better." If it disturbs you that your amplifier inverts phase, simply reverse the wiring to both your speakers to restore the previous polarity. (Switching only one would affect relative polarity and destroy your imaging—but that's another story.)

Upgrading for CD

Q When I bought my compact disc player, several audio salesmen told me I would have to upgrade the rest of my system because great advances had been made in amplifier design and manufacture since I bought my present setup. Since I have never had a problem with my components, do I need to replace them? Or are these salesmen simply trying to sell more equipment?

TIMOTHY E. JOHNSON
Bristow, OK

A Times are tough, so maybe you shouldn't blame the audio salesmen for trying to make a bit more commission. There have been subtle design changes over the years, of course, but unless something is very wrong with your equipment there is no good reason to replace it just because you have added a CD player. Certainly digital audio does demand more from both amplifiers and speakers than the sort of compressed analog signals we were

used to a decade ago, and that often means higher power to handle the increased dynamic range. But if you had enough watts to play really good analog recordings, and your speakers could handle them, the same equipment should do nicely for CD's. In any event, don't do anything until you have listened carefully to CD's with the equipment you have; if it sounds fine, don't feel that you have to replace it.

Pro Audio Gear

Q I have seen ads for professional audio equipment whose specs seem to be about the same as for home gear. Are there any advantages or disadvantages to using professional equipment in a domestic system?

RANDALL L. COLLINS
Omaha, NE

A The "professional" tag has been used since the beginning of home audio to give certain equipment the aura of better than average quality, on the theory that it must be great if the pros use it. Back then, almost nothing that was called professional (or such words as "monitor" or "studio") really had anything to do with professional audio. If a particular model did have professional roots, it probably also embodied a number of compromises in the interests of durability or special functions that would never be needed in the home. These compromises would have been made at the expense of performance or, more often, at considerable extra cost. Either way, "professional" gear was almost never appropriate for the average audiophile.

The gap has narrowed somewhat today, and consumers are probably less gullible about equipment that's "pro" in name only. But it's still true that people who create recordings often have requirements different from yours, and the extras still cost money. Buy them if you want, but don't expect much in the way of improved performance.

Microwave Damage

Q I have a floor-standing storage unit in my breakfast room that houses my CD collection. It is located 2 or 3 feet from a microwave oven. Could any damage occur to the discs because of this proximity?

HAROLD C. MARSHALL
New Bern, NC

A If your microwave is leaking enough radiation to zap your CD's, it is also capable of cooking certain vital parts of your body, so I wouldn't sweat the discs. I'd be more concerned that airborne cooking grease might be deposited on the playing surfaces, which could befoul your player and eventually disrupt the laser's ability to focus on the data. If you keep the discs in their jewel boxes and the storage unit has a door, however, you should not have a problem.

If you have a question about hi-fi, send it to Q&A, Stereo Review, 1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. Sorry, only questions chosen for publication can be answered.

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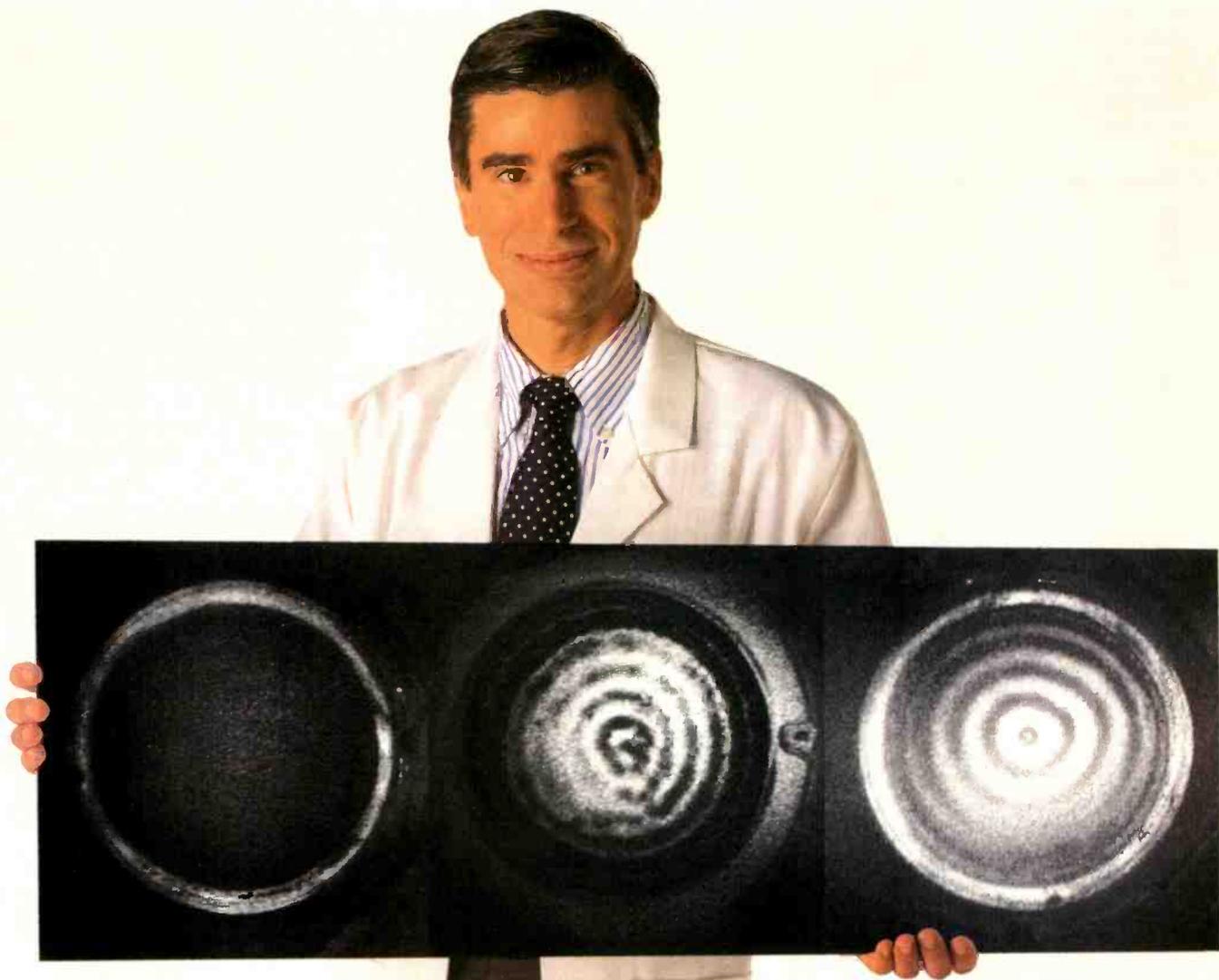
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Matthew S. Polk

Hologram "snaps" of tweeter showing no modal resonance, moderate amounts, and excessive amounts, each reflecting the use of different materials. The far left is Polk's Trilaminare tweeter.

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Before we could design and build speakers as sophisticated as the new LS Series, we had to design and build a whole new way to "look" at speakers.

At Johns Hopkins' Center for Non-Destructive Evaluation, a joint Polk/Hopkins team created a new Full-Field, Quasi-heterodyne, Laser Interferometry test. Much more useful than pronounceable, it allowed us for the first time to take a full-field hologram "snap shot" of microscopic forms of distortion generated by speaker materials themselves.

In the LS Series, the manifestation of Dynamic BalanceTM is brilliantly executed with the addition of aramid fibers to the cone, insuring that music, not unwanted resonance, literally jumps off the cone.

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Styling in the LS Series is not only breathtaking, it is highly functional. The slim, tapered cabinet design belies its technological contribution. The angled sides break up standing waves inside the cabinet, so detrimental to midrange performance. At the same time, this design feature also enhances the stereo presentation dramatically.

All LS Series speakers are available in a striking, gloss rosewood laminate. The LS50 and L70 are also offered in oak laminate with the LS90 available in natural Oak.

And each one of them is Dynamically Balanced.

Our pictures prove it. And so will your ears at your Polk Dealer.

THE NEW LS SERIES FROM THE SPEAKER SPECIALISTS OF **polk audio**





SIGNALS

BY KEN C. POHLMANN

Reality Check

OKAY. Your job, which was looking kind of shaky for a while, is now solid. Your credit-card vendor has just lowered its rates from unbelievably excruciating to moderately excruciating. Yes, this looks like a good time to upgrade your stereo system. But before you charge forward and start charging, let's take a moment for a reality check. Bang for the buck, what really makes an audio system sound better?

Because of the need to invest in your infrastructure (that is, food and rent), you never really got around to buying a CD player. How about joining the digital era? *Reality Check:* Yes. Absolutely. Run, don't walk, to your audio dealer, pick out a player that sells for \$300 or so, and buy it. While you're at it, buy \$200 worth of discs. From this evening on, your life will be different, and better. You can thank me, care of STEREO REVIEW.

Suppose you already have a CD player. How about a new CD player? *Reality Check:* Unless your CD player is really old or is malfunctioning, there is little point in buying a new player. Sound-quality improvement, if any, will be slight. One exception: If you're looking for convenience, a CD changer is certainly cooler than a single-disc model. Another exception: If your preamplifier has digital inputs and your CD player doesn't have a digital output, a new player, with digital output, might be a sound investment, particularly if you're eyeing those two new digital recording formats.

Hey! That's right! How about the MiniDisc and Digital Compact Cassette? *Reality Check:* Yes, they are certainly cool, but would they improve your system's sound quality? They are designed to replace the analog cassette; if you're still messing with cassettes, you should consider MD and DCC. MD is very convenient and very portable. But MD's first-generation sound quality is slightly inferior to that of CD, while its price is much higher. DCC's sound quality equals or surpasses that of CD, but

prerecorded DCC tapes are currently made from 16-bit masters, which limits the finished tapes to CD quality. Unless you're yearning to make your own recordings, upgrade to CD first.

That old receiver of yours has never quite been the same since your nephew spilled Tab inside it. *Reality Check:* This has real potential. Receivers have, in general, improved significantly in recent years (thanks largely to the introduction of CD). A new receiver could give you more power and possibly some creature comforts you might not enjoy now, such as remote control. But make sure it's got full audio/video capabilities, such as inputs galore, a surround-sound processor, and the ability to drive multiple speakers. That way you've got the basis for your future home theater system. Alternatively, you might consider separate components. They cost more but offer greater flexibility, easier upgrading, and, usually, better performance. Either way, get digital inputs and outputs so you'll be able to use the growing number of digital source components.

Perhaps you are tempted to follow the advice of that audiophile friend of yours—the one who raves about how exotic, high-price cables improve sound quality. *Reality Check:* Some people hear this improvement, and some don't. There are people who seem to hear a lot of things others don't. True, some people have better

ment in a system has as profound an effect on sound quality as the loudspeakers. That's because they alter the signals fed to them more than any other component. Because speakers have different frequency responses, radiation patterns, and distortion characteristics, they all sound different. But how much should you spend? The lion's share of the cost often goes to the furniture part of speakers. That's one reason some relatively low-price speakers sound better than more expensive ones. Where are they? Get a full tank of gas and travel from store to store, and back again, listening carefully. You'll find them.

Suppose your speakers are pretty good. Should you skip this category? *Reality Check:* Unless your upstream system has a weak link, I'm always in favor of speaker upgrades. It's easy to find speakers that sound better, or at least different. That's right. I'm advocating simply changing speakers. A person can get tired of the sound of a particular set of speakers. When that happens, it's fun to buy something else. The sound will be different, and you'll hear things you didn't hear before. It's like having new ears installed, only you won't have to readjust your sunglasses. Speaking of ears, you might consider a pair of headphones. They can provide incredible fidelity at relatively low cost.

If your current speakers are pretty

Take a moment for a reality check: Bang for the buck, what really makes an audio system sound better?

hearing than others, but do you want to spend money on something that might not make an audible improvement and that is debatable from a scientific standpoint anyway? Sure, if you have an ultra-high-end system and want expensive cables, go ahead. But for the average guy, I don't think so.

Speakers. Your current pair has a dry, hacking cough whenever there's a drum sound. *Reality Check:* Get your credit card ready. No other compo-

good and you *aren't* tired of them, is there a way to improve their sound quality? *Reality Check:* There sure is. It's called a subwoofer. Many primary speakers provide good fidelity over most of the audio range but lack deep bass response. A good subwoofer (and the amplifier that drives it) will give you that bottom octave you've been missing. Go ahead, crank it up! But if your landlord gives you the heave-ho, don't come crying to me. □

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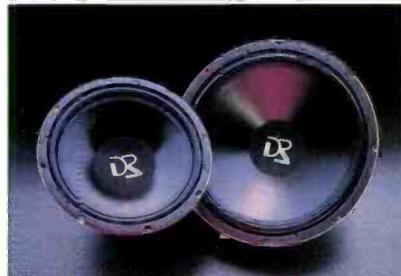
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TECH TALK

BY JULIAN HIRSCH

The Overlooked Component

ONE of the principal components of most hi-fi systems is usually taken for granted. It can be small enough to hide behind a tuner or receiver or too large to fit comfortably into a house. Although it can have a significant effect on a system's sound quality (frequently greater than that of any other component), it is often installed haphazardly, with no regard for the critical importance of its placement and orientation.

No, I am *not* referring to the loudspeaker, but rather to its counterpart at the other end of the playback system. Although they may appear to be completely dissimilar, *antennas* and *loudspeakers* share several major similarities and limitations.

Consider their installation requirements. Both are significantly affected by their surroundings, because reflections from nearby boundaries or objects can alter their directional characteristics. Both must be oriented critically for optimum results, the loudspeaker to beam its directional acoustic output *toward* the listener, the antenna for the opposite reason, to intercept very low-power radio-frequency (RF) signals *from* specific directions and conduct their minute signal voltages to the input of a tuner.

In their basic forms (a simple dipole and an un baffled driver), both antennas and speakers are very broadly directional, but they are usually designed to have specific directive properties. In the case of an antenna, narrowing its angle of response (beam width) effectively increases its gain, and there are analogous effects in a speaker system. Since amplifier power is inexpensive, there is little need for extremely high speaker sensitivity, but an antenna has to intercept signals on the order of millionths of a volt, and all tuners can benefit considerably from higher input levels, which make possible lower noise and distortion.

The analogy can be carried even

further, although it becomes a bit strained (and even disappears) after a while. For example, the gain of an antenna increases with its size (and number of elements), but at the expense of bandwidth (frequency coverage). A speaker must operate with relative uniformity over perhaps ten octaves of frequency, in contrast to the fraction of one octave required of an FM antenna. A large radiating surface is needed for useful output at low audio frequencies, however. A multi-way speaker (or its equivalent in the form of an electrostatic or similar planar radiator) is the universal answer to this problem.

There is no comparable bandwidth requirement for an FM antenna, which need only perform with reasonable uniformity over a half-octave frequency range. Since an AM tuner is a functionally separate component, it has its own antenna.

known compass direction to the station from your home, but that is not always practical (you have to know the heading to the transmitting antenna, not the studios). The best answer is a rotor, and in most cases the same rotor can serve for FM radio and television reception, although they may require different settings.

If this sounds cumbersome, think of the dedicated audiophile who has to redesign rooms and move all the furniture around to optimize the performance of a pair of costly, bulky, and heavy speakers. In contrast, even a very good antenna costs less than \$150, and a suitable support and rotor need not add more than a few hundred dollars to the cost.

I am sometimes asked to recommend FM antennas for use in demanding locations. Unfortunately, I cannot do that, since testing antennas is quite different (although analogous in some

Although they may appear to be completely dissimilar, antennas and loudspeakers share several major similarities and limitations.

Why this concern over antennas? Because FM radio is supposed to be a high-fidelity medium and can satisfy that requirement only if the signals are received with enough strength to overcome background noise and without the interfering effects of multiple signals arriving from different directions at different times ("multipath" distortion). Anyone who has tried to listen to FM signals while driving in an urban area is well aware of such effects.

The most common solution is to use a directional antenna aimed to receive only one of the many signals arriving from the desired station (usually, but not necessarily, the primary direct, unreflected signal). In many locations each station may require a different antenna orientation, although it is often possible that a single heading will suffice.

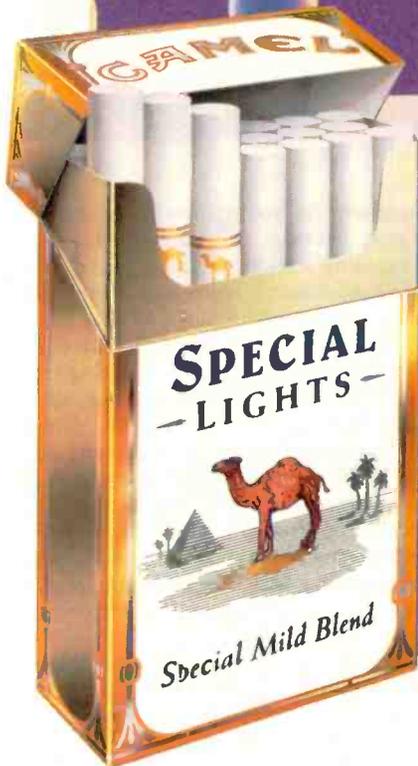
The correct heading for the antenna can sometimes be derived from the

ways) from testing speakers. If the situation appears unsolvable, keep in mind that, all else being equal, the larger the antenna and the higher it is placed, the better the results.

Finally, a comment on indoor antennas. Most tuners and receivers are furnished with wire dipoles that can be tacked to a wall or behind a piece of furniture. In many cases, these will suffice for reception in a strong-signal area, although adjusting their orientation can be awkward (reception is usually best along a line at right angles to the wire). There are a number of small indoor antennas (sometimes tunable and amplified) that can be rotated or tuned in frequency to give acceptable results in populated areas. In our suburban New York location, we have had good results with models from Terk and Recoton, but unfortunately there is no way to guarantee their performance in all installations. □

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TEST REPORTS



Nakamichi AV-1 Audio/Video Receiver

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

THE AV-1 is Nakamichi's most powerful audio/video receiver. It contains an AM/FM digital frequency-synthesis tuner, a preamplifier, digital signal processing (DSP) circuits for simulating several acoustic environments, and five power amplifiers. The AV-1 has complete signal-switching facilities for selecting and controlling tuner, CD, and phono sources, two audio tape decks, two VCR's, and a videodisc player, including inputs and outputs for both composite-video and S-video signals.

The front (main) power amplifiers are rated at 100 watts per channel into 8 ohms from 20 Hz to 20 kHz, both channels driven, with less than 0.1 percent total harmonic distortion (THD). A switch on the rear of the receiver enables safe full-power operation into 4-ohm loads. The surround-

channel amplifiers are rated at 30 watts apiece, and the center-channel amplifier is rated at 50 watts, all at 1 kHz into 8 ohms with no more than 0.1 percent THD.

The AV-1's large front-panel volume knob is driven by a motor when operated from the supplied remote control. The receiver's only other control knob is a small input-balance ad-

justment for setting up the Dolby Pro Logic decoder. All other operations, including station selection, audio level, tone-control adjustment, and the like, are done with pushbuttons.

The AV-1's front-panel display window shows its complete operating status. The tuned frequency, preset channel number, and station call letters (when programmed by the user) appear in large orange characters against a black background. Smaller red or orange characters show the signal-processing mode, tuner status and relative signal strength, and tape (audio and video) source and dubbing path where applicable.

Below the window, a row of large pushbuttons selects the program source and dubbing configuration. The Source Direct button bypasses all surround and response-modifying circuits, routing the selected program through the volume control and directly to the front-channel power-amplifier sections.

Below the source selectors, a group of smaller buttons controls the receiv-

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er's four spatial-modification circuits. These include Dolby Pro Logic for compatibly encoded video or audio programs and three synthesized environments identified as Natural, Hall, and Stadium. The Hall environment simulates the effect of a typical concert hall by adding reverberation to the delayed signals supplied to the surround speakers. Stadium provides longer delays and more reverberation, whereas Natural (for use with programs containing considerable reverberation) adds mainly an array of discrete signal delays rather than reverberation.

Other buttons control the Surround Memory function, which enables the user to program and store as many as

four different sets of spatial parameters for later recall. This is done with the previously mentioned spatial-modifier buttons, which are also numbered 1 through 4. In addition to its normal function, each button can be used to store one set of user-selected parameters, retrievable by pressing the Memory Call button. The adjustable parameters include the level of each channel, delay time (from 10 to as much as 150 or 250 milliseconds, except for the Pro Logic mode, which is limited by Dolby specification to a range of 15 to 30 milliseconds), and tone-control settings.

The tone-control, level, and delay adjustments are performed with a single pair of up/down buttons and a

group of small selector buttons, marked Center Level, Rear Level, Delay, Balance, Treble, Bass, and Super Bass. The up/down buttons adjust the value of a selected function in ten steps for each of the tone controls and nine steps for the full range of the balance adjustment. The delay can be adjusted in 10-millisecond intervals. The treble and bass tone-control ranges are typical of modern receivers, but the Super Bass feature is unusual and convenient, cutting in about an octave lower than the main bass control. A small loudness-compensation button is located near the volume knob.

Other front-panel features include the tuning buttons, small adjacent buttons that select AM or FM and automatic stereo switching with interstation muting or mono FM reception without muting for weak signal reception. A grid of small buttons is used for storing as many as thirty AM or FM channel presets or for direct numerical tuning to any frequency. These buttons can also be used to add your own five-digit alphanumeric identifier to each preset memory, which will be displayed when that preset is selected. At the lower left of the panel are a stereo headphone jack, separate speaker-switching buttons for two pairs of front speakers and the surround and center speakers, and the input-balance knob for the Dolby Pro Logic decoder.

The AV-1's rear apron contains input and output jacks for all potential source components and recorders, plus composite- and S-video monitor outputs. There is also a separate preamplifier output and power-amplifier input (joined by a removable link) for each channel, along with a monophonic preamplifier output that could be used to drive a powered subwoofer.

Insulated binding posts are provided for the two sets of main front-channel speaker outputs, and spring-clip connectors (for stripped wire ends) are used for the center and surround speakers. Although the main-channel binding posts superficially resemble the five-way connectors used on many amplifiers, they accept only wire ends and cannot be used with banana plugs or most types of lugs.

Antenna terminals are provided for the included AM loop antenna, along

MEASUREMENTS

TUNER SECTION

All figures are for FM only except frequency response.

Usable sensitivity (mono) 14.2 dBf

50-dB quieting sensitivity

mono 17 dBf

stereo 45 dBf

Signal-to-noise ratio (at 65 dBf)

mono 82 dB

stereo 69 dB

Distortion (THD + N at 65 dBf)

mono 0.175%

stereo 0.36%

Capture ratio (at 65 dBf) 1.5 dB

AM rejection 68 dB

Selectivity

alternate-channel 73 dB

adjacent-channel 13 dB

Pilot-carrier leakage

(19 and 38 kHz) -70 dB

Hum < -85 dB

Channel separation

100 Hz 41 dB

1 kHz 53 dB

10 kHz 38 dB

Frequency response

FM 30 Hz to 15 kHz +0.1, -0.6 dB

AM 48 Hz to 3 kHz +0.9, -6 dB

AMPLIFIER SECTION

All figures are for main front channels only except as noted.

Output at clipping (1 kHz)

8 ohms 132 watts

4 ohms 132 watts

4 ohms (8-ohm setting) 180 watts

Clipping headroom

(relative to rated output) 1.2 dB

Dynamic power

8 ohms 162 watts

4 ohms 180 watts

Dynamic headroom

(relative to rated output) 2.1 dB

Maximum distortion (THD + N at rated

power, 20 Hz to 20 kHz into 8 ohms)

main front channels (100 watts) 0.019%

center channel (50 watts) 0.05%

surround channels (30 watts) 0.025%

Sensitivity (for a 1-watt output into 8 ohms)

CD 11 mV

phono 0.18 mV

A-weighted noise

(referred to a 1-watt output)

CD -74.8 dB

phono -70 dB

Phono-input overload

(1-kHz equivalent levels)

20 Hz 104 mV

1 kHz 114 mV

20 kHz 127 mV

Phono-input impedance

..... 50,000 ohms in parallel with 160 pF

Tone-control range

30 Hz (Super Bass) +7.2, -8.5 dB

100 Hz +6.1, -7.5 dB

10,000 Hz +6.5, -6.8 dB

RIAA phono-equalization error

(20 Hz to 20 kHz) +0, -0.4 dB

Frequency response (with tone controls centered) 20 Hz to 20 kHz +0, -0.2 dB

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TEST REPORTS



We used the Nakamichi AV-1 receiver in a full five-channel Dolby Pro Logic configuration, which was very easy to set up and balance from the listening position thanks to the excellent remote control.

with a 75-ohm coaxial jack for an FM antenna. There are two switched AC outlets and a slide switch that selects for high- or low-impedance speakers.

The AV-1's FM tuner section was very good in many respects, but less so in others. For example, its capture ratio, AM rejection, and selectivity were well above average. On the other hand, image rejection was marginal, and though the mono FM performance was quite good, full quieting in stereo required an unusually high signal level of 70 or 80 dBf. FM distortion was also higher than we usually find in top

receivers and tuners. Stereo channel separation, very good in the important midrange, remained a good 35 dB or better over the rest of the audio range. The AM frequency response, like that of most receivers, was mediocre.

The amplifier section's audio frequency response was excellent. At the preamplifier outputs, the front-channel response was flat within +0, -0.3 dB from 10 to 25,000 Hz and down 3 dB at 90,000 Hz. Although the basic tone-control curves were conventional, the Super Bass feature added a worthwhile measure of extra control in the lower bass (from 100 Hz to 20 Hz or below). In particular, the +4-dB setting might partially compensate for the low-bass rolloff of many small speakers. The loudness-compensation contours were typical, with a moderate low-frequency boost and a smaller high-frequency boost at most usable volume-control settings.

The main power amplifier was conservatively rated, with output into 8 ohms at 0.1 percent distortion of about 130 watts per channel from 50 Hz to 20 kHz and 115 watts at 20 Hz. Performance was essentially identical when we used 4-ohm loads with the switch on the rear apron set for 4-ohm operation. We also tested the amplifier into 4-ohm loads with the switch at its 8-ohm position (because the impedance of most "8-ohm" speakers drops to much lower values at some frequencies) and measured an impressive 180 watts per channel from 100 Hz to 3 kHz, decreasing only slightly to 173 watts at 20 kHz and 160 watts in the 20- to 30-Hz range.

The surround-channel amplifiers were rated with similar conservatism. Into 8 ohms, they delivered about 37 watts at 0.1 percent distortion into 8 ohms from 70 Hz to 20 kHz, with output decreasing to the rated 30 watts at 20 Hz. The center-channel power output was about 64 watts from 90 Hz to 20 kHz and 52 watts at 20 Hz. The AV-1 also has an unusually good phono section for an A/V receiver, as evidenced by its healthy overload margin and the flatness of its measured frequency response, down only 0.05 dB at 40 Hz and 10 kHz, 0.2 dB at 25 Hz and 20 kHz, and 0.4 dB at 20 Hz.

The AV-1's remote control not only duplicates almost all the receiver's front-panel controls but has sections

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CT-Al Franklin's: Hartford • Carston's A/V: Danbury • Robert's Music: New London • Sound Playground: Newington, Orange, Norwich.
DC-Suburbe Audio Associates.
DE-Sound Studio: Dover, Newark, Wilmington.
FL-Absolute Sound: Winter Park • Audio Ctr.: Ft. Lauderdale • Audio Video: Tallahassee • Hoyt Stereo: Jacksonville • Sound Ideas: Gainesville • Sound Insight: Ft. Pierce • Stereotypes: Daytona • Stereo World: Ft. Myers, Naples • Stuart A/V: Stuart.
GA-Audio Warehouse: Savannah • Stereo Shop: Martinez • Stereo Video Systems: Marietta (Atlanta).
HI-Maul Audio Center: Kahuili.
IA-Audio Logic: Des Moines • Custom A/V: Cedar Rapids • Hawkeye A/V: Iowa City & Cedar Falls.
ID-Good Ear: Boise.
IL-August Systems: Champaign • Cars & Stereos: Rockford • Jon's Home Center: Quincy • Mills Recording: Chicago • Simply Stereo: Hoffman Estates, Orland Pk., Villa Pk. • Stereo Studio: Palatine • Select Sound: Naperville • Sterling Elect.: Sterling.
IN-Ovation Audio: Clarksville, Indianapolis.
KS-Accent Sound: Overland Park • Advance Audio: Wichita • Audio Junction: Junction City.
KY-Ovation Audio: Lexington, Louisville.
LA-Altman Audio: New Orleans, Metairie.
MA-O'Coins: Worcester (Boston: see Nashua, NH).
MD-Audio Assoc.: Annapolis, Laurel, Rockville • Cumberland Elec.: Cumberland • Gramophone: Balt., Ellicott City • Soundscape: Balt. • Sound Studio: Salisbury.
ME-Cookin': Portland.
MI-Future Sound: Ypsilanti • Listening Room: Midland, Saginaw • Pecar's: Detroit, Troy.
MN-Audio Perfection: Minneapolis.
MO-Independence Audio Video: Independence • Sound Central: St. Louis.
NC-Audio Video Systems: Charlotte • Stereo Sound: Durham, Greensboro, Raleigh, Winston Salem • Tri City Electronics: Conover.
ND-Pacific Sound: Bismarck.
NE-Custom Electronics: Omaha, Lincoln.
NH-Cookin': Nashua, Manchester, Newington, Salem, S. Nashua.
NJ-Sound Waves: Northfield • Sassafraz: Cherry Hill • Woodbridge Stereo: W. Caldwell, W. Longbranch, Woodbridge.
NM-West Coast Sound: Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Sta. Fe. • Upper Ear: Las Vegas.
NY-Audio Breakthroughs: Manhasset • Audio Den: Lake Grove • Audio Expressions: Newburgh • Clark Music: Albany, Syracuse • Electronic Workshop: Manhattan • Hart Electronics: Vestal • Innovative Audio: Brooklyn • Listening Room: Scarsdale • Rowe Camera: Rochester • Sound Mill: Mt. Kisco, Yorktown Hts. • Speaker Shop: Amherst, Buffalo.
OK-K Labs Premium Audio: Tulsa.
OH-Audio Craft: Akron, Cleveland, Findlay, Mayfield Hts., Westlake, Toledo • Audio Etc.: Fairborn (Dayton).
OR-Bradford's HiFi: Eugene • Chelsea Audio Video: Portland, Beaverton • Kelly's Home Ctr.: Salem.
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TN-Hi Fi Buys: Nashville • Lindsey Ward: Knoxville • Modern Music: Memphis • Sound Room: Johnson City.
TX-Audio Tech: Temple, Waco • Audio Video: College Station • Brock A/V: Beaumont • Bunkley's Sd. Systems: Abilene • Bjorn's: San Antonio • Don's Hi Fi: Amarillo • High Fidelity: Lubbock • Home Entertainment: Dallas, Houston.
UT-AudioWorks: Salt Lake City • Stokes Bros.: Logan.
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Puerto Rico-Precision Audio: Rio Piedras.
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dedicated to compatible Nakamichi tape decks and CD players as well. It is also a "learning" controller, programmable to operate similar system components from other manufacturers. Although the controller has a total of sixty-three buttons, they are well spaced, logically grouped, and clearly marked to match the receiver's panel nomenclature.

Like all A/V receivers, the AV-1 is a fairly complex device, and some practice is needed to obtain best results. The instruction manual explains the control functions clearly, but there is

no substitute for hands-on experience to achieve the kind of performance you paid for.

We used the AV-1 in a full five-channel configuration, which was very easy to set up and balance from the listening position thanks to the excellent remote control. The three basic DSP environments, plus the available modifying adjustments, provide ample capability for creating almost any sound character you wish. If you are disturbed by an inability to recreate the sound of your favorite seats in your favorite concert hall,

there are three possible solutions: (1) Buy season tickets to the live concerts (a good idea in any case), (2) invest many times the price of the AV-1 in a state-of-the-art system including an advanced DSP processor and correspondingly advanced speakers (which may sound great but still won't be indistinguishable from the real thing), or (3) take the time to set up the AV-1 carefully with five reasonably good speakers and other appropriate system components, sit back, and enjoy the music. I don't think you'll be disappointed! □

SECOND OPINION

If A/V receivers could be characterized by their political orientation, the Nakamichi AV-1 would definitely fall into the conservative camp. Nakamichi has traditionally taken a rather restrained approach to component design (the company still eschews Dolby HX Pro in its cassette decks, for example), and the AV-1 shows what this conservatism means in the A/V-receiver arena.

It means primarily ease of use, occasioned by a deliberately restricted number of features and adjustments. There are only four surround-sound modes, for example (Dolby Pro Logic and three music-enhancement settings), and in each of those you can really adjust only the time of the first-arriving delayed signal. There is no set of front-panel A/V connections, and there are only two switched AC convenience outlets on the back panel.

But the AV-1 isn't totally bare of noteworthy features. Two of the most interesting involve its ability to memorize control settings. Surround Memory enables a user to store as many as four combinations of adjustments, including surround mode, center-channel mode (phantom, wide-band, or normal), surround delay, surround level, balance, and tone-control settings. And the Station Call memory system enables you to assign a five-character alphanumeric name to any of the tuner presets, so that the receiver can display a station's call letters, for example, in addition to its frequency.

Hookup was easy, although I was annoyed to find that what appeared to be multiway binding posts on the main speaker outputs would in fact take neither connecting lugs nor banana

plugs, only stripped wire. Other connections were made easier by the horizontal arrangement of inputs across the back panel. I was pleased to find that all three video inputs (for two VCR's and a laserdisc player) were supplied with both S-video and composite-video connectors, as were the monitor and VCR outputs.

Operation was straightforward. The small number of unusual features made the remote control simple to navigate, a task made easier still by the legibility of the markings in a darkened room. I liked the remote's retention of the tuner-preset numerical keypad, but it would have been nice if a couple of the most important buttons (such as the controls for volume and for adjusting speaker-level and tone-control settings) had been larger or placed more prominently.

Sonically, the AV-1 was also conservative, in a positive, no-risk-taking sense. It was able to reach high volumes with very clean sound, especially from the surround channels. I observed no anomalous behavior from the Dolby Pro Logic decoder, but the music-enhancement modes sounded very similar to each other—perhaps too similar to provide a wide enough variety. Although this makes it difficult to make the music-processing modes sound really awful because of misadjustment, something far too easy to do with most other A/V receivers, I also felt that none of the music modes benefited any music except classical and other acoustically recorded genres. Most pop music took on too spacious a character, without any added vividness, and this was with the delay times all set to the minimum of 10 milliseconds. This limitation of the music-enhancement

modes is very common in A/V receivers, however—it's not unique to the AV-1.

In fact, Nakamichi's manual for the AV-1 never claims that any of these processing modes is appropriate for pop music. The Natural mode is described as suitable for program material with "a rich reverberation content." Hall is said to provide "a feeling similar to being in a concert hall" and to be suited "to program sources which contain a large amount of reverberation" (that sounds familiar), and Stadium is said to reproduce "the effect of being in a space larger than that provided by the Hall mode." As it turns out, these descriptions are rather apt and translate very well to classical music, most of whose many genres could benefit from one of these settings (don't be scared off by the Stadium mode's name—it doesn't produce the Astrodome-like effects typical of such settings on other receivers). I did appreciate the music modes' use of the center-channel speaker, when available; most other receivers use only the main front and surround speakers for music.

Even the nomenclature in the manual is conservative, to the extent of referring to the surround speakers by the traditional misnomer "rear." Surrounds should be at the sides of the listening area—or on the side walls just slightly to the back of the listening area—for both music and (especially) soundtrack listening. Hanging on to old ideas can get you into sonic trouble. Still, with surround speakers correctly placed to the sides, the AV-1 is one conservative I'd be happy to have in my living room. —David Ranada



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Mirage M-790 Loudspeaker System

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

THE M-790 is one of the loudspeakers in Mirage's Bipolar series. Like the company's top-of-the-line M-1, the M-790 was designed to produce a spacious, 360-degree sound field in the listening room. The bipolar effect is achieved by a combination of front and rear radiation to generate similar sound fields in front of and behind the loudspeaker over a major portion of the audible frequency range. Although this pattern superficially resembles that of a dipole radiator (a figure-eight with identical responses to the front and

rear), there is a fundamental difference between the two. The two lobes of a dipole radiator's output are 180 degrees out of phase, with output nulls to the sides. The *bipole* outputs, on the other hand, are in phase with each other and generate a sound field over a full 360 degrees around the speaker (although it is not actually omnidirectional, this pattern does achieve some of the subjective quality of an omnidirectional radiator).

The M-790, which actually has three drivers, could also be described as a "two-and-a-half-way" loudspeaker. It is a compact floor-standing system with two drivers near the top of its front panel. Uppermost is a 1-inch titanium-dome tweeter whose diaphragm and voice-coil bobbin are formed from a single piece of metal. The dome radiates through a ring that reduces its effective diameter; Mirage calls this a "time domain equalizer" (TDE) and says that it enables the tweeter to combine the wider dispersion of a ¾-inch dome with the extended low-frequency performance of a 1-inch dome.

Immediately below it is an 8-inch woofer with a polypropylene cone and rubber surround. The woofer, which operates up to 2 kHz, is in a vented enclosure occupying most of the cabinet's internal volume. It has two ducted ports opening to the front and rear of the cabinet. The opening of the front port is sculpted to reduce air turbulence (the rear port is not so treated, possibly because any turbulence-induced noise from it would probably be inaudible in the listening area of the room). The enclosure, made of ¾-inch medium-density fiberboard (MDF), is rigidly braced and internally damped. The speakers are supplied with spikes for optional use on carpeted floors.

At the top of its back panel the M-790 has a 4½-inch polypropylene-cone driver that Mirage calls an MSE (Mirage Soundstage Enhancement) transducer. The MSE reproduces frequencies from 450 Hz to 10 kHz, creating the rear half of the bipolar sound field in that range.

The M-790's rated on-axis frequency response is 36 Hz to 22 kHz ± 3 dB. At 30 degrees off-axis, the upper limit is specified as 18 kHz. Sensitivity is rated as 87 dB, impedance as 6 ohms nominal, 4 ohms minimum. The

DIMENSIONS

9¾ INCHES WIDE, 38½ INCHES HIGH,
11¼ INCHES DEEP

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MIRAGE, DEPT. SR, 3641 McNICOLL AVE.,
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Every so often, a product is introduced that's so good, it serves as the benchmark for an entire industry. Yamaha's critically acclaimed DSP-A1000 is such a product.

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What the competition will be using for target practice this year.



TEST REPORTS

speaker is recommended for use with amplifiers rated to deliver between 50 and 150 watts.

The removable grilles covering the upper portions of the front and back panels are firmly retained by plastic fittings. Their cloth exteriors are mounted to half-inch-thick wooden surfaces cut out to enclose the rims of the drivers. Set into the back panel are two pairs of multiway binding-post connectors joined by jumper straps. By removing the jumpers, you can operate the speaker in a biwired or biamplified configuration.

Mirage says that the M-790 speakers will sound best if placed 2 to 3 feet in front of the wall behind them and at least 2 feet from the side walls. For optimum bipolar performance, the wall behind them should be reflective, and the speakers may be toed in slightly to focus the center of the stereo image at the listening position. We tried to meet those conditions as closely as possible, although an ideal placement for these speakers was not feasible in our listening room.

Anechoic response measurements do not give an accurate picture of a speaker such as the M-790, whose sound depends heavily on the contribution of signals reflected from nearby walls. Our loudspeaker room-response measurements usually correlate well with perceived sound quality, however, and that proved to be the case with the M-790.

Its room response was among the flattest we have measured from a speaker, with less than ± 2 dB overall

variation from 400 Hz to 13 kHz. There was a slight peak (about 4 dB) at 17 kHz, falling to +2 dB at 20 kHz. Room-boundary effects were apparent below 400 Hz, though to a much lesser degree than with most speakers. In fact, the overall response from 20 Hz to 20 kHz (without smoothing or correction) was flat within ± 5 dB, a quite remarkable figure for a "live room" measurement.

The close-miked response from the woofer and its front port varied only about 6 dB overall from 36 to 500 Hz, with maximum output at 70 Hz. It spliced well to the room curve, yielding a ± 5 -dB variation from 20 Hz to 20 kHz, but it must be realized that the response below 500 Hz is inevitably affected by the room dimensions and acoustic treatment and is not exclusively a property of the speaker.

Horizontal dispersion was outstanding, with output at 45 degrees off-axis down less than 2 dB from the on-axis output up to 3 kHz and less than 4 dB all the way to 20 kHz. The smoothed response of the rear driver was within ± 2 dB from 800 Hz to 10 kHz, falling to -8 dB at 500 Hz and 13 kHz. Its maximum output was between 4 and 6 kHz.

Minimum system impedance was about 5 ohms at 100 Hz. The curve also showed sharp peaks of 15 ohms at 16 Hz and 12.6 ohms at 52 Hz (from the reflex loading of the woofer) and a broader one of 11.3 ohms at 1.5 kHz. Overall, the speaker's 6-ohm rating seems realistic.

Sensitivity measured 84.5 dB

sound-pressure level (SPL) at 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input, slightly lower than rated. When we drove the M-790 with a 5.3-volt signal, corresponding to a 90-dB-SPL output, the woofer distortion was between 0.5 and 1 percent from 1 kHz down to 200 Hz, rising to 3 percent at 100 Hz and 10 percent at 35 Hz.

The M-790 had excellent power-handling ability. The woofer began to sound distorted at 100 Hz with a single-cycle burst input of 900 watts into its 5-ohm impedance at that frequency. At 1 kHz it took everything our amplifier could deliver (650 watts into 10.5 ohms) without significant distortion, and at 10 kHz the tweeter absorbed 800 watts at the amplifier's clipping point.

The Mirage M-790 sounded every bit as good as it measured. Its spectral balance was first-rate, with no suggestion of over- or under-emphasis in any part of the audio range. Spatially, it had an open, easy quality, with a seamless and natural full-depth soundstage appearing across the end of the room. Its imaging, playing the Chesky JD37 test CD, was among the best we have heard.

But given the manufacturer's suggestions on placement and installation of the speakers, it is still possible that we were not obtaining the very best sound the M-790 is capable of. That is an unavoidable problem with almost every speaker we test (or with any you bring to your home), since it is often impractical to shift the position of a desk, bench, door, or window to achieve perhaps another small step toward sonic perfection. Indeed, one of the most desirable characteristics for a speaker to have, once a certain level of sound quality has been realized, is the ability to function satisfactorily, if not optimally, in a reasonable variety of circumstances.

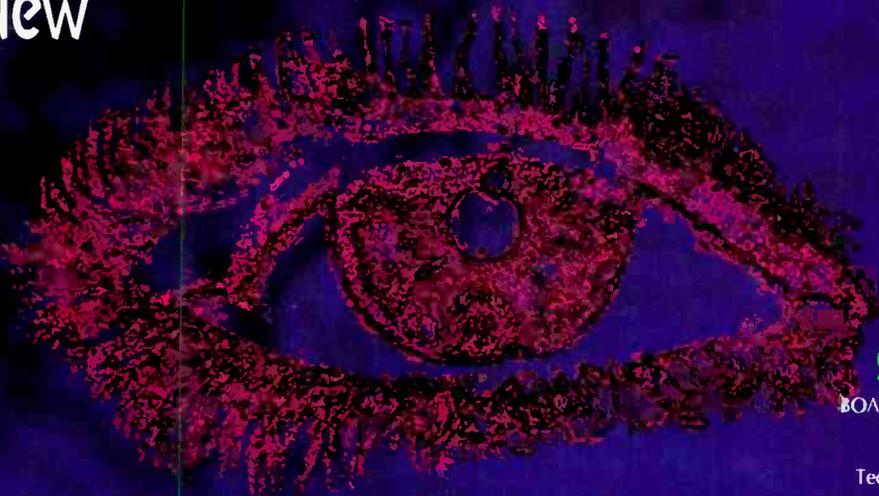
The Mirage M-790 meets this standard very handily. Its spatial and sonic qualities were excellent, even under less than ideal conditions. Although it is certainly not invisible, it is attractive and unobtrusive, both visually and sonically. It delivers a caliber of sound that would do justice to a considerably costlier speaker. The M-790 is well worth hearing if you are looking for a close approach to "high-end" sound without the usual price penalty. □



"Just because you've gotten older and can't hear high notes anymore is no reason to replace your tweeters with load resistors, Larry."

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TEST REPORTS



Carver AL-III Loudspeaker System

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

THE AL-III is the newest member of Carver Corporation's "Amazing" loudspeaker family. Like its predecessors, it uses a low-mass, vertically oriented ribbon dipole as the sole radiating element for most of the audio range (above 150 Hz). The previous Amazing speakers used several special cone drivers to

achieve a low-bass extension rarely found in conventional speakers of any size. Despite their impressive performance, however, the size and cost of the Amazing speakers may have discouraged some potential buyers.

In the AL-III, a 48-inch ribbon is the main sound source. Framed by two wooden "wings" that give the effect

DIMENSIONS

14½ INCHES WIDE, 72½ INCHES HIGH, AND
16½ INCHES DEEP

FINISH

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PRICE

\$1,699 A PAIR

MANUFACTURER

CARVER CORP., DEPT. SR, P.O. BOX 1237,
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of a single panel, the ribbon radiates equally to the front and rear through a slot about 2 inches wide. A thick foam-plastic strip protects the front of the ribbon, and a strip of felt covers the rear. The audio signal passes through the ribbon, which is immersed in a powerful magnetic field from a number of magnets. The resulting movement of the ribbon generates a pressure wave that radiates equally from the front and rear of the speaker in opposite phase (a dipolar pattern).

The woofer is more conventional, consisting of a 10-inch cone driver in a vented hexagonal enclosure, which is responsible for most of the system's weight. It is attached to the panel carrying the ribbon and serves as a stabilizing base, supported 1¾ inches above a flat wooden floor plate. The woofer faces downward, radiating around the entire periphery of the base. Its vent (about 2 inches in diameter) is located on the front about a foot above the floor, behind the foam strip that protects the ribbon.

On the back of the bass enclosure are separate fuses and input connectors (multiway binding posts) for the ribbon and the woofer. The inputs are normally connected by jumpers that can be removed for biwired or biamplified operation of the system.

Also on the rear of the woofer enclosure are three level-adjustment knobs, marked High Frequency, Upper Mid-Range, and Woofer. They have a limited range—about 5 dB according to the manufacturer—and the user is encouraged to experiment with their settings. Carver says that the level control for the woofer varies its "Q" (bandwidth) and affects only frequencies below 150 Hz. The middle control, which has settings identified as Room Average Flat and Anechoic Flat, affects frequencies from 2,000 to 6,000 Hz, and

TEST REPORTS

the top control trims the ribbon's output above 8,000 Hz.

To make most effective use of the AL-III's dipolar radiation pattern, the speaker should be kept several feet from any walls, although Carver states that even when it's placed against a wall, the depth of the woofer section keeps the ribbon far enough away to provide good results. Carver also recommends that for best sound the front of the room (behind the speakers) should be as acoustically "dead" as possible, while the opposite end should be relatively "live."

The AL-III's specifications include an anechoic bandwidth of 34 Hz to 20 kHz, with a usable lower limit of 24 Hz in a typical room. Nominal system impedance is 4 ohms, and sensitivity is rated as 86 dB sound-pressure level (SPL) at 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input. The recommended amplifier power is 575 watts per channel maximum (into 8 ohms), 65 watts minimum.

CARVER recommends that the AL-III be "broken in" for about 20 hours at a fairly high volume to relieve manufacturing stresses in its drivers. We followed this procedure as fully as possible, although there was no significant change in the sound as a result. The speakers were installed as recommended, except for the "live end, dead end" room treatment, which was not practical for us to implement.

The averaged room response of the two speakers was quite uniform from about 800 Hz to 20 kHz, with no more than a ± 2.5 -dB variation over that range. At lower frequencies the usual room interactions caused greater fluctuations, mostly within a ± 5 -dB envelope and extending down to our 20-Hz measurement limit.

The close-miked woofer response was strongest from 60 to 90 Hz, falling smoothly by 4 dB from 75 to 200 Hz and at a 12-dB-per-octave rate above that frequency. Below 60 Hz the output dropped off at a constant 12 dB per octave down to 20 Hz. Although the port output appeared to be quite flat from 60 to 20 Hz, it did not contribute significantly to the total bass output.

The composite response curve we constructed from the woofer and room measurements followed the room response down to 200 Hz and the close-miked woofer measurement below

that point. Its average level below 800 Hz was about 3 to 5 dB higher than from 800 Hz to 17 kHz, with a fairly steep drop above 17 kHz. These measurements were confirmed by quasi-anechoic (MLS) response measurements, which showed a uniform average level within ± 4 dB from 1.5 to 16 kHz and a 10-dB drop from there to 20 kHz.

Measuring the effect of the level controls on the speaker's frequency response essentially confirmed the information provided in the instruction manual. The woofer adjustment varied the output over a 4-dB range at 20 Hz but by only 1 or 2 dB between 40 and 60 Hz (the point of maximum output shifted between 65 and 75 Hz as the control was adjusted). From 70 to 200 Hz the adjustment range was 2 to 4 dB. The upper-midrange level adjustment had a range of 4 to 6 dB from 2 to 4 kHz, reducing to 2 dB from 4 to 6 kHz. The high-frequency adjustment range was 2 dB at 8 kHz and a maximum of 2.5 to 3 dB above that frequency. As stated in the manual, the audible effects of these controls were very subtle, and I found no significant differences in sound quality over their full range of settings.

The AL-III's sensitivity was 86 dB, exactly as rated. We measured woofer distortion at a drive level of 4.5 volts, corresponding to a 90-dB SPL at 1 kHz. It was very low and nearly constant at the bottom of the woofer's range, running between 1 and 3 percent from 20 to 50 Hz, falling to 0.3 percent at 100 Hz, and rising to 0.7 percent at 150 Hz.

The speaker's impedance with all the controls set to their clockwise limits (as we had them for most of our listening) was quite low, averaging about 3 ohms from 70 to 300 Hz and dipping to about 2.6 ohms at 200 Hz. It was also 3 ohms from 8 to 20 kHz. Except for brief rises to 11 or 12 ohms at 40 Hz and 3 kHz, the impedance averaged perhaps 4 ohms across the audio range.

In pulse power tests, the Carver AL-III's woofer cone bottomed at 100 Hz with a single-cycle input of 1,230 watts into its 3.1-ohm impedance at that frequency. At 1 and 10 kHz, the amplifier clipped at power levels of about 1,000 and 2,000 watts, respectively. The high-frequency tone-burst

waveform was exceptionally free of distortion and ringing compared with what we have seen from other speakers we have tested.

LISTENING is the only meaningful way to judge the sound quality of a loudspeaker. From earlier experiences with ribbon speakers (most of them tweeters), I expected effortless transparency, and I was not disappointed. Whether I was a foot from the speaker or across the room, the highs were always crystal clear and unstrained. There was no sense that the sound originated from these slender towers; instead, the reflection from the wall behind them added a dimension of depth that is a hallmark of dipole speakers. But, like the larger Amazing speakers, the AL-III uses almost a *full-range* ribbon, which extends its spatial effect well beyond that of a mere tweeter. It is a very addictive quality—difficult to describe, but once experienced, never forgotten!

What about the AL-III's woofer, then? It worked well and was an audibly "invisible" partner to the ribbon driver, but it was no match for the multiple bass drivers of the larger Amazing speakers (which can shake the room walls at 20 Hz without difficulty). Subjectively, it did a solid job down to 40 Hz or so, and when lower frequencies were present they could often be heard, but at a rather low level. We also noted that the outside of the bass enclosure vibrated quite palpably when the woofer was reproducing the lowest octaves at levels well within its capabilities. For bass aficionados a good subwoofer can make a genuine improvement in the AL-III's sound, but most people will be very satisfied without taking that step.

The AL-III really shines when it comes to price and practicality. A pair of these attractive and (despite their height) unobtrusive speakers can fit into almost any room, where they will look good and sound great. Sensitive enough to be driven by almost any hi-fi amplifier worthy of the name, they can nevertheless handle the output of the most powerful amplifier with ease, and their price is certainly reasonable by today's standards. Even if the AL-III speakers are not quite as "amazing" as their predecessors, the name still fits. □

TEST REPORTS



Panasonic LX-900 CD/Laserdisc Combi-Player

DAVID RANADA

STANDING at the top of Panasonic's line of combi-players, the LX-900 incorporates quite a few features designed to enhance both audio and video performance. It also has many features designed to improve operating convenience, the two most important of which are automatic laserdisc side-changing and a digital frame memory that makes possible the complete range of viewing tricks (still-frame, slow motion, and so forth) for both types of laserdisc (standard-play CAV and long-play CLV).

Other important features include special measures to reduce video noise (a digital time-base corrector and a three-mode digital field noise-reduction system), MASH one-bit digital-to-analog (D/A) converters for playback of CD's and digital laserdisc soundtracks, and a jog/shuttle search

control for both CD and laserdisc playback. Less important features include a bizarre Video Select button on the remote that enables you to change from standard operation to the curiously named Retro mode, which essentially makes the picture black-and-white, and the Night viewing mode, which slightly reduces overall picture brightness. The LX-900 also has a complete array of the more-or-less

standard CD/laserdisc cueing and repeat functions (except that you can't cue by CD index number) and two sets of RCA-jack outputs for composite video and stereo audio.

Although the LX-900 has two S-video outputs (fed from a digital color-separation circuit) and one optical digital-audio output, it is supplied without cables for them. Is that any way to promote these beneficial features? Does it encourage the purchase of other components with S-video or optical digital-audio connectors? And where can the average American buy such cables? They practically grow on trees in Japan, but I couldn't find a listing for either variety in a 20-minute search of the entire 1993 Radio Shack catalog. But enough of that—on to happier matters.

The LX-900's digital-audio performance was magnificent. Total harmonic distortion plus noise (THD+N), for example, was less than 0.0058 percent below 4 kHz, rising to a still inaudible 0.02 percent at 20 kHz. Noise was also extremely low, although we were surprised to see that it dropped only 1 dB when de-emphasis was activated (some CD's are made with a high-

DIMENSIONS

17 INCHES WIDE, 5 INCHES HIGH,
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frequency pre-emphasis that must be reversed in playback to achieve flat frequency response). Noise actually increased by 5 dB when the player was put into pause, possibly indicating that its D/A converters mute their outputs when playing the standard signal-to-noise test tracks, which contain only strings of digital zeros.

A more realistic noise and distortion test, spectrum analysis of a dithered 1-kHz tone recorded at -100 dB, showed—apart from the expected dither noise at around -128 dB across the audio spectrum—only traces of power-supply hum (at 60 and 120 Hz) and what might have been leakage of the video horizontal-scanning frequency (around 15.75 kHz). Since these individual components were all -113 to -114 dB below full output, they, too, would be inaudible at normal listening levels.

D/A linearity, measured with a 1-kHz sine wave that decays slowly from -60 to -120 dB, was also excellent, with deviations of less than 0.2 dB down to -100 dB and greater than 0.5 dB only at levels below -103 dB, where noise started to predominate.

Only in frequency response did the LX-900's measured performance fall short of near-perfection. Response without de-emphasis was very flat (to better than 0.05 dB) from 20 Hz up to 2 kHz, rose slowly to +0.275 dB at around 12 kHz, and then rolled off more swiftly to -1 dB at 20 kHz. Deviations of those magnitudes in those frequency ranges should not be audible with music. With de-emphasis switched in, however, response shelved down above 1 kHz, dipping to -0.5 to -0.6 dB between 4 and 7 kHz. In absolute terms, this, too, is a small deviation, but it extends over a wide enough range at frequencies where the ear is very sensitive that it could be audible with some music in direct comparison with a player having flatter de-emphasized response. It's curious that we still see errors of this magnitude in CD and laserdisc players, since de-emphasis can be performed simply and with much higher precision as part of the digital signal processing (DSP) that most one-bit D/A converters have to perform to work at all. On the other hand, few recordings (most of them classical) are being made with pre-emphasis, so for

MEASUREMENTS

DIGITAL AUDIO

All figures are for both CD and laserdisc except as noted.

Maximum output level	2.1 volts
Frequency response (see text)	
de-emphasis off	+0.26, -1 dB, 20 Hz to 20 kHz
de-emphasis on	+0, -0.6 dB, 20 Hz to 20 kHz
Channel separation	
125 Hz	110 dB
1 kHz	106.5 dB
16 kHz	73.3 dB
Channel imbalance	<0.01 dB
Signal-to-noise ratio (A-wtd.)	
de-emphasis off	114.8 dB
de-emphasis on	115.8 dB
Dynamic range	94.9 dB
Distortion (THD+N at 0 dB)	
20 Hz to 20 kHz	<0.02%
Linearity error	
-60 to -90 dB	<0.2 dB
below -103.2 dB	>+0.5 dB
Defect tracking (CD only, Pierre Verany #2 test disc)	1,000 μ m
Impact resistance (CD, top and sides)	B+
Cueing accuracy (CD)	A
Slewing time (CD)	2 seconds

AFM AUDIO

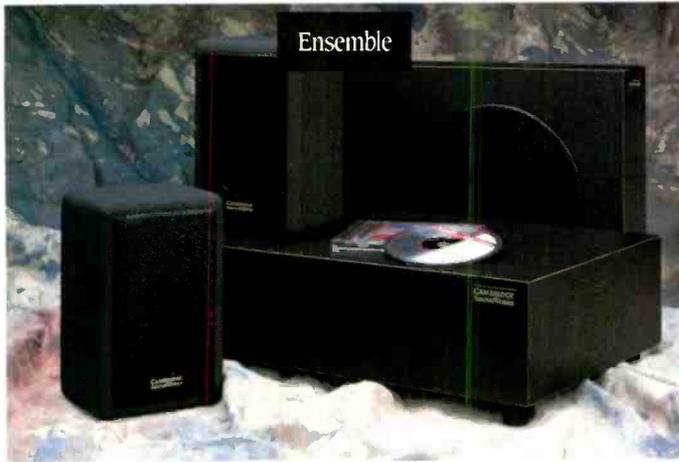
All figures are for laserdisc only.

Maximum output level	
(left/right)	0.48/0.52 volt
Channel imbalance	0.77 dB
Signal-to-noise ratio	
(A-wtd., CX on)	75 dB
Distortion (THD+N at 1 kHz, 100% modulation)	0.5%

VIDEO

Horizontal luminance resolution	
(wedge pattern)	>350 lines
Horizontal luminance bandwidth	
(-3 dB)	4.6 MHz
Luminance nonlinearity (maximum)	7.5%
Laserdisc side-change time	
end of A to start of B	12.5 seconds
start of A to start of B	14.5 seconds

Why The Critics Love Ensemble And Ensemble II.



Ensemble



Ensemble II

“Ensemble may be the best value in the world.” *Audio*

Ensemble and Ensemble II are subwoofer-satellite speaker systems designed by Audio Hall of Fame member Henry Kloss (founder of AR, KLH and Advent). Cambridge SoundWorks makes and sells Ensemble and Ensemble II (and a number of other audio components) factory-direct, with no expensive middle-men, so you can save hundreds of dollars. All purchases are backed by a 30-day money-back satisfaction guarantee, so there's no risk.



The extra subwoofer in our Ensemble system provides maximum placement flexibility.

“Can be compared only with much larger speakers at substantially higher prices.”

Stereo Review

Ensemble and Ensemble II are constructed with the very best materials and no-compromise workmanship. Both systems use satellite speakers that are virtually identical.* Unlike many competing systems, they are true two-way speaker systems, each containing a high perfor-

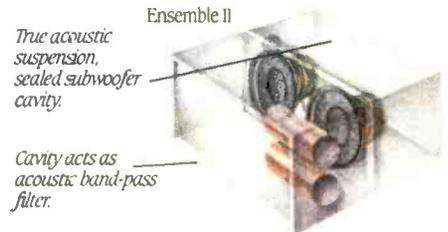
mance tweeter and a 4" woofer. Small and unobtrusive, they'll fit into the decor of any room. Available in scratch-resistant gunmetal grey Nextel, or primed so you can paint them any color you wish.

Ensemble and Ensemble II subwoofers use heavy-duty woofers in true acoustic suspension enclosures. Robust construction is used throughout, including solid MDF cabinets and solid metal grilles. Individual crossovers are built into each cabinet for maximum wiring flexibility.

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Esquire

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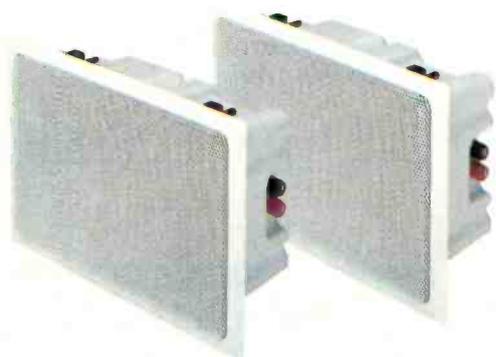
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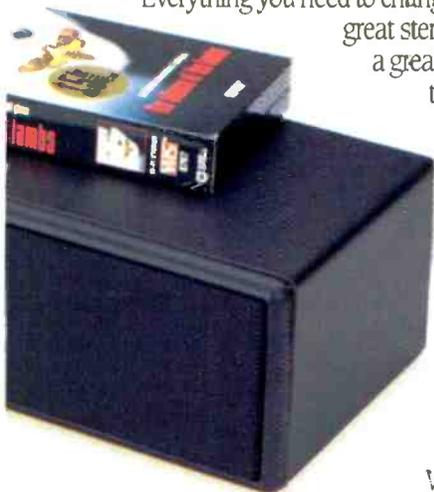
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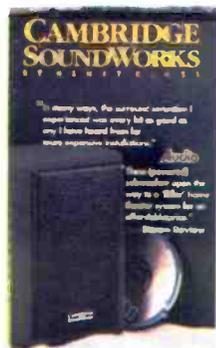
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most discs de-emphasis accuracy is irrelevant.

Performance with AFM-encoded laserdisc soundtracks was by comparison pretty awful: A 100-percent modulated 1-kHz tone produced distortion of 0.5 percent, and the A-weighted signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) was 75 dB. But those readings are par for the AFM-soundtrack course and important only when you play old laserdisc pressings that lack digital soundtracks or those that have alternative AFM soundtracks different from the digital ones. (Inclusion of AFM soundtracks on laserdiscs is scheduled to become optional sometime next year.)

The LX-900 reproduced the full range of laserdisc video test patterns extremely well. Off-the-screen horizontal luminance resolution, judged by viewing a wedge test pattern, exceeded 350 lines, slightly surpassing on direct comparison the abilities of the LX-900's predecessor, the LX-1000. This result was confirmed by luminance frequency-response measurements indicating a -3-dB bandwidth of 4.6 MHz, which calculates out to 368 lines.

The player exhibited some luminance nonlinearity, which was worst at the lowest picture levels (the maximum nonlinearity of +7.5 percent occurred at the 10- and 20-percent picture levels) and declined steadily at higher luminance levels. This error may produce a slight loss of detail in dark areas of the picture, although no obvious effects were visible. All laserdisc video measurements should be taken with a grain of salt, however, since they vary according to the test disc used. The numbers cited here are the best-case results obtained from four different test laserdiscs.

The LX-900 seemed to be better than the LX-1000, and many other players, at suppressing the various low-level interference patterns the laserdisc system is prone to. Video noise on such things as color bars and full-field colors was very low, and that was with the Field Noise Reduction control at its standard setting. Higher settings gave a slight further reduction of color noise with only slight picture blurring at the highest setting. I found the B&W (Retro) and reduced-brightness (Night) options of the Video Select control pretty useless.

The LX-900 has no on/off button for the remote jog/shuttle dials, which are always operational—a major advance in convenience.



Operational annoyances were few. The most significant one I discovered was that it is impossible to prevent the LX-900 from automatically going to the second side of a laserdisc after finishing the first: You have to intervene manually to stop playback before the changeover starts. While this is the *raison d'être* of the side-changing mechanism, the LX-900's uncontrollable enthusiasm in this regard can get irritating, especially with programs occupying an odd number of disc sides or when you're trying to cue to a point near the end of a side.

Other ergonomic problems were minor and principally concerned the remote control. The useful video noise reduction can be activated only from the player's front panel, whereas the particularly uninteresting Video Select and some other "trick" features (Strobe, Still & Sound) get buttons on the remote. Mechanical noise was

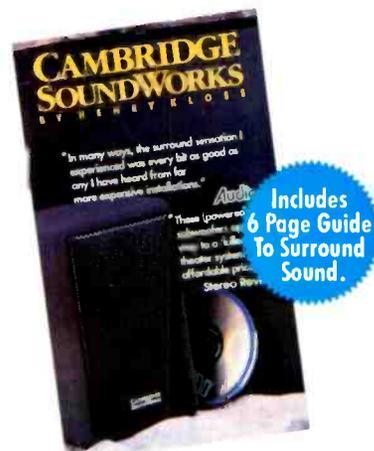
lower than with the last Panasonic combi-player we tested (the manual-turnover LX-101), but the groaning gear-shifting we heard during the laserdisc side-changing process could prove distracting.

As usual, it would have been nice to have had further differentiation of the size, shape, and feel of many of the handset buttons. For example, the Mode button—controlling whether you are cueing by laserdisc frame or chapter number—could receive far more prominence than it does. And I think that the numerical keypads on the remotes for all CD and laserdisc players should enable direct numerical entry of track numbers greater than 9 instead of requiring repeated presses of a +10 button like the LX-900 does. Many laserdisc programs and classical CD's have dozens of tracks, and they'd be easier to get to with direct numerical entry. Finally, the remote-sensor window on the front panel should have been located where it would not be shadowed by an open disc drawer when the player is placed below the level at which you hold the remote (near the front-panel jog/shuttle control would have been a good place).

The standout among the LX-900's operational improvements is Panasonic's elimination of the traditional on/off button for the remote handset's jog/shuttle dials: They are always immediately operational. This may seem minor if you haven't used such controls before, but removal of this pointless button is actually a major advance in convenience. Trust me.

Working hand-in-hand with the jog/shuttle controls is the LX-900's most important video convenience feature: frame memory. Just as I would never buy a home CD or laserdisc player without a remote control, I wouldn't buy a laserdisc player without frame memory. It brings slow motion and freeze frames to CLV discs, and you can easily save more than the price premium of the memory by buying the considerably less expensive CLV versions of laserdisc movies.

On the whole, the LX-900 is a smoothly operating combination CD/laserdisc player that delivers superb video and digital-audio performance. Now, if I could only find an S-video cable □



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CIRCLE NO. 6 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Choosing An

A/V

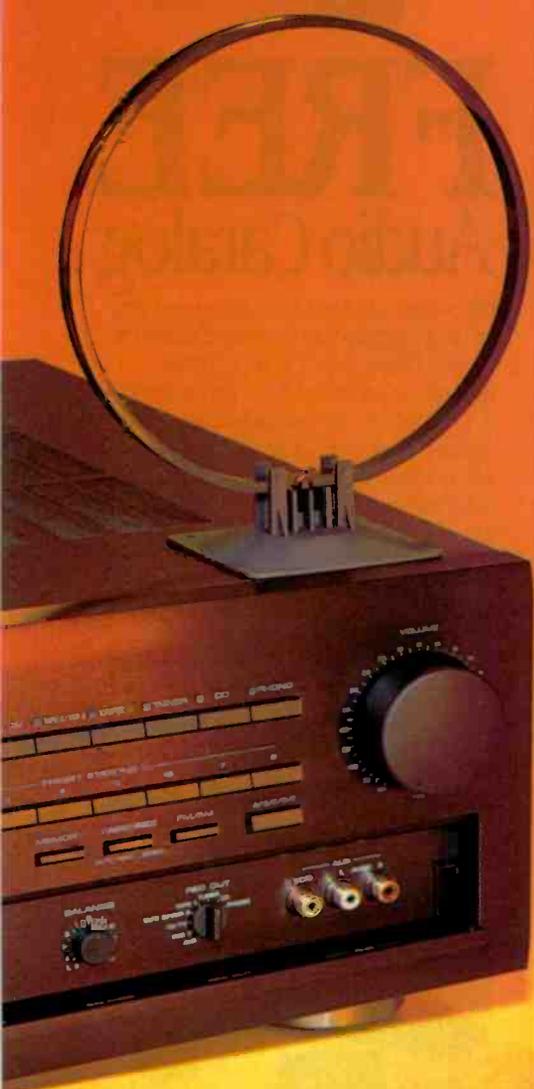
Receiver

A

PRACTICAL

GUIDE

by David Ranada



It's getting hard these days to find a receiver that doesn't have video as well as audio functions. Some stores now carry audio/video receivers only, no standard receivers, and whether you need one or not that's all you'll be able to buy. But even if you aren't going to make it the audio centerpiece of a home theater system, a well-chosen A/V receiver can provide sonic benefits for ordinary music listening. Your listening preferences will make a difference in what you should look for in an A/V receiver: Soundtrack-oriented listeners will want to look for a different mix of features than listeners oriented more toward music.

What Is an A/V Receiver?

The typical A/V receiver has all the features of a normal stereo receiver: an internal AM/FM tuner; connections and switching for a CD player, at least one audio tape deck, and sometimes an analog turntable; and two channels of power amplification to drive a pair of stereo speakers. Three additional features are required to turn such a device into an A/V receiver. The first is a movie-soundtrack surround-sound decoder, usually a Dolby Pro Logic circuit realized either by analog integrated circuits or by DSP (digital signal processing). The second feature is additional amplifier circuits and connections for multiple loudspeakers. Usually three additional amplifier circuits are supplied: one for a center speaker, to be placed as close to the center of your TV screen as possible, and two for surround speakers. Most A/V receivers also have a subwoofer or mono output suitable for driving an external amplifier connected to a subwoofer.

The third primary feature of an A/V receiver is connections and switching for video-oriented signal sources such as VCR's and laserdisc players. These connections include video inputs and outputs so that the receiver can switch the picture from the video sources along with their sound outputs. Instead of feeding your video monitor or TV set directly, you hook up the audio and video outputs of your VCR to the

receiver, which in turn feeds the screen.

Product brochures frequently concentrate on surround-sound features such as the number of music-enhancement modes. But one of the reasons for choosing an A/V receiver over separate A/V components is that it will relieve you of the intimidating task of trying to figure out multiple intercomponent connections and switching for both audio and video. So you should pay at least as much attention to the connection and switching capabilities of an A/V receiver as you do to its sound-processing abilities. The more inputs the merrier.

Related Componentry

Don't ignore the components to which an A/V receiver *has* to be connected when making your selection. If only for budgetary reasons. To get *any* benefit out of an A/V receiver's surround-sound capabilities, you'll need to connect two surround speakers. With just a pair of fairly inexpensive surrounds, you can take advantage of the receiver's music-enhancement modes for processing signals from audio tape, radio, and CD's. For the best performance when playing Dolby Surround movie soundtracks, a center speaker is also required.

Actually playing a soundtrack with surround sound requires Dolby Surround-encoded stereo soundtrack signals from a stereo video source: a hi-fi VCR, a laserdisc player, or a stereo

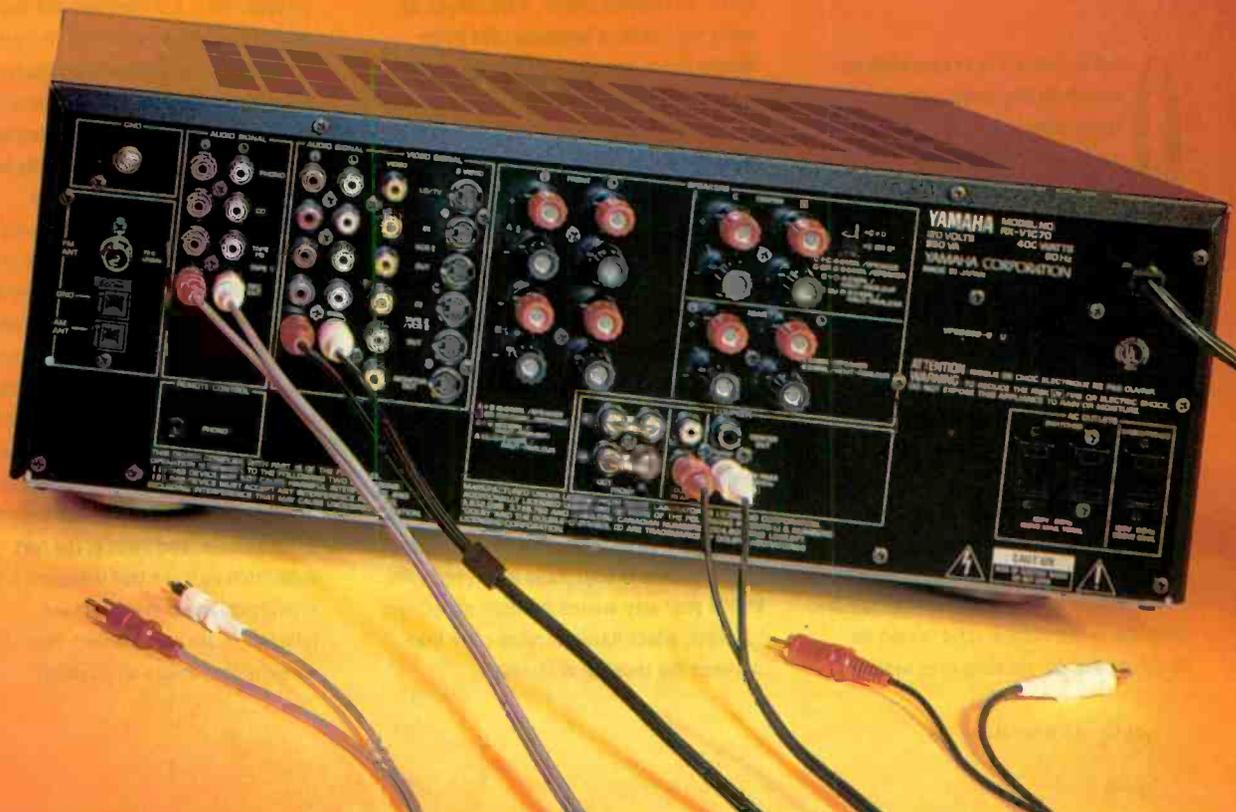
TV receiver with true stereo audio outputs. If you don't have any of these stereo-soundtrack sources and want to get into home theater, budget in their cost when you get your A/V receiver; a Pro Logic circuit can do nothing for a mono soundtrack signal.

Seeking Features

If you're a soundtrack-oriented listener who has gone whole hog and installed a center-channel speaker along with a couple of surrounds, the A/V receiver you choose should be rated to provide equal amounts of power for the front left, front right, and center channels. When you play a movie soundtrack, the center channel will get the largest share of the receiver's output, and its power capabilities should reflect that. If you plan never to have a center speaker you don't need to worry about center-channel amplifier power; you'll be using the surround decoder's "phantom center channel" mode, which creates the sonic image of a center speaker by feeding its signal to the main front speakers.

As for actual amplifier-section power ratings, A/V receivers are no different from standard receivers: Buy as much power as you can afford. Ideally, an A/V receiver would have equal—and large—amounts of power available for all channels (front left and right, center, and surround). Usually, however, the surround outputs are less powerful, even though music-enhancement processing and sound-

PHOTO BY DAN WAGNER



tracks can sometimes put a lot of energy into the surround speakers. But the old rule of thumb still applies: If all other aspects are truly equal—including price (a rare situation)—choose the receiver whose output power for either the front or surround speakers is significantly higher (meaning at least twice as high). Example 1: 100 watts front/center and 40 watts surround beats 50 watts all around. Example 2: 100 watts front/center and 40 watts surround also beats 150 watts front/center and 20 watts surround.

If you're a music-oriented listener who wants an A/V receiver primarily to enhance music, pay particular attention to the variety and adjustability of the receiver's music-processing modes (the Dolby Pro Logic mode, by contrast, is very limited in how much you can adjust it). This is one area where brand-to-brand and even model-to-model variations can be obvious and crucial, where a listening test is mandatory, and, unfortunately, where showroom evaluations are just about impossible.

Making your own surround-sound listening tests (or checking for detailed comments in a test report) is imperative for two reasons. First, although Dolby circuitry can be checked for compliance with Dolby standards by

measurement, all surround-processing effects are best evaluated by ear. Second, the surround-sound decoders in most A/V receivers don't do a particularly good job of enhancing any music other than classical. That's because their primary means of enhancement is to create multiple delayed versions of the main signal and play them through the surround speakers, perhaps with some artificial reverberation thrown in. While this type of processing can be effective in creating the feeling of an enveloping concert hall with classical music, it also usually creates a sense of distance and space that may be inappropriate for pop music, however imposing it might sound in a short showroom demo. There are a few A/V receivers whose music-enhancement modes include at least one that adds vividness without adding distance, but they tend to be higher-price DSP-equipped models.

Make sure that the receiver you choose has some means of displaying the relative levels of the main front, center, and surround speakers. This can take the form of a numerical read-out, the relative positions of index lights on main and surround volume knobs, or a string of LED's. Getting the best performance out of a surround-sound decoder requires you to

balance the speaker levels properly. This is much easier with visual aids.

Some A/V receivers can also display various operational-status indications (including speaker-level settings) on a TV screen. That, too, is a desirable feature as long as you aren't totally dependent on the TV to operate the receiver. Some units have so many possible adjustments that the only place a comprehensive, legible display is possible is a TV screen. But it soon gets annoying to have to turn on the monitor if all you want to do is change an audio setting.

MANY models have pre-out/main-in loop connections for all five speaker circuits, which enable you to upgrade the power of your A/V system by using external power amplifiers instead of the receiver's. Amplifier power determines a considerable portion of the cost of an A/V receiver, so if you're on a tight budget you might consider getting a relatively low-power unit with such loop connections and upgrading later. Remember, to make a noticeable difference, you'll need to use external amplifiers rated for at least twice the power of the internal amplifiers.

Other desirable features include a phono input if you have (or might add)

EASY LIVING

An A/V receiver is of necessity an electronically complex device. If the manufacturer is not careful with ergonomic design ("human engineering"), this complexity can easily seep into the receiver's operation. There's no good reason for this to happen considering the low cost of labor-saving computer control circuitry. But that circuitry must be programmed for easy and logical operation, and your access to the programming must also be quick and sure. If you can't activate a feature without having to look it up in the manual repeatedly, or if you have to slog through a laborious sequence of button pushing, you might as well not have paid for that feature. Usability is therefore a valid reason for selecting one A/V receiver over another.

One of the seemingly most neglected aspects of A/V receiver usability is ease of hookup. A fully equipped and connected A/V system might well include a couple of VCR's, a laserdisc player, a CD player, an audio tape deck, a turntable, five home theater loudspeakers, a subwoofer, and a pair of remote loudspeakers, all connected with a jungle of separate audio and video cables to a single A/V receiver's very crowded back panel. Heaven help you if you upgrade any one of those components or have to change any connections. You'll end up with knots that the entire Coast Guard couldn't untangle.

I've found that receivers (both the standard and A/V variety) whose input and output connectors are all arrayed horizontally tend to be far easier to connect—and, more important, to disconnect and reconnect—than those with the various connectors arrayed in vertical columns. This is especially true if you have to feel your way around the back panel from the front, which happens more often than not once the receiver is installed.

Unfortunately, not only do some of the best A/V receivers have vertically arrayed connectors, but in a store it's difficult even to determine *how* the connectors are arrayed. Most A/V receivers are more or less permanently ensconced in a display wall, and the salespeople probably don't know about their connectors, nor will the glossy product brochures mention or show them. You'll discover the truth the hard way: by opening the box at home.

An almost equally neglected area of A/V receiver design is the ease of use of remote controls. (Don't buy an A/V receiver that lacks a remote control. I don't actually know of any without one, but that is not to say that some cost-cutting manufacturer wouldn't put one out.) The only reason the front panel of every A/V receiver doesn't look like the cockpit of the space shuttle is that many of the controls have been moved to the remote, and most of the rest duplicated on it, so that it becomes the primary means of man-machine interaction. It's only prudent, then, to examine the remote for usability.

an analog turntable, S-video connectors for as many video inputs as possible (especially if you have a Hi8 or S-VHS VCR or camcorder), a front-panel A/V input for temporary hookup of a camcorder, and independent source switching for listening/viewing and recording.

An A/V receiver is normally larger and much heavier than a standard audio receiver with approximately the same main-channel power rating. If you plan to put your A/V receiver on a shelf, make sure that the shelf is deep enough and strong enough to support it.

In-Store Evaluations

Unfortunately, many other important characteristics of an A/V receiver cannot be assessed from a spec sheet and are just as difficult to gauge in a store. You should, for example, listen to the surround outputs alone to check their noise and distortion levels in both the soundtrack-decoding and music-enhancement modes. But many receivers in a store's "listening wall" aren't even hooked up, and it is often difficult to find one that allows listening to the surround or enhanced signal only without turning off or disconnecting the main speakers. Blessed are those stores that have good surround-sound listening facilities.



If you can do an in-store listening test, also try a quick input-isolation test. Feed pop music with a heavy beat into the receiver (preferably from a CD player) and adjust the volume to a fairly loud but comfortable level. Then, while the music is still playing and without changing the volume setting, switch to another signal source that is either not connected or not playing. Ideally, you should hear silence. In practice, you might hear the pop music leaking over into the "silent" input. Such "crosstalk" indicates insufficient signal isolation and can contaminate recordings made through the receiver. A/V receivers vary greatly in crosstalk, which is ex-

acerbated by the cramped circuitry inside them.

If you can, you should also carefully examine the front panel and remote control, paying particular attention to logical operation and ease of use (see "Easy Living" below). Many stores don't even put the remotes for their A/V receivers out for inspection, however, since they tend to get "lost" even more rapidly than they do at home. You'll usually get to play only with the front-panel switches, though in the real world you'll be using the remote at least 95 percent of the time.

It's possible to evaluate a couple of things even in the most uncongenial store surroundings: the receiver's display and indicator lights. You can easily check them for brightness, legibility from a distance, and, most important, usefulness. Do they tell you everything you absolutely need to know about the receiver's operating status? Look especially for the selected input and surround-sound mode, the overall volume setting, and the relative settings of the surround and center speakers.

And finally, just in case, make sure you can return a receiver for full credit if you take it home and discover that it doesn't do what you want it to do. With all of today's options, you can find a winner. □

Start with the standard remote-control questions, which are as valid for A/V receivers as they are for CD players and VCR's:

- Is the remote comfortable to hold?
- Does it absolutely require two-handed operation?
- Are the buttons well differentiated by size, color, shape, texture, or location?
- Are the buttons logically arranged, with related functions close together? (That will help you memorize the control positions.)
- Are any critical buttons too close together (on/off next to volume, for example)?
- Can you read the remote's labels and markings, or at least feel your way around the buttons, in a darkened room?
- Does it require weird batteries? (I prefer a remote that uses AA batteries because they usually cost the same as AAA cells and last much longer.)

Along with those basic remote-control issues, there are some specifically related to A/V receivers. Find out, for example, whether the remote incorporates all the

controls needed for accurate balancing of the speakers during surround-sound playback (separate level adjustments for front, center, and surround speakers along with a switchable test tone). Having these controls on the remote will enable you to balance the system for movie soundtracks from the listening position without assistance. I'd also look for a remote that allows some sort of selective surround-sound switching, specifically the ability to turn off the main sound and hear only the surround-sound processing. This feature is rare but can be extremely useful. Give several points to those receivers whose remotes also permit full adjustment of the music-enhancement surround modes from the listening position.

To reduce the number of buttons on the remote, many A/V receivers don't duplicate all their front-panel controls. Omission of tone controls from the remote is not too important, but leaving out numerical selection of tuner presets can be, especially if you use many of them. As if to make up for the buttons saved by leaving

off a numerical keypad, many remotes have buttons that are user-programmable for the handsets controlling other components. I've found that regardless of how many programmable buttons are provided, you'll eventually run out of them and end up having at least some other remotes lying around anyway (VCR remotes in particular are hard to get rid of). I don't put much value on a receiver remote's having programmable buttons if including them means leaving out important receiver-related controls.

Just because I've concentrated here on remote controls, don't forget the receiver's front panel. Remotes have the nasty habit of creeping between sofa cushions or under parts of the Sunday paper, or of running out of battery power just before the program you want to watch or listen to comes on. Make sure that the front panels of the receivers you consider have the critical controls for getting your system up and running: power, input selection, surround-sound mode, overall volume, and front/surround balance.

—D.R.

ADD-ON SURROUND SOUND

How to upgrade without
scrapping
your prized stereo gear



● DANIEL KUMIN

HOME theater is the big noise in home entertainment these days: Audio specialty salons and superstores alike report the biggest rush since the CD's dramatic entrance a decade ago. On the hi-fi side of things the attention has focused on surround-sound gear, especially multichannel audio/video receivers with built-in Dolby Pro Logic decoders. And understandably so since these all-in-one components dispense full hi-fi and surround-sound facilities in one fell swoop.

But many of us already own a perfectly good "old-fashioned" stereo receiver, an integrated amplifier, or a suite of separates. Happily, if you aspire to surround status, there's no need to junk perfectly functional, well-loved gear and start over. There is a plethora of add-on solutions.

The key to adding surround capability to an existing two-channel system lies in an outboard processor or controller that unravels Dolby Surround-encoded video and audio tapes and discs into their four-channel (left, center, right, and surround) sonic splendor. Although most of the movies made in the past ten years have soundtracks that are encoded in Dolby Sur-

round, also known as Dolby Stereo, relatively few music releases are recorded using this technique. Most processors, therefore, offer additional enhancement modes for non-surround-encoded (and even mono) music and A/V recordings that work either by synthesizing ambience signals via DSP (digital signal processing) or by extracting and redirecting existing ambience cues. In fact, many models use both techniques.

In scanning the shelves for a surround processor, then, the most fundamental question is the surround methodologies on tap. Dolby Pro Logic, which includes a dedicated center-channel output and "steering logic" to keep center, surround, and left/right signals suitably discrete (improving the intelligibility of dialogue and vocals as well as ambience reproduction), is fast becoming the de facto standard for movie and video soundtracks encoded in Dolby Surround or a compatible format. Pro Logic is superseding "regular" Dolby Surround decoding, which does not make use of a discrete center channel or steering logic. It makes little sense to scrimp here: Pro Logic's price premium has plummeted, and its enhancements are well worth the modest surcharge of 10 percent or so. Stand-alone Pro Logic pro-

cessors, many with power for the center and surround channels, can be had for less than \$400. Even basic Pro Logic processors typically include a couple of additional surround settings. There's almost always one labeled Hall or Concert for non-Dolby-encoded CD's, TV programs, and videos. Most processors also provide a mode that enhances monaural material, which still includes a good deal of television broadcasting, not to mention historic recordings and the like.

Upmarket processors often incorporate DSP-based ambience-synthesis modes as well, which derive a surround-channel signal, and in some cases also a center-channel signal, from the information contained in ordinary stereo recordings. In the context of a surround system with four or more speakers, DSP-synthesized ambience can fool your ears into thinking the listening room has been transformed into a variety of other acoustic environments—a small jazz club, a large concert hall, and so on—by mimicking the way sound is reflected in them. DSP-synthesized ambience is a stunning technological development, which at its best is extremely convincing. It remains a matter of taste, however. Systems vary widely in flexibility and naturalness of sound, and

PHOTO BY ROBERTO BROSAN



AudioSource's SS Three/II (\$400) features a six-mode Dolby Pro Logic processor and two 30-watt amplifiers to power the center and surround channels.

meticulous tweaking of DSP parameters, channel balances, and surround-speaker placement and orientation is often required to arrive at the "optimum" sound. If you choose a DSP-equipped model, be sure to arrange for a home trial, and budget plenty of tinkering time.

Some DSP-equipped models perform Dolby Pro Logic decoding digitally, which, in theory, should provide an edge in accuracy and overall performance. In practice it ain't always so: New-generation analog Pro Logic circuits are narrowing the gap, and either approach can yield excellent performance. Audition processors in the Pro Logic mode and listen for background noise in the surround channel (just make sure it's not in the recording!). Ideally you shouldn't hear any hiss at the listening position—even during very quiet passages with lots of ambience. Similarly, evaluate decoding accuracy by listening to truly monaural dialogue with the center speaker off or disconnected and the processor set to the "Wide" mode. *Some* dialogue leakage to the left, right, and surround speakers is almost inevitable, but it should be very slight and constant in level.

Introducing surround sound to a two-channel system requires more than just the processor: specifically, additional speakers to handle the surround channel and, for Pro Logic, the center channel, and additional amplifier channels to power them.

Processor Parade

Outboard surround processors come in three basic flavors, processor-preamplifiers, processors only, and processor-amplifiers. Processor-preamplifiers, which offer a full complement of audio and video inputs and outputs and global control suitable for both A/V surround and ordinary stereo listening, are intended more for ground-up component systems than for adding on to an existing rig.

Simple surround-sound processors offer Dolby Pro Logic decoding, an additional surround mode or two, and little else; you must supply amplification for the extra channels. The processor is patched into an existing system via a tape-monitor or external-processor input/output loop, and its master volume control handles the overall loudness adjustment for surround listening.

Processor-amplifiers have two or more amplifier channels to drive center and surround speakers. Although these are more expensive than simple



Lexicon's CP-3 (\$2,995) teams digital Dolby Pro Logic decoding and Home THX processing with highly sophisticated ambience enhancement for music.



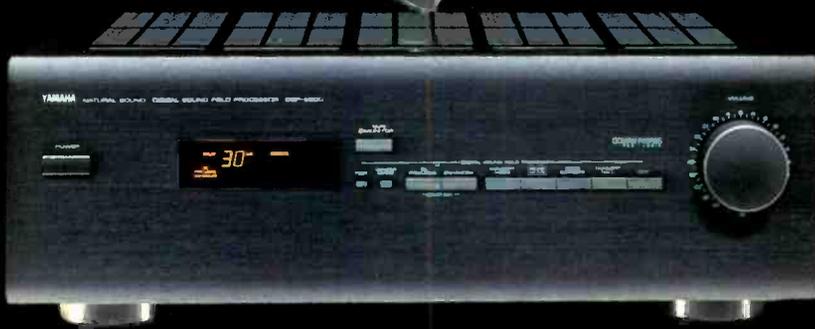
Kenwood's SS-992 (\$299) has a four-mode Dolby Pro Logic decoder, a 30-watt center-channel amp, and a 15-watt surround amp.



The Fosgate Audionics Model Three (\$2,499) boasts four surround modes—including regular Dolby Pro Logic, Home THX, and two proprietary movie modes—five music modes, six A/V inputs, and eleven outputs.

Pioneer's SP-700D (\$735) features eight modes, including Dolby Pro Logic and one for mono sources, sixteen sound-field presets, and sixteen programmable memories for user settings.





Yamaha's DSP-E200 (\$499) offers a digital Dolby Pro Logic decoder, a four-mode ambience processor, and three 25-watt amplifiers to power one center and two surround speakers. A full-function wireless remote control is included.

Luxman's fully digital F-116 (\$800) has three operating modes, each with one adjustable parameter: Dolby Pro Logic for Dolby Surround movies, Mono Logic for monaural soundtracks, and Music Logic for ordinary stereo programs.



The Carver DPL-33 (\$470) features a Dolby Pro Logic decoder, an ambience setting for non-surround-encoded programs, a 25-watt center-channel amp, and two 15-watt surround amps.



Dynaco's CD-2 (\$140) is a simple passive matrix decoder that routes the stereo difference signal (L - R) from music or a movie soundtrack to a pair of ambience speakers.

Onkyo's ES-500PRD (\$400) offers two movie modes, including Dolby Pro Logic, two music modes, adjustable surround-channel delay, a 50-watt center-channel amplifier, and two 20-watt surround-channel amps.



add-on processors, they can make the . . . um, *process* of upgrading to surround sound both easier and more economical. A processor-amplifier patches into a system the same way basic processors do. In either case, however, host receivers or amps equipped with preamp-out/power-amp-in jacks offer another hook-up option. Inserting the processor between these jacks gives you somewhat more flexibility in volume control.

BY way of comparison, a fully powered Pro Logic A/V receiver includes five amplifier channels, usually three of equal power for the front speaker trio and two of somewhat less power for the surround speakers, which commonly require less wattage. Processor-amplifiers, as their name implies, combine surround-decoding circuitry with the necessary *extra* amplification. But even within this relatively narrow category, there are plenty of choices.

For example, AudioSource's remote-controlled SS-Four (\$330) provides Pro Logic decoding, simple Hall and Matrix surround modes, and two 24-watt amplifiers to drive the center speaker and two surround speakers (the surround speakers are wired in parallel from a single output). Onkyo's ES-600PRO (\$400) is a remote-controlled Pro Logic processor with several adjunct modes, a heftier 50-watt center channel, and two separate 20-watt surround outputs.

A rather more elaborate specimen comes from Yamaha. The DSP-E200 (\$499) is a remote-equipped digital Pro Logic decoder with three 25-watt amplifiers and Yamaha's Digital Soundfield Processing. It offers numerous DSP-derived ambience modes.

Perhaps the most critical matter in selecting a processor-amp—next to the integrity of its surround decoding—is power. Most experts agree that the center-channel ideal is an amplifier whose rated power equals, or nearly equals, that of the main pair. So if you're building on a 40-watt receiver, look for a processor with a center amp rated for at least 25 to 30 watts. The surround channel can usually get along with less relative power, depending on room size, listening levels, and the sensitivity of the speakers; a quarter to a half of the main-channel power is a useful minimum.

Full-bore A/V amplifiers offer another way to keep using your existing receiver. Essentially A/V receivers without tuner sections, most of these

beasts offer surround processing, five-channel power, and integrated audio/video inputs, outputs, and switching. What's more, adding one to an existing setup leaves you with two "extra" amp channels, which you can use to drive additional surround speakers, extension speakers in a remote room, or a subwoofer. Denon's AVC-3030 (\$1,300) includes all these features and then some: Dolby Pro Logic, five ambience modes, a plethora of A/V connections (including S-video jacks), and 80 watts apiece to the three front speakers plus 35 watts for each of the surround speakers.

Somewhat paradoxically, nonamplified processors can be more elaborate (and costly) than processor-amps or A/V amps, for they are usually oriented toward the high end of the home theater market. For example, the Lexicon CP-1+ (\$1,595) is a sophisticated, all-DSP Dolby Pro Logic processor with extensive ambience-synthesis and ambience-recovery modes. Lexicon, Fosgate Audionics, and other companies also offer even more costly processors that incorporate Home THX refinements to Dolby Pro Logic in order to reproduce movie soundtracks on video with ultimate precision. There are also simpler examples, however. Luxman's F-116 (\$800) is a high-performance digital Pro Logic processor with a minimum of frills.

Taking the unpowered route demands additional amplification: three speakers' worth for a Pro Logic system; more if you're adding a subwoofer or two as well. And don't underestimate the importance of a subwoofer—much of the excitement of today's movie soundtracks hinges on good, solid low-bass reproduction.

The simplest way to add the necessary amplifier channels to a two-channel receiver or amp plus a nonamplified surround processor is to buy a single stereo power amplifier (or drag a retired receiver or amp down from the attic), employing one of its channels to drive the center speaker, the other for the two surround speakers (wired in parallel). To reach loftier heights of power and flexibility you can buy two (or more) new power amps or any of the growing number of multichannel amps. However you slice it, when the question is power, more is almost always better.

Surrounded by Features

Precisely which surround-processor niceties to look for is largely a matter of taste and budget. But be-

yond Dolby Pro Logic for movies and TV, and whatever additional ambience modes for music your personal preferences dictate, certain features are near necessities.

Virtually every outboard processor comes with a wireless remote control—but they are by no means created equal: Make sure the remote includes such essentials as master volume, individual center- and surround-channel volume, surround-mode selection and defeat, and audio mute. If the processor lacks automatic Dolby Surround input-balance, the ability to adjust the balance from your armchair is more than a luxury if you encounter a seriously out-of-balance videotape or TV broadcast—not so uncommon.

Most surround components include a visual display of some sort. Although seldom critical, a clear readout of basic settings—surround mode, master volume level, and relative levels of the center and surround channels—can be valuable, particularly if it's easily legible from across the room. A cramped, hard-to-read display will drive inveterate window-watchers nuts.

SINCE it's hard to tell what the future holds, pay attention to expansion options. Line-level outputs for all channels are important in a processor-amplifier (an unpowered processor *must* have them). Down the road, those outputs will enable you to substitute higher-power amplifiers for some or all of the onboard channels with ease. Line *inputs* to a processor-amp's power section add a further level of adaptability. And in both powered and unpowered models, a built-in tape-monitor/external-processor loop to replace the one it occupies on your receiver or main amplifier can be a lifesaver if you have several tape decks or signal processors.

In general, for pure, cinema-centric home theater, the simplest high-quality Dolby Pro Logic processor that fits the bill often gets the wallet's vote. But don't rule out music surround modes and DSP-derived ambience: Many a two-channel purist has been converted, willy-nilly, by living with a well-designed example for a few weeks. And by all means include basic audio quality prominently on your list of "features." Surround processors are, after all, hi-fi components: Hold them to the same standards of definition, dynamic range, and musicality you would demand of any other modern audio component, and you won't go wrong. □

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CIRCLE NO. 30 ON READER SERVICE CARD

PORTABLE CD



Don't leave home without it

A DOZEN years ago, when the compact disc was still in its infancy, Sony engineers demonstrated a prototype of their first CD player, later named the CDP-101. Journalists marveled that such sophisticated technology could be consolidated into a chassis that was about the size of a standard audio component. What many writers didn't notice—until Sony revealed it—was the thick cable running from the bottom of the player, through a hole in the demonstration table, and into a circuit-board rack the size of two hefty Samsonite suitcases.

Fortunately, by the time the CDP-101 hit store shelves a year or so later, the engineers had managed to squeeze everything into one relatively small 14 x 4 x 12½-inch chassis—a feat made possible by IC (integrated circuit) technology, which enabled entire circuit boards to be replaced with tiny silicon chips. IC's also set the stage for the development of battery-powered hand-held players a couple of years later and eventually CD-based portable systems. Hand-held CD players, which were pretty petite to begin with (see "35 Years of Portable Audio," page 75) have since shrunk to astonishingly small sizes, play longer on batteries, cost less, and sound much better than anyone could have reasonably imagined twelve years ago.

When it comes to shopping for portable CD, there are two basic configurations to consider: the hand-held player and the so-called boom-

box, a self-contained playback system with speakers and a carrying handle. Which is better depends on your listening habits. Hand-held players are considerably smaller and more portable than boomboxes, but they limit you to headphone listening—at least as far as on-the-go use is concerned. Boomboxes, at the expense of greater size and weight, let you take an entire playback system with you—wherever you go—and share the music with friends. Clearly, if you like to socialize around the pool, play volleyball at the beach, or tailgate at the stadium, a boombox is best.

Share the Emotion

While boomboxes have a reputation that is, well, less than sterling, fidelity is improving as more manufacturers use clean amplifiers and speakers that are capable of pounding out much more than incredibly distorted bass. Although there's a limit to the sound-pressure levels you can achieve with D cells, a good boombox should be able to deliver decent sound quality at moderate listening levels. In theory, the best-sounding systems should be the ones that forgo flashing LED's and excessive circuitry—like equalizers, bass boosters, and spatial expanders. Such questionable amenities rarely improve fidelity (which is different from listening fun) and often make the sound worse. Alas, perhaps reasoning that a boombox stripped of these features cannot qualify as a boombox, manufacturers are reluctant to omit such bells and whistles. Fortu-

BY KEN C. POHLMANN



ILLUSTRATION BY MARK MCCONNELL

PORTABLE CD



nately, there are some models that at least pay attention to the basics of CD player, amplifier, and speaker quality.

You can spend less than \$200 or as much as \$500 on a boombox. All have a tuner and many include a dual-well cassette deck for CD-to-tape and tape-to-tape dubbing (or deck-to-deck relay play), while some of the smaller boxes have a single cassette mechanism. If you don't own a high-quality component cassette deck and are interested in making "down-and-dirty" cassettes for casual listening, then tape facilities can be a plus. If, on the other hand, you don't plan to use the boombox for recording or playing tapes, go for a CD-only model. Why pay for a tape deck you're not going to use? Besides, CD-only boxes should have a better CD section or, at the very least, a lower price tag.

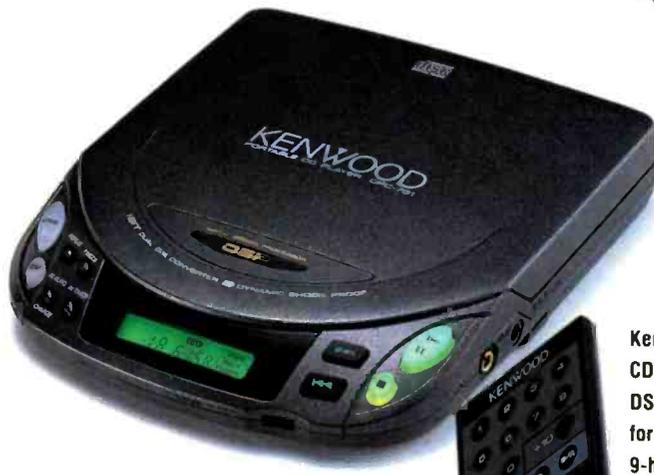
Whether you're buying a boombox for sound quality or quantity, don't overlook its size and weight. They can weigh anywhere from several pounds on up to 20 pounds, with many models weighing in at 10 to 12 pounds. Although some folks think "the bigger the better" and equate boombox size with status, systems that are big and heavy are ultimately a drag. The really bulky ones tend to be left at home, in which case why buy a portable? (A shelf system—or, better, full-size components—would make more sense.) The trick is to find a box that is small, easy to carry, and sounds good. Be sure to inspect the carrying handle before you open your wallet; cheap boomboxes have been known to separate from their handles at the worst possible moments—like when you're stepping into a rowboat.

And speaking of separation, some

Denon's DCP-30 CD player (\$200) offers sixteen-track programming and an equalizer switch for headphone listening. It measures 5½ x 1½ x 6½ inches and weighs less than a pound.



The two cassette wells on Panasonic's RX-DT707 CD boombox (\$450) are concealed by a motorized control panel that rises automatically when any button on the main unit is pressed.



Kenwood's DPC-731 CD player (\$249) has three DSP modes, including one for sing-along, a snap-on 9-hour battery extender, and a digital output.





Weighing in at just 11.8 ounces, Onkyo's DX-F5 CD player (\$290) boasts a back-lit display, twenty-four-track programming, and a wireless remote control.

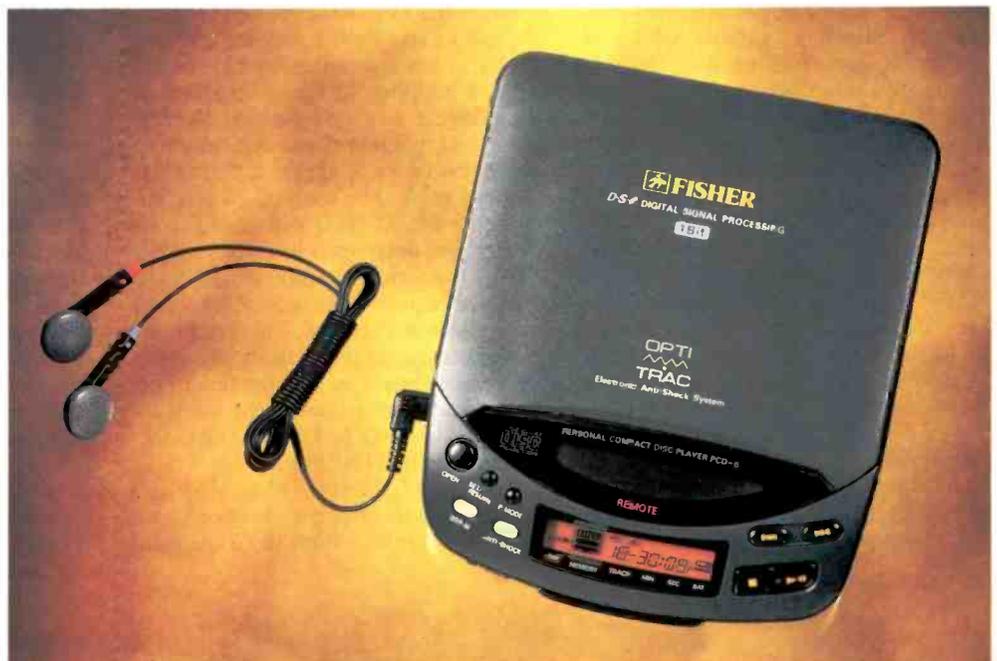
Sanyo's CDP-55 (\$190) CD player has a digital antishock circuit and includes DC-power and cassette adaptors for use with a tape-based car stereo system.

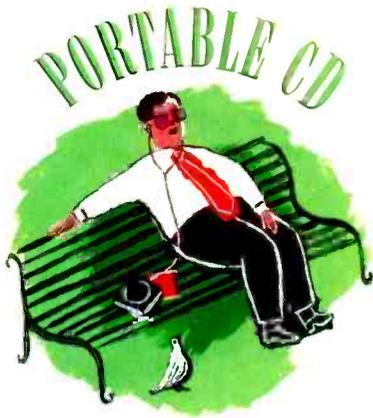


Alwa's CSD-EX03 CD boombox (\$150) weighs in at 7.7 pounds, plus the two AAA batteries it requires, and measures only 11¼ x 6 x 9 inches. Total power output is 2 watts per channel.



Fisher's PCD-6 CD player (\$300) has a four-mode DSP-based equalizer and a buffer memory that stores 4 seconds of music to help prevent gaps in playback if the unit is jarred. A car adaptor kit is included.





boomboxes have detachable speakers so that you can move them apart for a better stereo spread. While useful, particularly if you plan to use the box at home a lot, detachable speakers can be a burden to those on the move. Speaker wires tend to tangle, and the speakers themselves can fall off if they're not properly secured. My advice is, stick with built-in speakers.

Playing time is another very important consideration. There's nothing worse than having your batteries go belly up halfway through your beach barbecue. Generally speaking, a well-made boombox with a fresh set of batteries should be able to provide an afternoon of playing time. Of course, the louder you play the box and the more you use controls like track search and scan, the faster the batteries will run out. Another point worth considering is the number and size of the batteries the unit accepts. All things being equal, a box that accepts ten D cells should play longer than one that takes six. (By the way, alkaline batteries cost more, but they last far longer than the standard variety.)

Finally, you may want to consider a boombox with unorthodox features. Citizen offers a karaoke-equipped model that lets you sing along through a supplied microphone—a great way to amuse friends. Sony has a new bright-yellow CD model in its Sports series that's described as "splash resistant"—perfect for beach bums who like to park themselves close to the water. Sharp recently became the first company to offer a boombox with a CD changer. Slated to hit store shelves in August, it features an unconventional seven-disc stocking mechanism and a dual-well cassette deck as well as the obligatory three-band equalizer.

A Private Affair

If yours is a more solitary nature, then you'll probably find hand-held CD players more appealing. There's

nothing quite like having a personal CD player, a wallet full of CD's, and a good novel on a long airplane ride. On the other hand, before packing your player, you may want to check with your airline to make sure it hasn't placed any restrictions on the use of electronic devices during flight.

Hand-held players are marvelous inventions. For as little as \$100 (or as much as \$500), you can buy a mini CD player that provides essential features like track skip and scan as well as favorites like track/disc repeat and random play. Most players also offer some degree of programmability, and many offer a bass-boost switch that, depending on the headphones you're using, can provide fuller sound. Hand-helds typically run on standard AA or rechargeable batteries and include an AC adaptor so that they can be plugged into an electrical outlet. Many models also have a digital output, a "hold" switch that prevents accidental button operation, and an automatic turn-off circuit to conserve battery power—all worthwhile features. Some models even include a tiny wired or wireless remote control, which might come in handy if you plan to tap into a home or car sound system. Other features you might come across include a simple equalizer, a handful of DSP ambience settings, and some sort of antishock mechanism (more on that later).

ALTHOUGH the footprints of many hand-helds are roughly the size of a CD jewel box—give or take a few eighths of an inch—height and weight can vary significantly from model to model. The thinnest models are an inch or less thick ($\frac{3}{8}$ inch in the case of the JVC XL-P90) and weigh a pound or less with batteries. Playing time, which can range from 1½ hours to a whopping 10 hours, is often a function of size and weight. Models with long playing times typically use larger batteries or accept a "booster" battery pack. For example, Technics says its SL-XPS900 will play for 10 hours, but only when its rechargeable Ni-Cd batteries are augmented by a plug-in battery pack containing two AA alkaline batteries. Of course, as with boomboxes, listening habits have a distinct impact on running time: The more you skip around from track to track or use EQ or DSP circuits, the shorter the playing time.

Hand-held players also vary in terms of their sensitivity to shock and vibration, ranging from the hypersen-

sitive to the remarkably robust. Players that are the most resistant to shock contain well-engineered laser pickups with a sophisticated suspension mechanism as well as a buffer memory that stores several seconds of music; when the player is jolted and the laser pickup loses its place, information continues to flow from the buffer while the laser reorients itself. The best way to gauge a player's immunity to shock (especially if it's sitting on a store shelf) is to tap its top and sides. The best players will tolerate several good thwacks. One final note: Even players that have a buffer memory are not really designed for jogging. Leisurely strolls, yes, but unless you are a very dainty runner indeed, they will skip.

ELECTRONICS aside, one sure-shot way to improve sound quality is to acquire good headphones. While most hand-helds come with earphones, or "earbuds," they often don't sound all that good—let alone fit comfortably in your ears. In addition to increasing comfort, "real" headphones usually sound much better. "Open-air"-type headphones, which sit on the ear rather than covering it, make the most sense, especially if you plan to be on the go—it's possible to become dangerously oblivious to the outside world with "cup"-style headphones (although they're great for in-home listening). Make sure the headphones you're considering have a mini-jack connector or can be easily adapted to mini-jack. Finally, with most phones and players you should not push the volume beyond the "4" or "5" setting (in a range of 1 to 10): Not only will the sound begin to distort, but you may hit sound-pressure levels that can permanently damage your hearing over an extended period.

A great side benefit to owning a hand-held player is that it can be used in your car—without the headphones, please! You'll need a power adaptor that plugs into the cigarette lighter and a cassette-shaped adaptor that converts the CD signal into magnetic form for playback through the tape player. Although a few hand-held players, such as Fisher's PCD-3, include these accessories, they are more often available as part of an optional kit or from accessory companies like Recoton and Scosche. A shock-absorbing mounting plate is another accessory that might be worth looking into, depending on the mounting options in your vehicle. In addition to providing a fairly stable mounting platter, some

THE NEW KIDS

ALTHOUGH hand-held CD players are quite petite these days, they're not the only digital game in portablesville. Even though DAT failed to make an impact, many diehard fans of that format still swear by hand-held DAT machines like Sony's WMD-DT1, which measures $4\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{13}{16}$ inches and weighs a mere 9 ounces. More significantly, the quest for portability—and a successor to the decades-old analog tape format—has led to the introduction of the Digital Compact Cassette (DCC) and MiniDisc (MD) formats. Both offer a recording option and boast good shock immunity.

Sony's MZ-1 player/recorder (lower right, \$750) and MZ-2P player (\$550) were the first portable MD units on the market. In addition to having a digital input and output, both incorporate a smart charging system that *discharges* the battery before recharging it (if nickel-cadmium batteries are not fully discharged before being recharged, they lose storage capacity, which translates into reduced running time). Although the playing time of these first-generation Sony MD portables is limited to an hour or so, and they are bulkier than hand-held CD players, the MiniDiscs themselves are only about one-fourth the size of standard CD's and are housed in protective caddies. Sony's buffer



memory chip stores about 9 seconds of music, which greatly reduces the likelihood of audible pausing and skipping. As the hardware shrinks, MD could become a favorite of music lovers on the move.

The Sony MD portables are not alone anymore. In recent months they have been joined by the Aiwa AMD-100 player/recorder (\$800), essentially a clone of the MZ-1, the Sanyo MDG-P1 player (\$600), which in addition to being smaller than the Sony units boasts a 12-second buffer memory, and the Sharp MD-S10 player (\$550) and MD-D10 player/recorder (\$600), which are the smallest and lightest MiniDisc portables available, weighing in at a mere 10.2 and 11.6 ounces, respectively. The MD-S10 measures $3\frac{5}{16} \times 1 \times 4\frac{5}{16}$ inches, which except for a thickness of $1\frac{3}{16}$ inches are the same dimensions as the MD-D10. The controls

and display are built into the MD-D10, whereas with the smaller MD-S10 they are situated on the remote control.

Although the first DCC decks were designed for home listening, the second generation provides portability. The Panasonic RQ-DP7 (left, \$549) is a hand-held player that offers 2 hours of playing time and a digital output. It measures $4\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ inches and weighs 1.1 pounds. Because DCC is a tape format, it is inherently resistant to shock and vibration. As with its home counterparts, the RQ-DP7 plays prerecorded DCC cassettes, DCC cassettes recorded by the user, and analog cassettes. Philips has a similar player, the DCC130 (\$549). But if you want to make compilation tapes, you'll have to buy a home deck, since a portable recorder is not yet available. —K.P.



of them include a gooseneck arm for added flexibility.

Although hand-helds are designed to be moved to and fro, the reality is that they often wind up spending much of their operating lives indoors on a shelf or table—in some cases, hitched to an external audio system. If you suspect that will happen in your case, then there's no need to worry about shock resistance. (It really pays to consider for a few moments how a hand-held CD player might—or might not—fit into your leisure time.) Focus instead on home-oriented features like a digital output, which I believe is essential for any CD player. A digital output passes musical data directly to an outboard digital-to-analog (D/A) converter or to any downstream component that has a digital input. And if you're a recording enthusiast, it lets you bypass both the hand-held's D/A

converter and the recorder's A/D (analog-to-digital) converter when you record a CD onto DAT, DCC, or MD, assuring the cleanest possible copy (and eliminating the need to adjust input levels on the recorder).

Much ink (and some blood) has been spilled over the alleged differences between optical and electrical (coaxial) digital connections and cables. For one reason or another, many audiophiles favor electrical connections over the standard fiber-optic variety. But having tested both types of connections, and monitored error rates, I'm convinced that both work equally well when properly designed and used. For reasons having largely to do with space conservation, optical connectors are becoming the norm on hand-helds. Either way, make sure that any components you plan on hitching together have compatible in-

puts and outputs. Another key consideration for home-bound hand-helds is the mini wireless remote control—many models offer this convenience.

FROM a price/performance point of view, no audio technology comes close to portable CD. The fact that players operate on a few volts of battery power and are capable of delivering good to excellent fidelity is nothing short of astounding. But technology never stands still, and with the advent of new formats such as DCC and MD (see "The New Kids" above), it seems inevitable that the CD will someday (perhaps many years in the future) seem bulky and clumsy. Until then, pick out a CD portable—with or without a handle—and revel in the fact that it fits inside your Samsonite instead of towering beside it. □

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THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF PORTABLE AUDIO

1958

1993

Think back for a moment and try to remember the first time you encountered a “portable” audio component. My first was a rather clunky hand-me-down record player that my brother and I used to (unwittingly) deface Beatles 45’s. Then my father picked up a pocket AM radio at the local Radio Shack so he’d never have to miss the Yankees again. Personally, I liked the little bugger for music (even though it made the speaker in the dash of our aging Comet sound good). And I’ll never forget the newspaper photo of my uncle trudging through a field in Army fatigues carrying one of those AM/FM transistor radios that everybody owned—you know the kind, with the handle and the telescoping antenna. Except for my acquisition of a low-fi portable cassette player, things were pretty quiet during the Seventies, until one day I walked into a hi-fi shop where a college buddy of mine worked as a salesman. He was holding a little box and wearing some funny-looking headphones. Excitedly, he waved me over. “You’ve got to hear this!” he practically yelled. “It’s *incredible!*” And it was—my first run-in with a Walkman. Next came the tiny CD players and the boomboxes. Portable audio has undergone a revolution in the past decade—one that continues today with near jewel-box-size CD players and hand-held MD and DCC players. Curious to see just how far we’ve come, I combed the STEREO REVIEW archives in search of portable audio devices. For a peek at what I found, turn the page.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARK FALLS

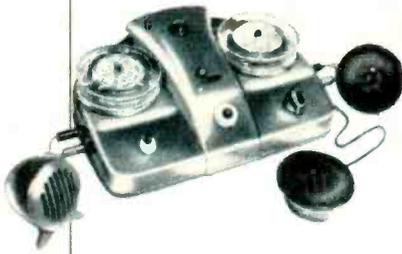
StereoReview

35

35TH ANNIVERSARY

BY BOB ANKOSKO

1958



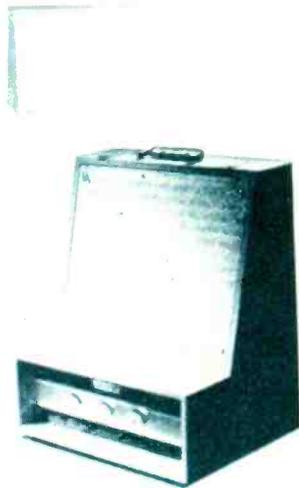
"World's Lowest Priced Tape Recorder!" screamed an ad for the Tel-Tape transistor tape recorder in the June 1958 issue of *HiFi & Music Review*. Offered by Filnor Products for \$29.95, the West German import weighed 2 pounds and ran on four C-cell batteries.

1960



Radio Shack's version of the classic pocket AM radio was a forerunner of the Walkman. Offered for \$9.95 under the Archer label, the battery-powered transistor radio had a built-in speaker, measured 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 4 x 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and weighed about 10 ounces.

1961



Early boombox: Bell Sound's Model 2418 hi-fi system was hailed as an innovation by *HiFi! Stereo Review* editors. The \$180 system packed a 30-watt stereo amp and a pair of 8-inch speakers (one detachable) in a luggage-type case.

1962



The Royal 2000, Zenith's version of the classic carry-along AM/FM transistor radio, sold for \$150. It weighed 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds, measured 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{3}{32}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches, and was powered by eight flashlight batteries. A 5 x 7-inch speaker, headphone jack, and telescoping FM antenna were included.

1962



The KLH Model Eleven phonograph was "26 pounds light and small enough to fit under a jettliner seat," boasted an ad in the October 1962 issue of *HiFi! Stereo Review*. It featured two detachable speakers and a 30-watt transistor amp with bass and treble controls.

1968



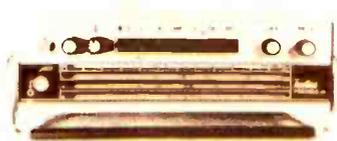
SJB's ST-120G Portamount offered a partial solution to the format wars of the day: The 7-pound deck played both four- and eight-track tape cartridges and offered a built-in amp and speakers as well as a DC adaptor to run off a car's cigarette lighter—all for \$140.

1969



The cassette was catching on. Concord advertised the AC or battery-powered F-400 recorder in *STEREO REVIEW* for "less than \$180." It featured "two high-power stereo amplifiers and acoustically matched speakers," automatic recording-level control, VU meters, and a microphone.

1971



Of the fifteen portable FM radios evaluated by Julian Hirsch, Tandberg's 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -pound, \$110 TP-41 was singled out as having "by far the best FM performance, and . . . excellent audio quality." It had a large 5 x 9-inch speaker and ran on six D-cells or a car battery.

1979



The era of personal stereo was born with Sony's revolutionary Walkman. For the first time, remarkable fidelity was possible from a headphone-equipped cassette player that could fit in a shirt pocket. The \$200 TPS-L2 Walkman featured a built-in recording mike and headphones that weighed just 1 ounce. By 1982, sales of personal cassette players had soared into the millions and headphoned joggers had become city fixtures.

1984



The personal stereo revolution continued with Sony's \$300 D-5 Discman, the first hand-held CD player. Bulky by today's standards, the 1¼-pound player measured 5 x 1½ x 5¼ inches and came with a battery pack that took six C-cells. An awestruck Julian Hirsch wrote: "Here we have a pocket-size CD player, in most respects a better performer than those early [home players], at about a third of their price."

1985



The Technics SL-XP7 hand-held CD player was a mite smaller than Sony's D-5, making it, for a while, the "world's smallest." The \$300 player brought random-access programming and repeat play to the portables party.

1992



Although a prolonged copyright dispute effectively nipped DAT in the bud as a consumer format, DAT portables like Denon's \$900 DTR-80P recorder remain popular among enthusiasts and semi-pros. It measures 3¾ x 1¾ x 6¾ inches and weighs 1¼ pounds.

1992



The incredible shrinking CD player: Hand-held CD players of the latest generation aren't much bigger than a jewel box. At about ⅝ inch thick, JVC's XL-P90 CD player is among the smallest. The \$450 player has a digital output and is loaded with features.

1993



The MiniDisc (MD) format was conceived by Sony with on-the-go users in mind. Sharp's \$549 MD-S10 is the smallest MD player to date, measuring 3⅞ x 1 x 4⅝ inches and weighing 10 ounces (see "The New Kids," page 73).

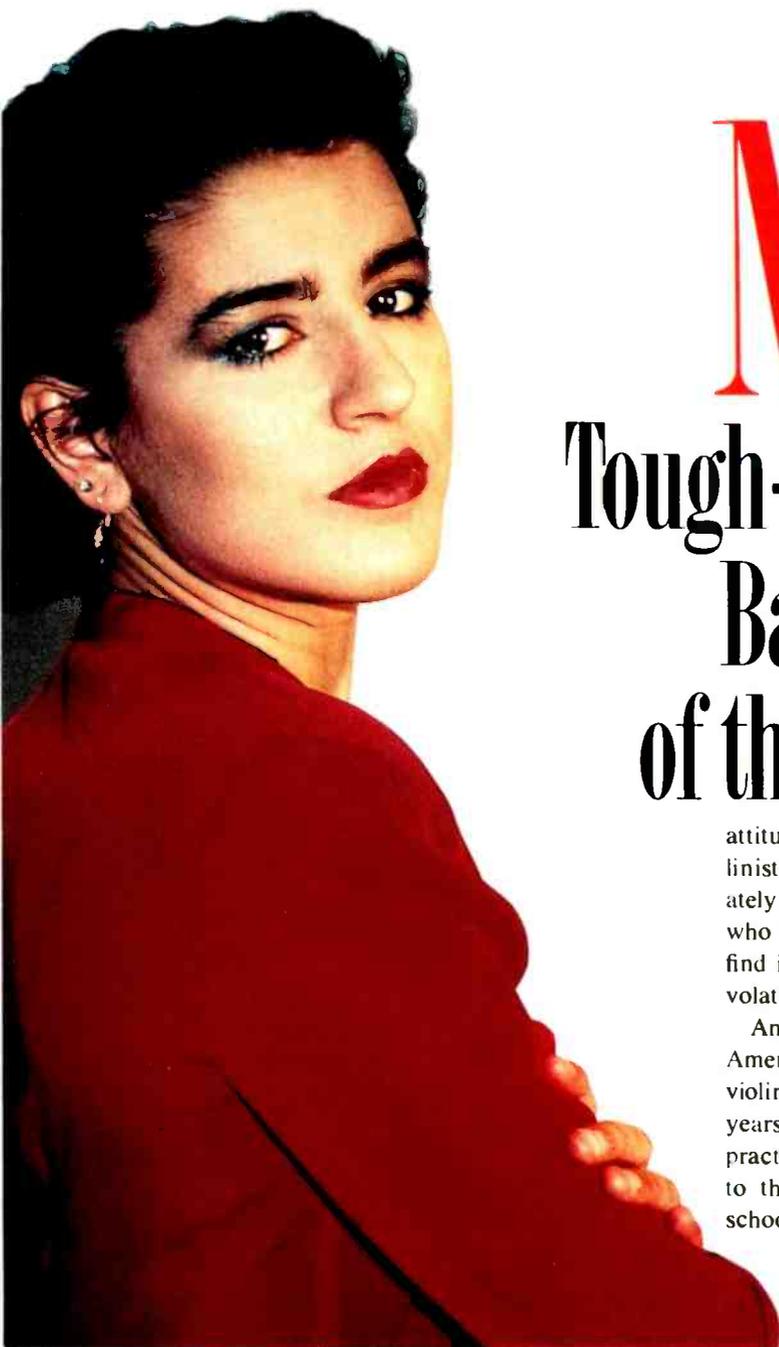
1993



Following the release of Digital Compact Cassette (DCC) home recorders late last year, Philips is readying the 1-pound DCC130 player for release by fall. The \$549 unit measures 4⅓ x 1⅞ x 4⅓ inches.

NADJA SALERNO-SONNENBERG

by K. Robert Schwarz



NADJA SALERNO-SONNENBERG slouches on the leather couch in the living room of her Manhattan apartment, chain-smoking cigarettes, talking with a husky, street-smart accent that sounds more like a rock-and-roller's than a classical musician's. One whole wall of the room is given over to a 45-inch stereo TV—ideal, she says mischievously, “for Oscar, Miss America, and Superbowl parties.” Mounted on an opposite wall is a 275-pound, 105-inch blue shark that she wrestled into submission off the coast of Long Island.

Tough-Talking Bad Girl of the Violin

Next to the shark, she plans to hang an alligator that she trapped in the Louisiana bayous.

Obviously, Salerno-Sonnenberg, now thirty-two, does not fit the stereotype of the refined, cultivated classical violinist. Indeed, her detractors would claim that she has parlayed her unconventionality—in dress, stage demeanor, and general

attitude—into the makings of a major career. Like the English violinist Nigel Kennedy, she's had to face charges that she deliberately crafted a provocative, marketable public image. Yet anyone who has listened to her frighteningly passionate playing would find it difficult to doubt her sincerity. For Salerno-Sonnenberg, volatility—living on the edge, you might call it—is a natural state.

And it seems that it always has been. Born in Rome of an Italian-American mother and a Russian father, Nadja did not ask for the violin, as many prodigies claim to have done. When she was five years old, her mother handed her a fiddle—and had to force her to practice. Three years later, the Salerno-Sonnenberg family moved to the suburbs of Philadelphia, where Nadja attended public school and studied violin at the Curtis Institute of Music.

She had a surprisingly normal childhood. "My main desire from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to sleep was to play. Not the violin—to play ball, play games in the street, swim in the neighbor's pool." Even then, she was a fighter, and when children would taunt her about her Italian accent or her ethnic food, she knew exactly what to do. "In elementary school, kids used to make fun of me because of the lunches I brought. My grandmother, being Sicilian, made me fried-pepper and scrambled-egg heroes. And these kids had bologna with the crusts cut off the Wonder bread!"

Although Salerno-Sonnenberg claims to have practiced only under duress, she certainly made rapid progress. At age ten she won a local competition and got to play the Bach A Minor Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra. And at fourteen she began attending the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, where she studied with the legendary Dorothy DeLay—who taught just about everybody from Pinchas Zukerman and Shlomo Mintz to Nigel Kennedy, Midori, and Cho-Liang Lin.

Three years later, at seventeen, Salerno-Sonnenberg moved to New York to attend Juilliard full-time, and that's when the trouble began. "Here I was in New York, and I was free. I had a thousand dollars, that was my entire life savings, and that went in a month and a half. I cut classes, fell in love, snuck into Yankee Stadium. It was a year full of wonder. I learned an enormous amount about life, but nothing about playing the violin."

In fact, so undisciplined was she that for seven months she stopped playing entirely. "It got to the point where I didn't even bring my fiddle anymore to my lesson. DeLay and I would just talk. She knew I had a lot of teenage angst going on, and she was patient because she knew I was a talent worth nurturing. But her patience ran out as well—and, boy, is she patient!"

DeLay essentially gave Salerno-Sonnenberg an ultimatum: Either take the violin seriously, or forget about being her student. That threat spurred the young woman into action. Not only did she rededicate herself to the violin, but she decided to enter the prestigious Walter W. Naumburg International Violin Competition. There was only one problem. After not having played for nearly seven months, she had less than three months to get ready to compete.

She dealt with the situation in a characteristically compulsive manner. "I went from one hole to the next. Now I practiced thirteen hours a day. Mentally, I was a basket case. I was trying to save myself, to save my life, to make some sort of future. My eating habits were so strange. Every day I ate fried sausages, drank a gallon of Coke, and had peanut butter and chocolate ice cream. And I was very dirty: I didn't wash, I didn't do laundry, I didn't see friends."

Salerno-Sonnenberg had hoped only to make the finals of the Naumburg, in order to reassure herself that she had what it took to be a violinist. Instead, in May 1981, at the age of twenty, she won the competition. If she hadn't been prepared to win, she certainly wasn't ready for what followed: a media blitz that, in typically fickle fashion, at first celebrated her unconven-

What you're looking at ain't necessarily what you're looking at, or what you



tionality, then reviled it. Feature articles on the tough-talking, baseball-playing bad girl of the violin led to appearances on the *NBC Nightly News*, *60 Minutes*, and the *Tonight Show*. "I wasn't prepared for all this, and I went through a period of several years when I was completely unaware of what the hell was going on. So when the backlash came, I was stunned."

What was it about Salerno-Sonnenberg that made such waves in the staid classical-music world? First of all, there were her clothes—pants or jumpsuits, but no gowns. She claims

may know about me ain't necessarily so.

that those clothes were chosen with an eye toward comfort, not notoriety. "It never occurred to me that this would cause a stir. Afterwards, I felt, can the classical-music community be so anal as to make a big deal out of this? Who cares?"

But critics did seem to care. In some misplaced fit of sexist pique, reviews began to focus on her clothes more than her playing. And then there was her stage manner. Onstage, she looked—and still looks—as if she were wrestling with demons, both internal and external. She writhes and grimaces, she stomps her feet, she seems alternately enraptured and on the verge of tears.

Back in the mid-1980's, she was accused of deliberately creating this intensely physical stage presence. She insists today, as she did then, that it is entirely unconscious, an essential and natural part of her musicmaking. "It's not anything that I think about. I hardly have time to learn the notes; when am I going to find time to choreograph? It's the way I play when I practice at home, it's the way I played at my lessons. I think I do it instinctively, so that I can remain relaxed. If I stand still—and I try often at home to stand still—the playing suffers."

FINALLY, there was (and is) her playing itself. Highly unconventional and deeply personal, it is playing that wells up from her soul, playing that cares nothing for traditional pieties or historical niceties, playing of such emotional intensity as to take your breath away. It's playing that many purists despise. But it's unlikely that it leaves anyone untouched.

Dorothy DeLay has described Salerno-Sonnenberg's interpretations vividly: "Nadja never plays it safe. She very often puts herself in danger, playing as fast as she can move, taking a phrase to a really high point. Or in a slow passage, as she draws the bow across the string, the note gets softer and softer as she sustains the tone longer and longer. It's breathtaking—the kind of thing you hear opera singers do."

Today, if you go back and listen to Salerno-Sonnenberg's earlier recordings, such as the Mendelssohn concerto or the Brahms and Bruch concertos, it's easy to hear what caused such a critical uproar. She smashes the bounds of stylistic propriety, twisting phrases, pushing and pulling tempos. Instead of seeking a lush, polished



Salerno-Sonnenberg On Disc

BARBER:

Violin Concerto
SHOSTAKOVICH:
Violin Concerto No. 1

London Symphony, Maxim Shostakovich cond. EMI 54314.

BRAHMS AND BRUCH:

Violin Concertos
Minnesota Orchestra, Edo de Waart cond. EMI 49429.

BRAHMS:
Violin Sonata No. 2

FRANCK:
Violin Sonata
With Cecile Licad (piano).
EMI 49410.

MENDELSSOHN:
Violin Concerto
SAINT-SAËNS:

Havanaise; Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso
New York Chamber Symphony, Gerard Schwarz cond. EMI 49276.

VIVALDI:
The Four Seasons
Orchestra of St. Luke's. EMI 49767.

IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO
Violin encores. EMI 54576.

tone, she gladly sacrifices timbre in favor of brusque attacks and sharp accentuations. In this slash-and-burn violinism, it's intuitive, earthy passion that counts the most. But in our age of carbon-copy conservatory grads, how refreshing it is to hear a violinist who has such an immediately recognizable personality.

Still, Salerno-Sonnenberg is growing up, and some have observed that her tender, more introspective new CD of the Barber concerto (with the Shostakovich First) indicates a certain tempering of her interpretive eccentricities. She doesn't agree. "I feel a hundred percent more mellow about the business of music. But I don't think my playing has mellowed. If anything, I'm so much more confident in the stuff I do now that I'm even more impassioned and desperate than before—a *furioso* passage is extremely *furioso*. And I'm not afraid that if I overdo it, the critics will kill me. I just couldn't care less at this point."

Perhaps that's why she agreed to the highly provocative packaging of her most recent recording, a collection of encores entitled "It Ain't Necessarily So." On the cover, wearing a tight, skimpy black dress, she sits in a wooden chair under a skylight in a mysterious, ruined artist's loft.

"Because it was an album that had the potential to reach a nonclassical audience, because it had popular pieces in it, we agreed that the cover should be unconventional. When you think about the title, it could mean that what you're looking at ain't necessarily what you're looking at, or what you may know about me ain't necessarily so. So what we wanted was the juxtaposition of a very beautifully dressed woman in an atmosphere of decay."

Some of the encores are played with a searing romanticism, some are given a gauzy French veil, others are leavened with Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*. But none are less than absolutely personal. In fact, so bluntly honest is Salerno-Sonnenberg—in conversation as in music—that it's hard to see how anyone could call her insincere.

How, then, has she been able to endure all the scathing criticism? Maybe it's because she continues to sell out dozens of concerts a year. And her public, rather than being sleepy and blue-haired, is young, raucous, and devoted.

"Why would I put myself through this?" she asks, lighting one last cigarette. "Why not play it safe and get those nice reviews that don't offend anybody? You want to know what the payoff is? It's seeing a girl in the third row who's sixteen years old with pink hair." She smiles with satisfaction. "That's really nice." □

K. Robert Schwarz is a free-lance music journalist who frequently appears in the *New York Times*, *Stagebill*, and other publications.

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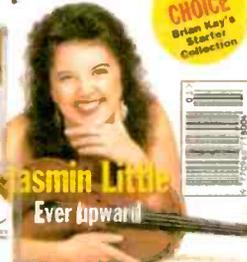
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BEST OF THE MONTH REVIEWS

STEREO REVIEW'S
CRITICS CHOOSE
THE OUTSTANDING
CURRENT RELEASES

Patty Loveless: A Country Singer Who's Not Afraid to *Sound* Like a Country Singer

WHO says time travel is impossible? Someone who hasn't heard "Only What I Feel," the sixth album by Patty Loveless. Listen to her hit the piercing, mournful high notes of *Love Builds the Bridges (Pride Builds the Walls)*, and you're transported to a backwoods porch in the 1930's, when country music was just becoming "country music." Or listen to the electric piano dance along to the fleet, sassy *You Will* and enjoy the kind of rockified country that's become the flavor of the decade in Nashville. These stylistic touchstones and others from the different eras of country music blend together seamlessly in "Only What I Feel" because Loveless cares less about sounding fashionable than about making emotional sense.

What's more, "Only What I Feel" sounds like a country album made by someone who isn't afraid to sound like a country singer. It doesn't sound, for example, like an album made by someone who's been studying Bonnie Raitt, one of the strongest influences on today's crossover-minded country women. Loveless has shown some of these tendencies before, but she's now become more distinctive. Part of the difference is instrumental—the arrangements aren't saturated with pedal-steel guitar and fiddle, but they haven't been avoided, either, or lost in the mix. Then there's Loveless's more traditional vocal styling, actually just a smidgen more of a sharp, nasal edge on some phrases. This is the way all country women were expected to sound at one time, and Loveless is willing to seem a little corny if it makes the right emotional point.

And these songs give her the right emotional points to make. This album is a catalog of lovesick complaints, from the deceptively breezy loneliness of *Mr. Man in the Moon* to the grab-his-lapels-and-tell-him-off spunk of *Blame It on Your Heart*. But the topper of this strong collection is the one song that isn't entirely about romance. *How Can I Help You Say Goodbye* tells the story of three farewells—to a childhood friend, to a soon-to-be-ex-husband, and to the dying mother who has always been there to help her daughter say goodbye. The situ-



ations are as simple as they are universal, and Loveless lets the feelings they generate come out naturally.

The more conservative approach of "Only What I Feel" might be tied to two different developments in Loveless's life. She's on a new record label, Epic, and no longer being co-produced by folk-rock guru Tony Brown. And the greater clarity of her singing might be related to the successful vocal-cord surgery she underwent last fall. But whatever the reason, or reasons, Loveless is now less likely to be confused with Reba, Wynonna, or any of the others we know

on a first-name basis. In a career that has already seen considerable success, "Only What I Feel" is a major step forward.
Ron Givens

PATTY LOVELESS

Only What I Feel

You Will; How About You; Nothin' but the Wheel; Love Builds the Bridges (Pride Builds the Walls); Mr. Man in the Moon; Blame It on Your Heart; You Don't Know How Lucky You Are; All I Need (Is Not to Need You); What's a Broken Heart; How Can I Help You Say Goodbye
EPIC 53236 (35 min)



African-American Concert Classics

AFRICAN-AMERICAN musicians have been working and trying to achieve recognition in the concert hall for a long time. Scott Joplin wrote two operas and a ballet. James Reese Europe formed his Clef Club Orchestra—a symphony orchestra with banjos!—at least ten years before Paul Whiteman gave his famous concerts. James P. Johnson wrote a piano concerto, and W. C. Handy organized Carnegie Hall concerts. But up-town acceptance of black music was very slow in coming.

William Grant Still, born the son of a Midwestern bandmaster in 1895, was the leading black American “classical” composer of his generation. He studied in Little Rock, Arkansas, at the Oberlin Conservatory, at the New England Conservatory, and in New York with Edgard Varèse. He worked with (or for) W. C. Handy, played in the pit band for the musical *Shuffle Along*, composed and arranged for two radio networks and for Warner Bros. films, and had his music performed by the major Eastern symphonic organizations, including the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra. In short, he just about covered the territory. Still became part of New York City’s bohemian, avant-garde life in the 1920’s. Later he consciously rejected avant-gardism as too elite and turned toward a much more accessible romantic style incorporating elements from black musical tradition. His Afro-American Symphony (as No. 1 was called) generated a lot of interest in its day—the early 1930’s—but later generations found it tame, and, truth to tell, it is closer to Dvořák in spirit than to Gersh-

win, let alone Duke Ellington or Jelly Roll Morton. But it is written with easy skill and, like some of Joplin’s music, evokes an idyllic age that ought to have been, even if it never really was. The intensity and rhythm, the passion for life, that we might associate with Afro-American music is barely hinted at, but the sweetness and melodic drive are genuine and very fresh.

The case of Duke Ellington is much more complex. Though only four years younger than Still, he seems to belong to a later generation. He showed an interest in expanding his horizons throughout his long career, and his larger pieces, beginning with *Black, Brown and Beige* (written in the 1930’s, first performed—at Carnegie Hall—in 1943) have always commanded respect. Toward the end of his life he produced a series of important compositions including religious pieces, the “street opera” *Queenie Pie*, and several orchestral works. The best known of these is *The River*, which was inspired by the flow of a great stream

Duke Ellington (above) and William Grant Still



from its origins in the mountains to its end in the sea but also refers to the old preacher’s analogy between the course of a river and the course of life itself.

Ellington wrote at least ten pieces under the collective title *The River*, and there are several different realizations of the material. The version here, orchestrated by Ron Collier, is a suite of seven numbers. Ellington’s big-band jazz style, already very distinct and “cultivated,” dovetails easily with a rich, post-impressionist orchestral sound, and that contrast is fully exploited in this recording. I have mixed feelings about the authenticity of some of the realizations; as presented here, the music sometimes hovers or teeters uncertainly between kitsch and something deep and deeply felt. The swing moments generate a certain excitement but are also a little heavy-handed. Ultimately, though, the deeply felt wins out, and the performance by the Detroit musicians under Neeme Järvi, their East European conductor—on Chandos, an English label—has both style and vitality, two qualities that always suit Ellington perfectly. The orchestra is even more at home in the Still symphony: this is music in a well-known mode, and they know exactly how to deal with it. All in all, a major contribution to our understanding of the width as well as the depth of African-American musical culture. *Eric Salzman*

WILLIAM GRANT STILL: *Symphony No. 1 (“Afro-American”)*

DUKE ELLINGTON: *The River*
Detroit Symphony, Järvi
CHANDOS 9154

Blazing Prokofiev From Riccardo Muti

DURING his tenure as music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Riccardo Muti made some significant additions to that organization’s already enormous discography, mostly in the area of Russian music. Now, having become the orchestra’s conductor laureate, he has given us what is perhaps the most striking recorded document of their collaboration: a powerful, brilliant, altogether irresistible account of Prokofiev’s *Symphony No. 3*.

The Third is the symphony Prokofiev built in 1928 on material from his unproduced 1919 opera *The Flaming Angel* (which was, in fact, not produced until after his death). He had conceived the

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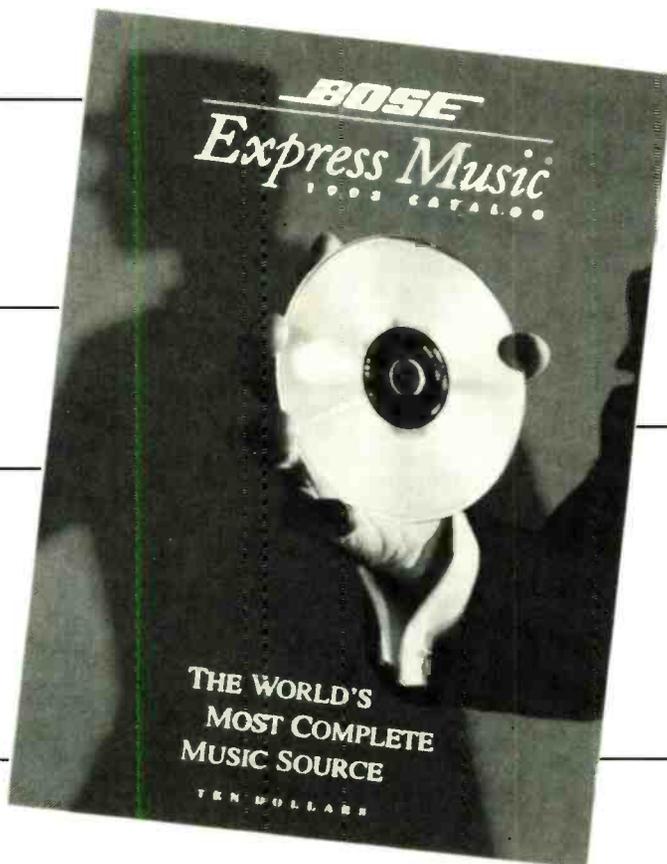
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opera symphonically, and he was encouraged by his friend and colleague Nikolai Miaskovsky to use its music for a full-scale symphony instead of a mere suite. Prokofiev used the opera material freely in creating his Third and declared that it "should be listened to just like any other symphony without a program." The music itself, however, declares its descriptive character as clearly as Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony or Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, and it works best when approached unapologetically as a sort of symphonic poem—or symphonic drama—in four movements. That is what Muti has done. His reading itself is aflame from first note to last, driving the music on its frankly demonic course in a way that sweeps away any thought of resistance—and the great orchestra's resources of sheer voluptuousness are released as they have not been in any of his earlier recordings.

All this gave the Philips production team both a challenge and an opportunity to which it responded gloriously. The CD is filled out with an account of Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony that is as apt to that work—fresh, witty, affectionate, without a hint of condescending cuteness—as the big, blazing one of the Third is to it. This recording will surely turn up on many lists as one of the memorable orchestral issues of the year, as well as a crowning achievement for Muti's years in Philadelphia.

Richard Freed

PROKOFIEV: Symphony No. 3; Symphony No. 1 ("Classical")
Philadelphia Orchestra, Muti
PHILIPS 432 992 (49 min)

CHRISTIAN STEINER/PHILIPS CLASSICS



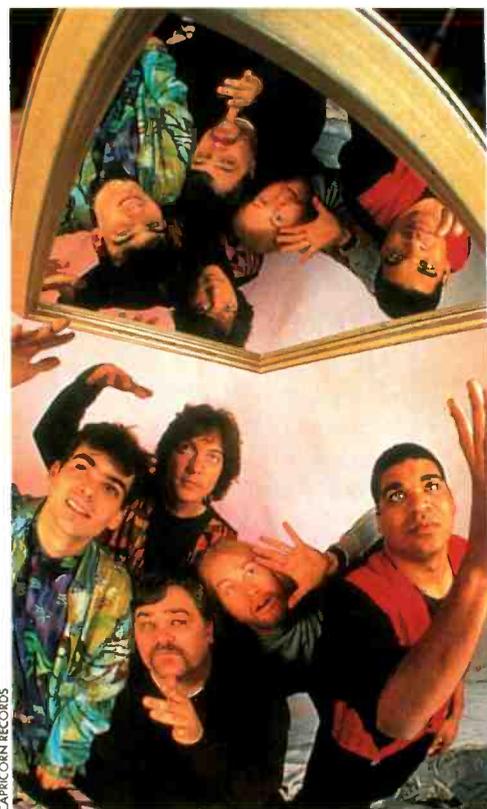
Hot Picking and Dixie Weirdness from Col. Bruce Hampton's Aquarium Rescue Unit

LET'S assume you've never heard the Hampton Grease Band's "Music to Eat," a 1970 double album of Southern-fried surrealism that was the second worst-selling album in Columbia Records' history. It is similarly unlikely that you've chanced upon "One Ruined Life (of a Bronze Tourist)" by Col. Hampton B. Coles (Ret.), the next installment in the fitful, offbeat career of Bruce Hampton. Finally, you probably didn't get up with the Late Bronze Age, a Hampton-fronted ensemble that made a few records in the Eighties.

All that's okay now, though, because at last the world seems ready to embrace Bruce Hampton. And why not? The lyrics in his new album, "Mirrors of Embarrassment," fall somewhere between Webb Wilder and Captain Beefheart, and his new band, the Aquarium Rescue Unit, is among the hottest bunch of pickers on the planet. Just imagine it—a six-string-bass jazz/funk virtuoso, a mandolin phenom with avant-garde leanings, a guitarist who'd have been a Southern-rock hotshot in another context, and a four-armed drummer (or so it seems), all coming together in a sound that combines the brisk tandem runs of bluegrass, the improvisational aspects of jazz, and the dynamics of rock. This group isn't so much a melting pot as a fusion reactor.

"Mirrors of Embarrassment," Hampton and Co.'s second release on Capricorn, surpasses their first, a live album, by virtue of a pristine production job. Guest banjo player Bela Fleck adds another layer to the instrumental mix in *Dead Presidents*, a bluegrass breakdown with a twist of Western Swing, and *Too Many Guitars*, a perplexed commentary on the grunge scene. "People jumpin' around / Smiles look like frowns / Couldn't tell exactly what they're gettin' down," Hampton warbles in *Too Many Guitars*, while the band segues into a long, deconstructive coda that would have done mid-1970's King Crimson proud. The Greek choruses of *No Ego's Under Water*, *It's Not the Same Old Thing*, and *Gone Today*, *Here Tomorrow* add to the fun ("Scarce, scared, scarred, sacred," they chant in a rush of near-anagrams in the last song).

Elsewhere, Hampton croaks like a lounge singer from hell in *Trondossa* (an invented name—such coinages are liberally scattered throughout his work) and



CAPRICORN RECORDS

puts a frisky spin on *Swing*, a number salvaged from "One Ruined Life." Most surprising, the final song in "Mirrors of Embarrassment" is a relatively straight jump blues, *Payday*, to which no irony or oddness is attached. Is the Colonel selling out? Nah. At the very end is a comic rap in which he impersonates a sleazy booking agent trying to round up an act to play "the Shannon Au Go-Go." It's a vintage moment of high comedy from a self-commissioned Colonel whose work is always finger-licking good.

Parke Puterbaugh

COL. BRUCE HAMPTON AND THE AQUARIUM RESCUE UNIT

Mirrors of Embarrassment

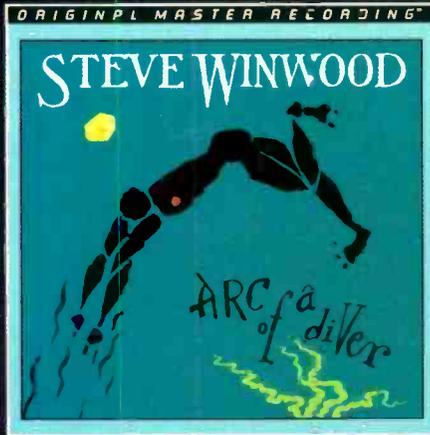
No Ego's Under Water; Lost My Mule in Texas; It's Not the Same Old Thing; Too Many Guitars; Gone Today, Here Tomorrow; Shoeless Joe; Lives of Longevity; Memory Is a Gimmick; Dead Presidents; Trondossa; Swing; Payday

CAPRICORN 42016 (49 min)

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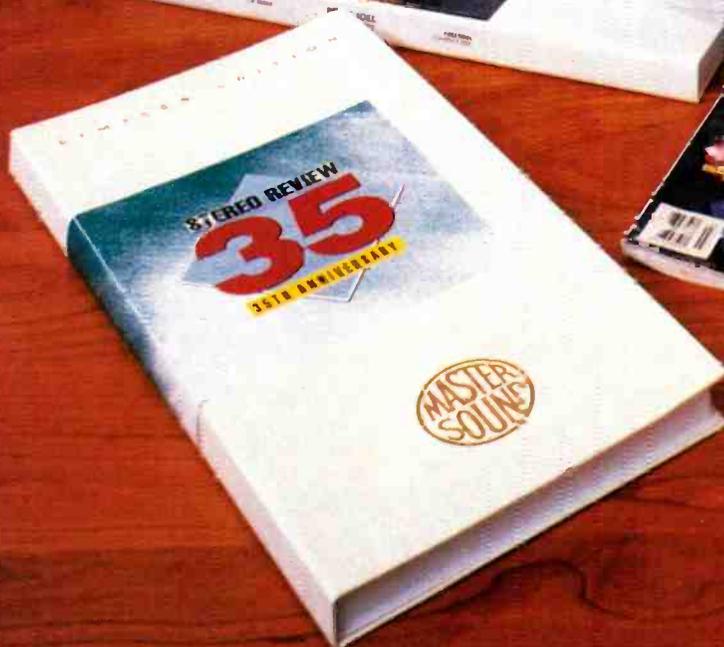
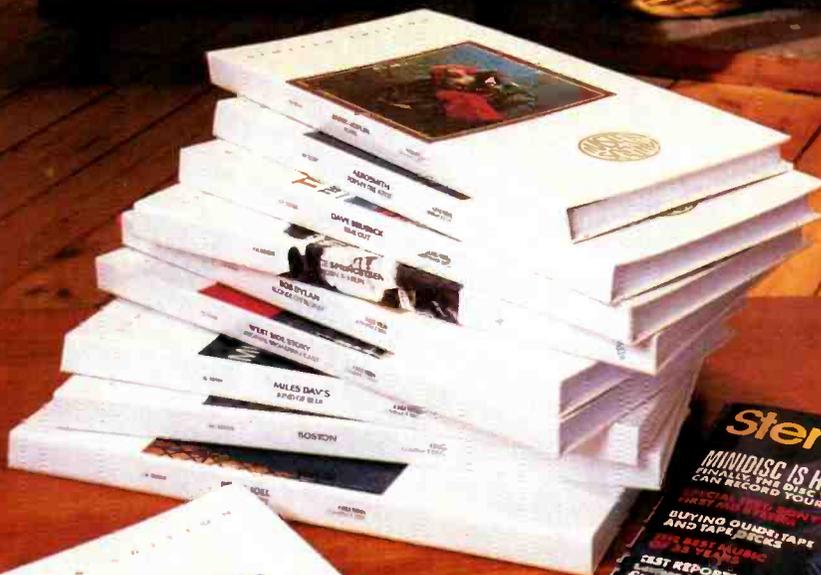
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Aerosmith, *Sweet Emotion* (from the "Toys In The Attic" album)

Boston, *Hitch A Ride* (from the "Boston" album)

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POPULAR MUSIC



NEW RECORDINGS REVIEWED
BY CHRIS ALBERTSON,
FRANCIS DAVIS, PHYL GARLAND,
RON GIVENS, ROY HEMMING,
ALANNA NASH,
PARKE PUTTERBAUGH, AND
STEVE SIMELS

AEROSMITH

Get a Grip

GEFFEN 24455 (62 min)

Performance: Forced

Recording: Good

The men of Aerosmith didn't become multi-platinum legends by thinking too hard. That's why it was such a surprise when they scored a big hit with the seriously thoughtful *Janie's Got a Gun*, the centerpiece of the band's 1989 "Pump" album. That song made people pay attention to Aerosmith again, for the first time after years of unconvincing hard rock. For those who thought that "Pump" was the beginning of another golden (if not platinum) age for the band, "Get a Grip" will be a disappointment. When they shoot from the crotch on this album, songs seem to miss their libidinous targets. *Flesh*, while catchy and energetic, lacks the testosterone force of the band's mid-career punch-outs. And when they try to be significant, the songs seem like Boy Scout civics lessons set to a polite rock soundtrack. *Eat the Rich*, which tries both to strut and to commentate, just seems forced. Separated from any significant content, Steven Tyler's yowls and Joe Perry's bluesy riffs don't really register. In fact, Aerosmith doesn't even sound much like itself on "Get a Grip," a title that the band should take more seriously. R.G.

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

Unplugged

CHRYSALIS 21994 (68 min)

Performance: Okay

Recording: Good

With this album, Arrested Development proves that rap can be just as powerful live as it is on record. But if you've already got the record—A.D.'s only previous effort, "3 Years, 5 Months & 22 Days in the Life of..."—then you don't really need this. That's especially true if you want to hear *Tennessee*, the group's breakthrough hit, which isn't included here. What you will find here, though, are instrumental versions of seven A.D. songs. Which really means that "Unplugged" can function as the rap equivalent of Music Minus One, making it the perfect gift for the budding rapper who needs some practice. R.G.

PAT BENATAR

Gravity's Rainbow

CHRYSALIS 21982 (45 min)

Performance: Miraculous

Recording: Good

How does Pat Benatar do it? How does she sing the platitudes that overcrowd this album and make them so entertaining? You'd almost believe that she believes she's singing about something significant, but these songs defy encapsulation. For the life of me, I don't



know, in *Everybody Lay Down*, why everybody should lay down, or why it will do them any good. But the tune has a terrific hook in the chorus, and enough guitar riffs to keep us distracted from such petty thoughts. That's true for virtually every song here—Benatar belts the phonemes in her best crystal-clear soprano, and the musical hooks just don't quit. Will this album put Benatar back on the charts, where she roosted for much of the Eighties? Only if these hooks sink in. R.G.

CARLENE CARTER

Little Love Letters

GIANT 24499 (43 min)

Performance: Zesty

Recording: Good

Yes, she has tight-fitting country genes—June Carter is mom, Carl Smith is dad, and Mother Maybelle Carter was grandma—but Carlene Carter is true to the ripsporting spirit of rockabilly. "Little Love Letters," the follow-up to her 1990 countrified "I Fell in

Love," is more rock and less 'billy. The songs, all written or co-written by Carter, nearly burst with energy, thanks to her no-holds-barred soprano and some of the twangiest guitar leads around. It doesn't hurt that these tunes show a wry sense of romance—"I love you so much I hate you," Carter mock-complains on *Every Little Thing*. Even if she gets a little sappy when things slow down, as in the weepy *Unbreakable Heart* or the we-can-get-back-together *World of Miracles*, she is never boring. And when she kicks into high gear, Carter is the liveliest female country-rocker since Wanda Jackson. R.G.

DEPECHE MODE

Songs of Faith and Devotion

SIRE/REPRISE 45243 (47 min)

Performance: Depressing

Recording: Okay

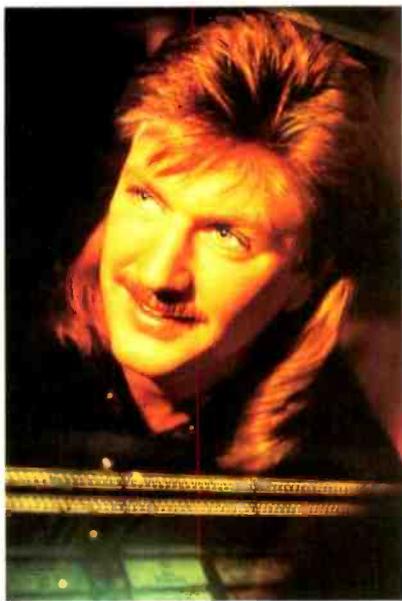
Talk about your ultimate broodfest. Depeche Mode has grabbed its own pet obsession—love—and taken it for a metaphysical ride. "Songs of Faith and Devotion" goes round and round the great traffic circle of life, where romance and spirituality merge until you can't wait for a ten-car pileup to end it all. Oh, sure, this album has its exhilarating moments, including the factory-fresh, U2-like clutter of *I Feel You* and the organized cacophony of *Get Right with Me*. But too much of it has the feeling of a serious statement—a collection of leaden insights presented with enough pretension to last several lifetimes. R.G.

Depeche
Mode:
not-so-sacred
songs



MICHAEL LAVINE/EMI

ANTON CORBIN/REPRISE



EPIC RECORDS

JOE DIFFIE

Honky Tonk Attitude

EPIC 53002 (40 min)

Performance: Good ol' country

Recording: Good

Joe Diffie has two personalities: good ol' boy and really good ol' boy. When he's good, he struts with the best of them, his baritone full of macho brass about drinkin' and foolin' around just a little. And when he's really good, he becomes sensitive, his baritone taking a deep dip into the well of sincerity about how much his woman means/meant to him. For the first half of "Honky Tonk Attitude," Diffie jumps back and forth between the two personas—and it works. The tunes are catchy, as well as true to life as Nashville knows it. Things get a little muddy in the middle with the goopy *Somewhere Under the Rainbow*, and both songs and singer seem a bit lost. Of course, the duality that Diffie starts with is simple, not to mention simplistic, but it's an entertaining fantasy while it lasts. *R.G.*

DONALD FAGEN

Kamakiriad

REPRISE 45230 (51 min)

Performance: Sleek

Recording: Pristine

In its heyday, Steely Dan offered something for everyone: solid chops and great solos to appease jazz snobs, catchy tunes that sneaked onto the AM side of the dial, guitar solos and static-free grooves that sated FM rockers, irony aplenty for critics, and danceable rhythms to hypnotize the disco crowd. Their genius was being able to address all factions simultaneously while still retaining an air of inscrutability. Steely Dan's seamless music both mirrored and mocked the smooth come-ons of the self-indulgent Seventies.

The Eighties, by contrast, were a lost decade for both partners in Steely Dan—Donald Fagen and Walter Becker—with precious little work issuing from either. Now here's Fagen with his first full-length studio album since 1982's "The Nightfly." More to the point, "Kamakiriad" qualifies as a virtual Steely Dan reunion, since Becker produced it and plays

bass and guitar on it. Needless to say, it's marked by superlative musicianship, class, and intellectual irony. "Kamakiriad" is a concept album of sorts, with a futuristic premise that actually allows Fagen to rewind and muse on the social mores of the last half-century or so. It might just be the first significant *fin de siècle* album. (On the other hand, its jazzy sheen makes for good mood music, so those who'd prefer not to think too much can simply pour another drink and absorb the vibe.)

"Kamakiriad" employs trademark Dan touches—cool horns that wash over the songs in gentle waves, a tight choir of background singers who make the choruses surge, lightly funky grooves that insinuate and tease. The lyrics are oblique, intimating a high-tech future in which sensory simulation overtakes real life while scanning the wreckage of the last few decades, particularly the numbing of the senses through sex and drugs. Only music looms on the landscape as an oasis for the revival of real feelings, and the warm, gregarious spirit of "Teahouse on the Tracks," at the close of the album, seems a real triumph. Whether or not this album gains Fagen readmittance to the charts is almost beside the point. The real question is do the charts deserve "Kamakiriad"? *P.P.*

BRYAN FERRY

Taxi

REPRISE 45246 (40 min)

Performance: Soporific

Recording: Fair

If this is all Bryan Ferry has to show for a five-year hiatus, he might as well have laid low and let his legend grow in absentia. This album of cover tunes pales next to his previous attempts at same, which offered startling recontextualizations of goofy pop and sacred icons, boldly placing Lesley Gore and Bob Dylan on approximately equal footing. "Taxi" is nowhere near as sure-handed or smart, offering a meager ten songs, heavy on early-Sixties girl group and R&B covers, with nary a newly refracted insight brought to any of them. Aside from the funky drum track that enlivens an otherwise tepid reading of *Amazing Grace*, this album is amazingly lifeless. Of greater concern is that Ferry, whose well-cultivated sense of irony and style fueled some of the canniest rock of the past few decades, sounds creatively fatigued. *P.P.*

PJ HARVEY

Rid of Me

ISLAND 514 596 (48 min)

Performance: Excoriating

Recording: Good

You must love, but you hate love. In fact, you love the hate that love provides. You are Polly (PJ) Harvey and you use rock-and-roll to wallow in your passion. For her first album, "Dry," Harvey tapped her wellspring of ugly emotions and produced a gusher. With "Rid of Me," she's created another album of dangerous, important music.

It's hard to describe the fury of Harvey's music without making it sound completely repulsive. That's because repulsion is one of the key ingredients in her songs, which start in her blackened heart and stay there. The push-pull of love takes Harvey to extremes, as in *Legs*, when she considers the possibility of

being jilted: "I might as well be dead / But I could kill you instead." In *Rub Till It Bleeds*, she calls her lover weak, only to take it back almost immediately, saying, "I was joking," and to offer, in acid conciliation, to "rub it / until it / bleeds." We don't really know what "it" refers to, but we don't really want to know. The fact of PJ Harvey's menace is enough for anyone.

The soundtrack for all this nastiness is rather skeletal. Guitar, bass, and drums come together in punchy rhythmic patterns, and melodies are spare, offered a little at a time, as if Harvey is clenching them in her fist. Only blasts of grunge guitar are used to modulate her rage. In "Dry," Harvey used her rhythm section of drummer Robert Ellis and bassist Steve Vaughan in a rather sinuous way, push-



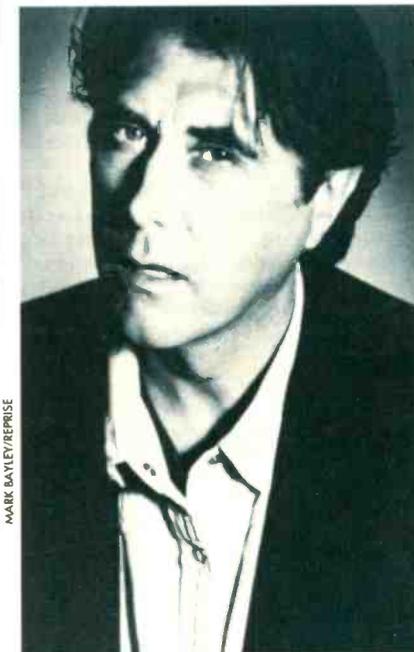
MARIA MOCHNACZ/ISLAND

PJ Harvey: love hurts

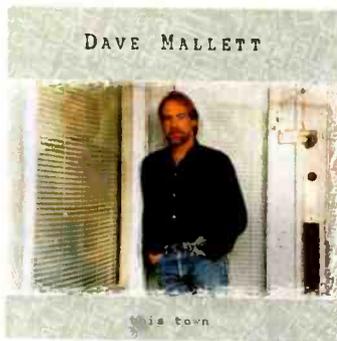
ing them forward in the mix and letting her own astringent guitar play off them. In "Rid of Me," Harvey puts the guitar up front so that she can wail without obstruction, but in doing so she also loses some of the tension between white hot brutality and dark beauty that made "Dry" so powerful.

To question this musical choice, however, is to assume that Harvey has a choice. She might not agree. Harvey has the ultimate case of the modern woman's blues—or perhaps they have her—and yowling to a beat may help her to eliminate anything that comes between her and the pain. *R.G.*

Bryan Ferry: exhausted?



MARK BAYLEY/REPRISE

**DAVE MALLETT****This Town**

VANGUARD 79466 (41 min)

Performance: Soothing
Recording: Very good

Heavily influenced by Gordon Lightfoot in both his song structure and his vocal timbre, folk poet Dave Mallett continues to write thoughtful, potent songs about a changing America—small-town *Main Street*, relationships disintegrated or strengthened by distance and fast-moving times, the vast chasm between this nation's poverty and wealth. In "This Town" as before, however, Mallett sometimes veers into too-precious territory (the deeply sensitive *Autumn*). Thankfully, he occasionally writes with Jon Vezner and Hal Ketchum, who add a helpful commercial tinge to some of his songs (*Old Soldiers*, previously

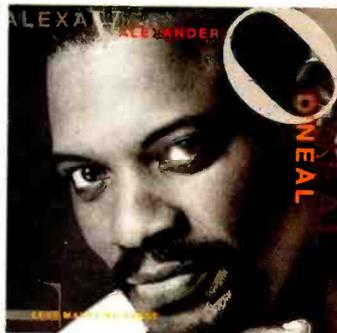
recorded by Ketchum), as well as a melodic and rhythmic lift from mid-tempo boredom. Backed by Ketchum, Nanci Griffith, and Kathy Mattea, and produced by Jim Rooney, the man behind Griffith's best acoustic records and now Ketchum's, Mallett has created a memorable album that evokes new ruminations and feelings every time you play it. It also offers continued hope about the natural melding of country and folk in the radio marketplace. **A.N.**

ALEXANDER O'NEAL**Love Makes No Sense**

TABU 9501 (51 min)

Performance: Sensual R&B**Recording:** Very good

Remember Isaac Hayes? His smoldering 20-minute story-raps were the backdrop



for many a romance back in the early Seventies. Barry White picked up the torch and carried it on into the bedroom with his inviting growls during the mid-Seventies. Well, the pace has picked up in the interim, and a guy has to get to the point a lot faster these days if he wants to score. For instance, Alexander O'Neal wastes no time in addressing his intentions in this palpably sensual album, where he stakes a claim to becoming the main man of R&B intimacy for the Nineties.

O'Neal has a more highly developed singing voice than either Hayes or White. Actually, his style is closer to that of the late Marvin Gaye—the entire framework and setting of *Aphrodisia*, for example, is derivative of the overtly sensual direction Gaye's work took after the landmark "What's Going On" album, right down to some of the chord changes and cooed vocal improvisations. But there's more of a rough, burly edge here—while Gaye implored, O'Neal commands.

The meat of this album is its center, featuring the Gaye-like *Love Makes No Sense*, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, *Change of Heart*, and *Lady*. You can forget the obligatory upbeat openers, but don't overlook O'Neal's performance in the superb finale, the Ashford and Simpson classic *Your Precious Love*. It assures us that this Nineties soul singer has mastered the art of drawing from the past to address the present in a most compelling fashion. **P.G.**

P.M. DAWN**The Bliss Album . . . ?**

GEE STREET 514 517 (60 min)

Performance: Lush**Recording:** Very good

Just before the music starts on "The Bliss Album . . . ?" you hear part of an astrological reading in which Prince Be, the mastermind of P.M. Dawn's intoxicating blend of rap and soul, is described as "a time traveler . . . maybe from another dimension . . . not an earthbound creature." This is the guy, you will remember, who earlier said, "Reality used to be a friend of mine." Well, it seems Mr. Be and Reality still don't talk much. This album is plump with loopy metaphysics, in which life is a struggle between good and bad, light and dark, between Prince Be and his spiteful alter ego, the Nocturnal. And the "heavier" his thinking gets, the more perplexing Prince Be becomes.

When Be comes closer to our earthly plain, he can make good, if somewhat metaphorical, sense. On *Plastic*, he launches a tough hip-hop counterstrike against the rappers who've attacked P.M. Dawn for being too passive, and on a number of tunes he becomes a direct, if soft-spoken, New Age romantic—"I tend to dream you when I'm not sleeping," he croons in *I'd Die Without You*. In fact, Be is much more expressive as a singer, coming close to the throaty ecstasies of Smokey Robinson. His spoken delivery is often too matter of fact, but nearly all his raps are punctuated by sung choruses. And his choruses are the glory of P.M. Dawn. The lush combination of impassioned lead vocals, piping background voices, and harmony-rich choral effects—virtually all courtesy of Prince Be—are astonishing. You may not understand what he's saying, but you can feel his bliss. **R.G.**

TALES FROM THE VAULTS

**THE RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN 50TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION**

MCA 10766 (four CDs, 234 min)

In honoring this year's fiftieth anniversary of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, there's been a lot of hoopla about that landmark show revolutionizing Broadway musicals. Hogwash! Jerome Kern and his collaborators (including Hammerstein with *Show Boat*) were the real trailblazers, "integrating" songs with a show's "serious" book well before 1943.

More genuinely revolutionary in their time were the recordings of Rodgers & Hammerstein shows—among the first to offer virtually complete Broadway scores performed by the original casts. After *Oklahoma!* became a hit on record as well as in the theater, a whole recording genre took off—and survives today. Now spiffily remastered for CD, the original, pioneering 1943-1945 recordings of *Oklahoma!* (with Alfred Drake and Celeste Holm) and *Carousel* (with Jan Clayton and John Raitt) as well as the 1951 *The King and I* (with Gertrude Lawrence and Yul Brynner) remain much more than historic keepsakes. Each one comes across as enduringly fresh and alive, with wonderful performances that have never really been topped by any of these shows' later versions. The original sonics have been impressively cleaned up to sound almost as good as some later recordings, and each show's songs have been rearranged in their correct sequence (something the LP editions didn't do). There are also bonus tracks offering alternate takes for three *Carousel* selections (including the opening waltz) and *Pore Jud Is Daid from Oklahoma!*

The fourth disc in the set is a real winner: a compilation of eighteen Rodgers & Hammerstein songs performed by Bing Crosby, Judy Garland, Rosemary Clooney, Dick Haymes, Buddy Greco, Carmen McRae, Jeri Southern, and Al Jolson, among others—some from long-unavailable 78-rpm singles. Included are such R&H rarities as *Haven't Got a Worry in the World* from the 1946 Helen Hayes play *Happy Birthday*, and *There's Music in You* from the 1953 movie *Main Street to Broadway*. **R.H.**

**THE RANKIN FAMILY****Fare Thee Well Love**

LIBERTY 99996 (36 min)

Performance: Traditional purity**Recording: Good**

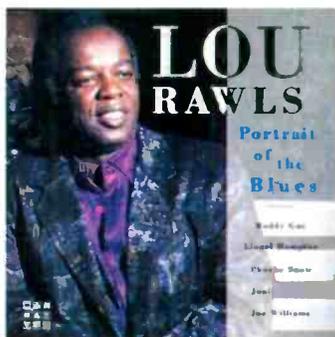
The Rankin Family, who appear on the cover of their first U.S. release with a well-scrubbed, Von Trapp Family glow, hail from Canada, but their gaze is perpetually set on the Emerald Isle. The five siblings offer crystalline voices, well-turned songwriting, and authentically scruffy fiddle playing. Their repertory ranges from original, slightly country compositions to fresh arrangements of traditional Celtic folk fare, presented in pared-down production with nary a nod to the commercial U.S. pop charts. There's an innocence about this album, and a kind of touching earnestness and pride, too. Just don't expect Maura O'Connell. *A.N.*

LOU RAWLS**Portrait of the Blues**

MANHATTAN 99548 (51 min)

Performance: Rootsy**Recording: Very good**

In a pop world where the duration of fame seems to have been cut back from 15 to 10 minutes, Lou Rawls has maintained his popularity over more than thirty years. Central to his longevity have been the undeniable appeal of his deep baritone voice and his craftsmanship as a singer. Of course, there have been huge variations in the quality of his material. His early work reflected his Chicago blues roots, laced with rich jazz nuances, but for the next couple of decades he rode a predictable groove, grinding out album after album of bland, instantly forgettable pop. In this, his sixtieth album—a remarkable feat in itself—



Rawls has come full circle, returning to the blues and R&B that were his original inspiration. It is a homecoming worthy of celebration, demonstrating that he can still sing with a soulful insistence and gritty urgency that make these vintage songs ring true.

For the occasion, he has resurrected a set of classics from the Forties and Fifties, including Ivory Joe Hunter's *Since I Met You Baby*, Buddy Johnson's *Save Your Love for Me*, and T-Bone Walker's *I'm Still in Love with You*. The authenticity level is enhanced by the presence of such guest instrumentalists as Junior Wells, whose plangent harmonica summons up shades of the indigo past in Jimmy Reed's *Baby What You Want Me to Do*, and Buddy Guy, who lends his guitar to Willie Dixon's *My Babe*. The venerable vibist Lionel Hampton and the blues belter Joe Williams join in for Louis Jordan's romping *Saturday Night Fish Fry*. The set also benefits from the mellow horn arrangements of Hank Crawford and Benny Golson. A treat. *P.G.*

BARRY AND HOLLY TASHIAN**Ready for Love**

ROUNDER 0302 (35 min)

Performance: Simplistic tradition**Recording: Good**

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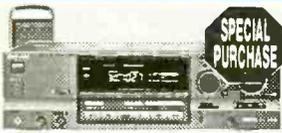
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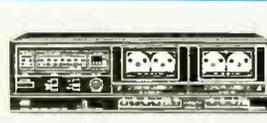
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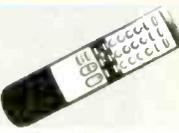
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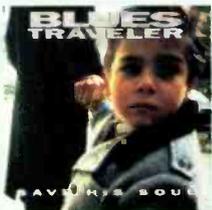
RAZOR & TIE 2007 (55 min)

Okay, so the title track is more danceable than *We Are the World* and more politically correct than the Modern Language Association. And yeah, any disc featuring cameos by both Miles Davis and Stiv Bators (talk about multicultural) is pretty cool by definition. Nonetheless, this was a better idea than an actual record in 1985, and on this new CD reissue it still is. **S.S.**

BLACK ON WHITE: GREAT R&B COVERS OF ROCK CLASSICS

RHINO 71227 (63 min)

A concept album with a concept so good it's hard to believe nobody's ever thought of it before. The individual tracks are variable, of course—I really, really wish the Isley Brothers hadn't felt compelled to record *Summer Breeze*. But the good stuff here (Aretha Franklin's *Satisfaction*, Al Green's *How Can You Mend a Broken Heart*, Run-D.M.C.'s *Walk This Way*) is out of this world, and at the very least this is one hell of a party record. **S.S.**

**BLUES TRAVELER****Save His Soul**

A&M 0080 (68 min)

The band who hit it big in 1970 with *Ride Captain Ride* return with . . . just kidding. Actually, if these guys remind me of anybody it's the Grateful Dead, fronted by David St. Hubbins of Spinal Tap. **S.S.**

BUCK NAKED AND THE BARE BOTTOM BOYS

SCAM/HEYDAY 033 (39 min)

Hilarious and thoroughly obscene nouveau trashcan rockabilly—what the Cramps might have sounded like if they'd read Kraftt-Ebing and come up in comedy clubs. Pick hit: *Sit on My Face*, which isn't quite as funny as the Monty Python song of the same name, but what could be? **S.S.**

DILLON FENCE**Outside In**

MAMMOTH 0049 (45 min)

North Carolina has a long history as a seedbed for power pop and a more recently cultivated reputation for grunge. Those two disparate trends find common ground on Dillon Fence's latest disc. "Outside In" is all sweetness and bite, with the band making significant strides in their pop-grunge dialectic on numbers like *Headache* and *Collapsis*. Pure-pop types, meanwhile, will swoon for *Safety Net*, a hook-filled charge led by Greg Humphreys' exultant vocal and a surging wall of guitars that don't so much jangle as drill. **P.P.**

GIBSON/MILLER BAND**Where There's Smoke . . .**

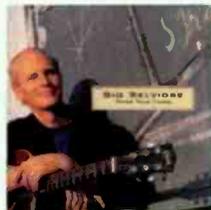
EPIC 52980 (38 min)

The Gibson/Miller Band combines the ballads of Alabama with the jingoism of Charlie Daniels and the dance jive of Brooks & Dunn. Need I say more? **A.N.**

PEOPLE GET READY: A TRIBUTE TO CURTIS MAYFIELD

SHANACHIE 9004 (43 min)

Mayfield, crippled (apparently for life) in a freak 1990 stage accident, is one of the most influential R&B songwriter/performers ever, and he gets his due quite nicely here from a B-list all-star cast (Don Covay, Delbert McClinton, Vernon Reid, and Jerry Butler, to name a few). Huey Lewis and the News's a cappella take on *It's Alright* is a little too slick for its own good, but everything else is understated and heartfelt—very much in keeping with Mayfield's original performances. **S.S.**

**SID SELVIDGE****Twice Told Tales**

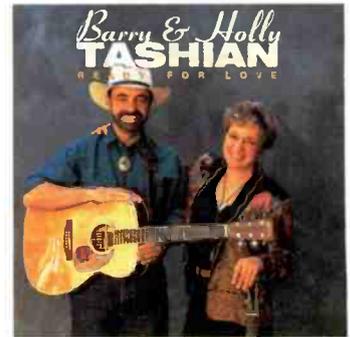
ELEKTRA NONESUCH 61473 (46 min)

Delta blues, hard country, early R&B, and rock-and-roll rendered almost as chamber music? It shouldn't work, but on this debut album by a semi-legendary Memphis singer/guitarist it does—and like gangbusters. Low-key and utterly winning. **S.S.**

WESLIE WHITFIELD**Beautiful Love**

CABARET 5007 (50 min)

Here's the best album yet from San Francisco's brightest gift to the U.S. cabaret scene. Whitfield sings good standards, and songs that *should* be standards, with refreshingly individual insight and an often witty disdain of sentimentality. Highest marks also go to pianist-arranger Mike Greensill for his easy-swinging combo backings. **R.H.**



gram of country and bluegrass songs that explore the joys and sorrows of the heart. Several pay tribute to the performers who have influenced them—*This Old Road* recalls the Louvin Brothers. *The Price of Pride* Ralph Stanley. The Tashians, who hail from Westport, Connecticut, but now live in Nashville, love and understand the rises and harmony structures that make up the best of this kind of singing. That goes a long way given Barry's lack of a distinctive solo presence and Holly's often off-key harmonies. And while the Tashians are capable of insightful lyrics, they often fall short of memorable melodies. That's not so bad given the stellar acoustic pickers behind them (Kieran Kane on mandolin, Richard Bennett on guitar, and Ron Huskey, Jr., on bass, plus Emmylou on harmony vocals), but it'll probably keep them off the list of legendary duet acts. **A.N.**

WORLD PARTY**Bang!**

CHRYSALIS 21991 (52 min)

Performance: Tour de force**Recording: Very good**

His voice is wispy and sometimes thin. He plays many instruments but is by no stretch a virtuoso. Yet Karl Wallinger, the driving force behind World Party, possesses vision, the essential ingredient that elevates a musical work to a higher level than the mere arithmetic sum of a set of performances. On "Bang!" he assays a little light opera, street-savvy hip-hop stylings, and sunny, shimmering pop with the timeless quality of the Beatles and Beach Boys.

Thematically, "Bang!" appears to have been conceived as a dialogue between man and God on the subject of planetary health vs. global apocalypse. "How could it come to this? / I'm really worried about my creation . . . / You're really killing me, you know," Wallinger sings in the voice of a saddened deity addressing humankind's profligate nature in *Is It Like Today?* World Party's contemporary leanings are manifested in the swaggering beats and jabbing, sampled urban funk of *Rescue Me* and *What Is Love All About?*, which serve to ballast the lighter, poppier stuff.

Wallinger's varied approach also makes for a nice balance between realism and idealism. After the hard, face-the-music knocks of *Radio Days* ("All I see is chaos and misunderstanding") and *Rescue Me* ("Hold me up, 'cause I think I'm going under"), the delirious rays of hope proffered in *Sunshine* feel genuine. That song is followed by *All I Gave*, a tuneful production number with a heavenly ELO-meets-Beach Boys feel and a hymnlike

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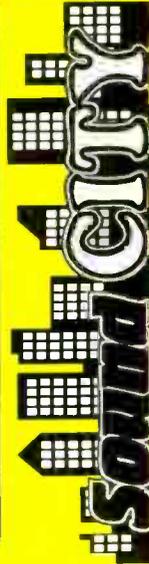
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LORENZO NICHISEMI

World Party's Karl Wallinger

note of resolution and peace about it. But, of course, we're still stuck here in the material (see George Harrison and Madonna) world, so Wallinger closes with a reprise of an earlier song. *Give It All Away*, that serves as an urgent and timely reminder of what's being lost and what's at stake. "Bang!" is a work of conscience that doesn't so much preach as counsel in the context of some highly entertaining music. Miss it at your own peril. *P.P.*

WARREN ZEVON

Learning to Flinch

GIANT 24493 (77 min)

Performance: Raw

Recording: Good live sound

Unlike his California cronies of the Seventies singer/songwriter school, Warren Zevon has maintained his artistic viability by going underground. In that respect, he shares a prickly integrity with Neil Young, who once wrote of middle-of-the-road success, "Traveling there soon became a bore, so I headed for the ditch. A rougher ride, but I saw more interesting people there." That could serve as a précis for Warren Zevon's gallery of rogues, losers, and dangerous characters in "Learning to Flinch," a career-summarizing live disc that walks on the darker side. The unaccompanied approach, with Zevon taking turns on piano and guitar, serves his songs well by accenting their starkness. He leans toward numbers with the most nettles, such as the black, brittle wit of *Lawyers, Guns and Money*, *Mr. Bad Example*, and *Excitable Boy*. The fact that Zevon finds the world such an existential barrens, yet still struggles to conquer and make sense of it, is ultimately what makes "Learning to Flinch" so bracing. Granted, the Roland Chorale and some of his twelve-string flourishes are a bit indulgent, but in the main this is a concise, focused, and unflinching statement of belief. *P.P.*

JAZZ REVIEWS

JACK DEJOHNETTE

Music for the Fifth World
MANHATTAN 99089 (61 min)

Performance: Tribal trivia

Recording: Very good

This is not your usual Jack DeJohnette re-lease. Let's just say that "Music for the Fifth World" takes us where no DeJohnette record has taken us before: an hour-long "healing" journey that combines the drummer's considerable percussive powers with a concoction of heavy metal, African chants, and synthesized funk. Weaving spirituality into music is as old as the ages, but I believe it should be conveyed in the music rather than in the liner notes. Mystical claims aside, this trek is not without its pleasant stopovers (guitarist John Scofield and pianist Michael Cain contribute some salient moments), but there are many plodding passages and the proceedings too often degenerate into a commercial pop/new-age mish-mash. *C.A.*

ELLA FITZGERALD

First Lady of Song

VERVE 898 (three CD's, 199 min)

Performance: Prime Ella

Recording: Very good

She turned a nursery rhyme into a hit song in the late 1930's and maintained steady popularity throughout the next decade, but not until the 1950's did Ella Fitzgerald assume the high position she will forever hold in American music. "Ella Fitzgerald: First Lady of Song" begins with *Perdido* and *Lullaby of Birdland*, a couple of Jazz at the Philharmonic performances recorded in 1949 and 1954. The former is a mad, all-star jam, and the latter—a previously unreleased recording with quartet accompaniment—gives us the less frantic, exquisitely swinging Ella, who so eloquently eased beyond the jazz wall for a remarkable series of composers' song books. Leaving few good songs unsung, she applied her smooth style to the works of Cole Porter, the Gershwins, Rodgers and Hart, Ellington, Harold Arlen, Johnny Mercer, and Jerome Kern, defining every nuance so perfectly that these recordings should serve as models for all ballad singers to come.

In this three-CD set, Ella enhances material by all of the aforementioned composers. She also scats the light fantastic with jazz royalty, teams up with Louis Armstrong, gets real mellow under the direction of Nelson Riddle, Billy May, and Frank DeVol, swings with the bands of Ellington and Basie, and engages in lovely balladry accompanied only by guitarist Herb Ellis. In short, a representative slice of Ella Fitzgerald in her prime. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the packaging of this album. Besides the CD's—each in its own pocket—the accompanying sixty-four-page color booklet contains two good essays, thorough discography, diverse illustrations, a Picasso drawing of Ella, and an alphabetized track index. The rationale behind this set is Ella's seventy-fifth birthday, but no excuse is needed to release artistry of this caliber. *C.A.*

CHARLIE PARKER
Bird at the High-Hat
 BLUE NOTE 9787 (71 min)
Performance: Fine Bird
Recording: Bearable

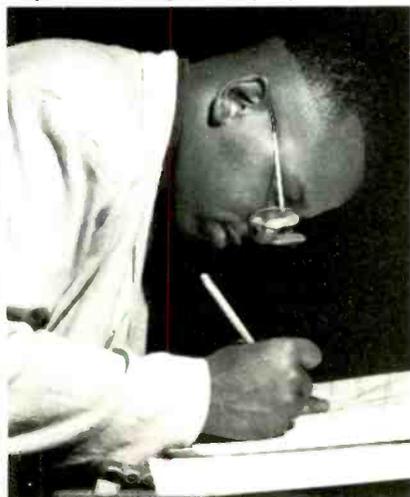
When a major jazz artist dies, there is a tendency for record companies to re-lease every scrap of performance left behind, and when that artist is as significant as Charlie Parker, the releases can become downright ludicrous. Case in point: Mosaic's "Complete Benedetti Charlie Parker," a set of private recordings that includes 5- and 8-second tracks of three or four notes—meaningless snippets identified by the CD's producer as "possibly Stardust," and "could be *Lover Man*," etc.

Fortunately, "Bird at the High-Hat" is not marred by such nonsense. Instead, this is a reissue of broadcast recordings—presumably made during 1953 and 1954 Parker appearances at a popular Boston club—that originally appeared on two obscure Phoenix LP's. (The generous, nearly 1¼-hour-long disc also includes a couple of brief conversations between Parker and disc jockey Symphony Sid Torin.) Although the engineers did a remarkably poor job of balancing on these broadcasts, and there are some rough performance spots, Parker is generally in fine form here and this is definitely a collection worth preserving. Of course, someone should have told the art director that the club was the "Hi-Hat," not the "High-Hat." C.A.

COURTNEY PINE
To the Eyes of Creation
 4TH & B'WAY 4054 (58 min)
Performance: Eclectic
Recording: Excellent

I have expressed both enthusiasm and disappointment over Courtney Pine in these pages, but it looks like smooth sailing from now on. In his latest release, "To the Eyes of Creation," Pine takes us along on a superb journey, during which he looks back at his experiences and ancestry, and thus gives us a wonderful glimpse of what lies ahead. The view from this young British saxophonist's vantage point is clearly a sweeping panorama: he dishes up a substantial serving richly peppered with American jazz, West African, East

Stephen Scott: in good company



Indian, and Caribbean sounds, and dashes of pop. Somehow it all works. Those who hear little more than reflections of past glories in the works of young jazz players ought to lend Courtney Pine an attentive ear. C.A.

STEPHEN SCOTT
Aminha's Dream
 VERVE 644 (57 min)
Performance: Better late than never
Recording: Very good

He is only twenty-four, but the pianist Stephen Scott already has an impressive list of past associates, ranging from Benny Golson and Ron Carter to such fellow newcomers as the Harper Brothers and Roy Hargrove. "Aminha's Dream," Scott's new Verve release, is his second album as a leader, the first being "Something to Consider," which came out in 1991. Remarkable as that set was, this one is even more thoroughly pleasing, representing a significant step in a promising career. Although the two albums are separated by only a short interval, it is a more mature, more sophisticated pianist we hear this time. Accompanied by several horns—including that of the alto saxophonist Justin Robinson, a childhood friend who originally introduced him to jazz and also appeared in his previous album—Scott breezes through a wonderfully imaginative program of ten originals, a familiar ballad, and Woody Shaw's *Moontrane*. It's perfection at any tempo, and the young player is every bit as interesting as his illustrious rhythmic supporters. Ron Carter and Elvin Jones—you have to be very good to hold your own in that company, and Scott does. Keep an ear on this young player, for he has the potential to become a major figure in contemporary American music. C.A.

ROBERT TROWERS
Synopsis
 CONCORD JAZZ 4545 (55 min)
Performance: Unpretentious
Recording: Very good

Trombone players are relatively scarce on the jazz scene today. I suppose that makes it easier for a trombonist to be singled out, but Robert Trowers would surely catch your ear even if the woods were teeming with them. For the past few years, Trowers has found a place in various big bands—an environment that has long been considered ideal for budding stars. His employers have ranged from Lionel Hampton and Illinois Jacquet to Sam Wooding, the venerable band leader whose extraordinary orchestra made history with a series of 1925 Berlin recordings. More recently, however, Trowers has been heard with the Basie ghost band, and strong evidence of that experience can be found in "Synopsis," his new Concord Jazz release. Accompanied by a rhythm section, with occasional input from alto saxophonist Jesse Davis (a fellow sideman in the Illinois Jacquet band), Trowers captures the basic Basie ingredients—namely a mellow, bouncy rhythm—in this delightful set. Pianist Carl "Ace" Carter (another alumnus of the Basie orchestra), bassist Marcus McLaurine, and drummer Lewis Nash all contribute mightily to the success of this album, but it's Trowers's full tone and easy-going style that impress me most. I say, Mr. Trowers, leave the ghost unit behind and go for it! C.A.

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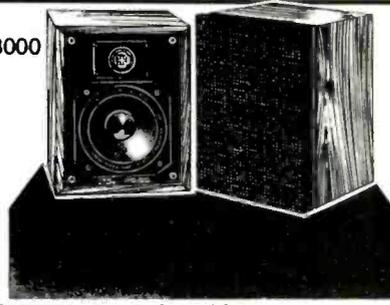
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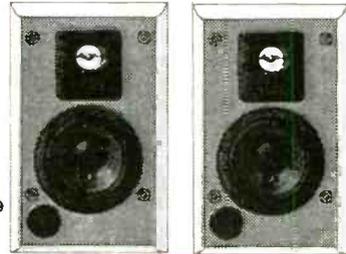
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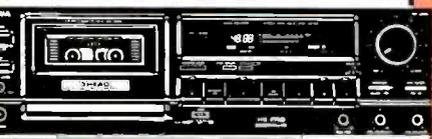
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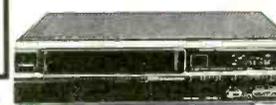
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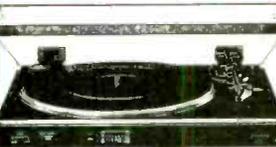
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NEW RECORDINGS
REVIEWED BY
ROBERT ACKART,
RICHARD FREED, DAVID
HALL, GEORGE JELLINEK,
ERIK SALZMAN, AND
DAVID PATRICK STEARNS



**BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica");
 Egmont Overture**
 Dresden State Orchestra, C. Davis
 PHILIPS 434 120 (65 min)
Performance: Broad-scale
Recording: First-rate

It was the "Pastoral" Symphony that was the most memorable component of Colin Davis's mid-Seventies Beethoven cycle on Philips with the BBC Symphony: the "Eroica" in that cycle had its moments but did not make the sort of impact this very appealing remake does. The approach is very broad-scale. Davis not only takes all repeats in the symphony and sets a relaxed pace both there and in the *Egmont* Overture, but he also allows himself a bit of gear-shifting leeway at the big climactic points, as conductors used to feel free to do more regularly. It is old-fashioned Beethoven in that respect, and old-fashioned as well, perhaps, is the reassuring feeling one gets that these performances were not simply run up in the studio but represent a distillation of a lifetime of study, commitment, and conviction. Climaxes are masterfully achieved in the symphony's Funeral March and finale, and the scherzo is engagingly crisp, with especially happy contributions from the horns in the trio.

There will always be more than a single way to the heart of such works. Davis's compassionate and stirring readings give grandeur its due while keeping the momentum flowing, avoiding any hint of empty rhetoric or monumentalizing, and Philips has come through with first-rate sound. *R.F.*

BEETHOVEN: Violin Concerto
BACH: Sonata and Partita No. 3 for
Unaccompanied Violin, excerpts
 Kennedy; NDR Symphony, Tennstedt
 EMI 54574 (59 min)

Performance: Interesting
Recording: Mixed bag

Whether or not you buy Nigel Kennedy's image—working-class accent, punk clothes, and grooming that suggests he lives in the subway of some large industrial city—he is easily among the most stimulating violinists

around today. And in this new recording of the Beethoven concerto he offers more than just volatility. Underneath his exterior cool, Kennedy is intimately familiar with the piece and seems to love it with all his heart. He takes incredible chances with the slow tempos, but they are justified by how much he has to say. It's essentially a lyrical, reflective performance with many moments of exquisite tenderness—so many that Kennedy and conductor Klaus Tennstedt (who is mostly in superb form) are sometimes guilty of neglecting the work's overall sweep.

At times, Kennedy seems to be a compulsive revisionist, improvising his own mildly eccentric cadenza in the third movement and occasionally using turns of phrase that seem to come more out of a need to be different than a deeply felt interpretive decision. After reading his liner notes, I was relieved there wasn't more idiosyncrasy: He rants none too lucidly against everything from music critics to conservative politics to digital sound. Unfortunately, he has a legitimate gripe with the sound of this CD: Though his violin is clear, the orchestra sounds as if it's under a blanket. But for all its problems, this is an infinitely more interesting recording of the concerto than

most others in recent years. And the filler pieces, two movements from Bach's unaccompanied violin sonatas and partitas, leave me hoping that Kennedy will record those works complete very soon. *D.P.S.*

BRUCKNER: Symphony No. 8
 Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Solti
 LONDON 430 228 (74 min)
Performance: Tautly controlled
Recording: A mite dry

George Solti and the Chicago Symphony find themselves in an unaccustomed venue for this 1990 recording of Bruckner's blockbuster Eighth Symphony—namely, the great Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonic.

Solti uses the Leopold Nowak edition of 1955 with the cuts in the slow movement and finale sanctioned by Bruckner, and, given the control he brings to bear on the performance as a whole, the entire symphony is accommodated on a single CD.

There is no denying that the orchestral execution here is awesome, but I find the overall musical-sonic result somewhat earthbound. The dryish acoustic of the hall may be partly to blame, at least as recorded here. In this particular music I crave the openness of Vienna's Musikverein or the Lübeck Cathedral, where the more spacious readings under Herbert von Karajan and Günter Wand were digitally recorded.

In general Solti seeks to maintain a steady musical flow in the first movement; the grand pauses are less in evidence than usual. The windswept scherzo is swift and brassy, and the finale is fierce and intense, mostly to its advantage, but I don't feel much of Bruckner reaching for the empyrean in the incomparable slow movement. In short, this fine performance is just shy of the transcendent quality the music demands. *D.H.*

KERNIS: Symphony in Waves; String
Quartet ("Musica Celestis")
 Lark Quartet; New York
 Chamber Symphony, Schwarz
 ARGO 436 287 (71 min)
Performance: Sympathetic
Recording: Excellent

Aaron Jay Kernis, now thirty-three, has caused quite a stir in new-music circles lately, and this first major recording illustrates why. He's one of those rare composers these days who writes in an utterly distinctive style without having to forge his own musical language. The exuberant opening movement of the *Symphony in Waves* (1989) seems clearly influenced by the minimalists, while the work's five-movement scheme as a whole seems modeled after Schumann's "Rhenish" Symphony. Within those bounds, there are passages of rapt, ecstatic lyricism as well as

NOW ON CD

• **BACH: Sonatas and Partitas for Violin.** Heifetz. EMI 64494. Not up to current standards of "authenticity" and in mono sound, mostly from the mid-1930's, but Heifetz's virtuosity and individuality compensate. Includes his transcription of a movement from the English Suite No. 3.

• **BERLIOZ: Symphonie Fantastique; Overtures and Marches.** Paray. MERCURY 434 328. Beautifully recorded late-1950's Detroit Symphony sessions in the midprice Living Presence series. Includes the *Corsair* and *Roman Carnival* overtures and two marches.

• **RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto No. 3.** Horowitz; Ormandy. RCA VICTOR 61564. Recorded at Carnegie Hall in 1978 at Horowitz's "Golden Jubilee" concert with the New York Philharmonic led by Eugene Ormandy. "... the piano playing is dazzling ... one of the great recorded ego trips of our time" (July 1978).



raucous moments suggesting rock-and-roll piano. There are times when the only apparent unifying factor is a certain Ivesian faith that it all makes perfect sense on a higher level, but it all flows, especially given the work's water imagery—in this music water, in some form or another, is never very far away, and it's always ingratiating to hear.

The string quartet (1990) is perhaps more inviting, particularly with its extraordinary adagio, which is so spiritually uplifting that it rivals similar passages by Messiaen. The use of more traditional forms only seems to intensify Kernis's individuality. Both performances are sympathetic but lack the polish that comes with living with a piece for a while. They're still plenty exciting, making this one of the most notable contemporary-music recordings in some time, not just because of its quality but for what it promises in the future. *D.P.S.*

MAHLER: Das Lied von der Erde

Baltsa, König; London Philharmonic, Tennstedt
EMI 54603 (67 min)

Performance: Passionate
Recording: Powerful

This intense, deeply involved account of Mahler's great vocal symphony, *The Song of the Earth*, offers transparent textures and virtuosic orchestral execution. The orchestral splendors, however, tend to overshadow the singing. The tenor, Klaus König, must struggle mightily to make himself heard, particularly in the opening section, "Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde" ("The Drinking Song of the Earth's Sorrow"). He makes expressive points, but the struggle takes its toll.

Recorded as far back as 1982 and 1984, the contralto Agnes Baltsa was captured in prime vocal estate. Her singing is secure, cleanly focused, and tonally beautiful even in the stormy middle section of "Von der Schönheit" ("Of Beauty"). In the final "Abschied" ("Farewell")—unusually expansive in Tennstedt's hands—her performance is heartfelt and eloquent. The text, however, is rarely projected with the needed clarity.

For all its attractions, this is not the *Lied* to put its several recorded predecessors in the shade, least of all EMI's own earlier recording conducted by the rock-solid Otto Klemperer and with the opulent Christa Ludwig and the wondrous Fritz Wunderlich. Reissued on CD, it seems to sound better at each new hearing, and its vocal-instrumental balances seem ideal. *G.J.*

POULENC: Dialogues of the Carmelites

Soloists; Chorus and Orchestra of the Lyon Opera, Nagano
VIRGIN 59227 (two CD's, 152 min)

Performance: Pure, moving
Recording: Focused

Dialogues of the Carmelites, one of the few truly successful opera-house operas of modern times, is a setting of a play by the French Catholic mystic Georges Bernanos about the martyrdom of a group of Carmelite nuns during the anticlerical fervors of the French Revolution.

One can hardly imagine a more unlikely subject for an opera. The revolution took place out on the street, but the opera mostly unfolds in a series of interior tableaux: inside the palace and Carmelite convent, and inside the



CHRIS BENNION/SEATTLE SYMPHONY

Conductor Gerard Schwarz: making a case for Kernis

head of Sister Blanche. Only the very final *Te Deum*, as the sisters, joined in the end by Blanche, go off to their deaths, takes place in the public square. *Dialogues* is not about politics but about what we would call anxiety and neurosis, not from a psychiatric point of view but from a Catholic mystical one.

Who would have guessed that the sophisticated composer of so much suave and witty music would have identified so completely with such a subject? In fact, Poulenc turned this story into music of tremendous melodic and emotional power. The secret of his score lies in its simplicity and its clarity of form. Poulenc followed the Mussorgsky-Debussy

model, wrapping the music around the exquisite declamation of Bernanos's words, but he combined it with a Stravinskian Neoclassical aesthetic, taken from works like *Oedipus Rex*, that gave heroic/tragic stature to a very personal saga.

The first performance took place in 1957 at La Scala and, later that year, at the Paris Opéra; the EMI recording of that production is now on CD. The cast of this new recording includes Catherine Dubosc as Blanche (the freshness and purity of her singing are outstanding), Rita Gorr, Rachel Yakar, Martine Dupuy, Brigitte Fournier, José van Dam, and Michel Sénéchal. Even more than the original, this version has a simplicity and an intensity that are very much in keeping with the character of a remarkable work.

What has happened, perhaps unconsciously, is that the spirit of contemporary early-music performing has penetrated the realization of what is, after all, a Neoclassical work set in the eighteenth century. Ultimately, the clarity and focus of the performance are very much to the credit of Kent Nagano, the Japanese-American conductor whose excellent work at the Lyon Opera has helped turn that provincial French theater into one of the leading houses in Europe. *E.S.*

RODRIGO: Concierto de Aranjuez;

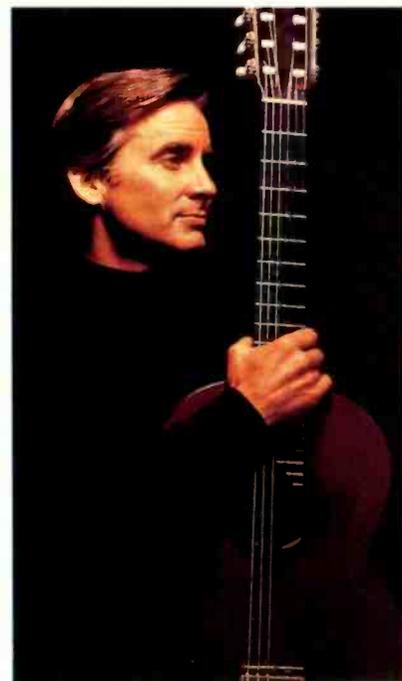
Fantasia para un Gentilhombre

WALTON: Five Bagatelles for
Guitar and Orchestra

Parkening; Royal Philharmonic, Litton
EMI 54665 (59 min)

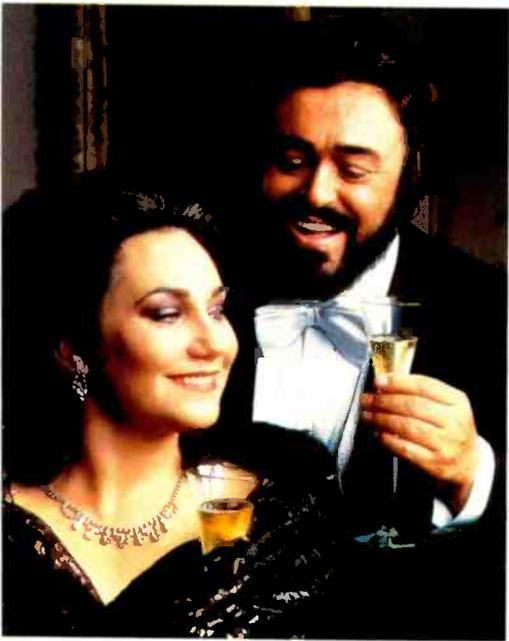
Performance: Excellent
Recording: Close-up

This is a brilliant and extremely satisfying performance of the contemporary Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo's guitar concerto by two Americans, Christopher Parkening and Andrew Litton, with a British orchestra. The *Fantasia for a Gentleman*, based on an early Spanish guitar instruction book, is a lesser achievement only in that it is a slighter work.



SHEILA ROCK/EMI CLASSICS

Parkening: frighteningly perfect?



DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

Studer and Pavarotti in *Traviata*

Rodrigo was present at the performances and recording sessions and gives the release a hearty endorsement; it is easy to share his enthusiasm. The pairing with William Walton makes a lot of sense: He was born in exactly

the same year as Rodrigo and, thanks to Julian Bream, also created major works for the guitar. The Five Bagatelles were originally solo works, later neatly orchestrated; those two versions are combined here to make a kind of smart concerto/suite.

This is not a purely instrumental CD. The strikingly close-up recording catches Parkening's grunting and humming almost the whole way along. It adds a dark smudge or two to what are almost frighteningly perfect realizations. *E.S.*

SCHUBERT: Hungarian Melody; Impromptus, Op. 90 (D. 899); German Dances; Moments Musicaux; Grazer Galopp
András Schiff (piano)
LONDON 430 425 (71 min)

**Performance: Glowing
Recording: Atmospheric**

András Schiff is so thoroughly inside the music here that he never intrudes as an interpretive "middleman" but seems to allow it to shape itself spontaneously, as it must have done at Schubert's own keyboard. The playing is always direct, unselfconscious, yet filled with subtleties. It is scaled toward intimacy, toward the sort of setting in which Schubert would have conceived these works and would have had opportunities to play them, and in every one of the eighteen pieces we are reminded that he was the supreme composer of songs. Every line really sings here, without coaxing, without laying it on, but simply be-

cause that is the music's nature, and Schiff responds to its heartbeat. The last two of the Op. 90 Impromptus, so often weighted with grand gestures, flow with a noble simplicity. The dance pieces are hardly less striking for the heady blend of poetry and earthiness Schiff finds in them, or the *Moments Musicaux* for the occasional touches of spice. The Mozart Saal of Vienna's Konzerthaus was an effectively atmospheric recording site, and the whole production fairly glows with unfeigned affection. *R.F.*

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 8

Berlin Philharmonic, Bychkov
PHILIPS 432 090 (63 min)

**Performance: Powerful
Recording: Excellent**

Like Semyon Bychkov's earlier recording of the Shostakovich Eleventh Symphony, also with the Berlin Philharmonic, this otherwise splendid new recording of the Eighth may be a bit too smooth. This most urgently and poignantly personal work—one of the composer's desperate chronicles, if you will—benefits, like the Eleventh, from a certain edge of rawness and snarling bluntness. This hard-to-define quality (which must not be confused with crudeness) is searingly felt—in the vast, episodic opening movement and the enigmatic concluding one as well as the motoric second scherzo—in the live performance under the late Evgeny Mravinsky (also on Philips) and the similarly committed one by Mstislav

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Bychkov, to his great credit, brings the super-refined Berlin orchestra perhaps as close to that sort of idiomatic voice as may be possible for an orchestra that has not lived with this material as part of its core repertory, and in every other respect their performance is stunningly competitive. On its own terms, it is a heartening assurance that the Eighth need not rely solely on executants who were present at the creation to perceive and transmit its essence, and justify its survival, and the Philips production team has shown what a fine recording venue Berlin's frequently problematic Philharmonie can be after all. *R.F.*

VERDI: La Traviata

Studer, Pavarotti, Pons, others: Metropolitan Opera Chorus and Orchestra. Levine
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 435 797
(two CD's, 122 min)

Performance: Well paced
Recording: Very good

VERDI: La Traviata

Gruberova, Shicoff, Zancanaro, others:
Ambrosian Singers: London Symphony, Rizzi
TELDEC 76348 (two CD's, 130 min)

Performance: Excellent Violetta
Recording: Very good

These new recordings of Verdi's *La Traviata*—both praiseworthy, neither ideal—join the many others on CD, complicating the

buyer's choice. James Levine's conducting and the lack of real weaknesses in his cast tilt the balance in favor of the DG set, but the margin over the Teldec is not very wide.

On paper, in fact, Levine's cast looks superlative, but only Juan Pons fully lives up to expectations: his strong and sympathetic portrayal of the elder Germont is scarcely diminished by a certain effortfulness in the high register. Cheryl Studer's Violetta has the beauty and evenness of her tone going for it. She is at her best in Act II, where she and Pons benefit from Levine's flexible pacing: in Act I there are some intonational lapses and some smudged passage work in "*Sempre libera*," and "*Un di, felice, eterea*," her first duet with Luciano Pavarotti, could have used more rehearsal. The great tenor's voice is still golden—if only it were used with more refinement and less explosiveness and hard breathing!

Edita Gruberova's Violetta is the principal attraction of the Teldec set. After a somewhat unsettled opening scene she delivers a finely nuanced performance of the aria "*Ah, fors'è lui*" and a brilliant "*Sempre libera*," she carries her part with dignity and conviction in Act II, and she crowns her achievement with an inward, moving rendition of "*Addio del passato*." Hers is an altogether admirable account, on a par with the best recorded Violettas.

All three Teldec principals follow Verdi's dynamic markings with unusual exactitude, although the tenor, Neil Shicoff, doesn't quite match his Violetta's lovely *mezza voce* phras-

ing in the duet "*Parigi, o cara*." Elsewhere, except when emotional delivery imperils his intonation, he offers an ardent and youthful-sounding Alfredo. It is Giorgio Zancanaro, a heretofore reliable baritone, who ultimately lets the performance down. While he, too, deserves praise for his sensitivity, he has a disconcerting tendency to land just below the center of his notes. The conductor, Carlo Rizzi, who is scheduled to join the Met next season, deserves credit for his disciplined and sensitive overview, but he tends to extremes in his choice of tempos—hurried at times, unduly slow at others. *G.J.*

VILLA-LOBOS:

Choros No. 2; Duo; Quintet;
Bachianas Brasileiras No. 6;
Four Songs from "Forest of the Amazon"
Villa-Lobos Society Chamber Players
ETCETERA 1144 (52 min)
Performance: Good
Recording: Tight, close

Did you know that there is a Villa-Lobos Society, headquartered in New York City and devoted to performing and recording what must be the largest output in twentieth-century music? The society is busy rediscovering some routine stuff, a lot of worthy music, and, in at least one case, buried treasure.

Heitor Villa-Lobos's favorite musical form was the *choros*, a term that has nothing to do with "chorus" (although the composer must have relished the pun) but means "sad song"—

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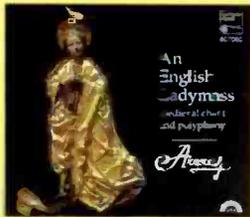
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ANONYMOUS:

An English Ladymass

Anonymous 4

HARMONIA MUNDI 907080 (59 min)

Appealing, pure women's voices, devotional texts and music, plus sincerity and conviction combine to give this CD a surprising spiritual wallop. Anonymous 4 is a quartet of female singers. I can't explain the mystical effect of their performance of medieval chant and polyphony in honor of the Virgin Mary, but the recording is a winner. *William Livingstone*

HAYDN: Piano Concertos in F Major, G Major, and D Major

Ax: Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra
SONY 48383 (59 min)

Haydn's piano concertos are somewhat neglected—partly because of disputes over whether he actually wrote all of them, but mostly because they seem a bit pale compared with the melodically profuse Mozart concertos. But for the Mozart-surfeited, Haydn's robust lyricism and absorbing musical narrative—for which the always elegant pianism of Emanuel Ax seems well suited—make a welcome change, particularly in the more substantial G Major and D Major concertos. *D.P.S.*

HINDEMITH: Konzertmusik, Op. 50; Der Schwanendreher; Nobilissime Visione, Ballet Suite

San Francisco Symphony, Blomstedt
LONDON 433 809 (67 min)

All of these pieces are written in the composer's best popular/visionary style of the 1930's, when he was well out of his earlier avant-gardism but not yet mired in the glibness and academicism of his later work. Some of his strongest creations, they include a concert piece commissioned for the Boston Symphony's fiftieth anniversary, a viola concerto (*Der Schwanendreher*) based on German folk tunes, and music for a ballet about St. Francis of Assisi. Herbert Blomstedt obviously believes in them, and the deeply felt performances and fine recordings do a lot for the music. *E.S.*

NIELSEN: Symphonies Nos. 4 and 6

Gothenburg Symphony, Jarvi
BIS 600 (67 min)

Completing the Bis series of Carl Nielsen's orchestral music begun a decade ago under

the gifted conductor Myung-Whun Chung, Neeme Järvi brings great elegance to the Fourth Symphony's *Poco allegretto* second movement and a fine singing quality to the big lines of the succeeding slow movement. More fire is needed, however, in the opening movement and most certainly in the finale. The savagery and bitterness implicit in the Sixth Symphony also seem to evade him, and only its infinitely sad slow movement comes off as it should. *D.H.*

SIBELIUS: Karelia Suite; En Saga; Pohjola's Daughter; The Swan of Tuonela; Finlandia

Atlanta Symphony, Levi
TELARC 80320 (65 min)

Yoel Levi offers a slack reading of the first two sections of *Karelia* and an overly careful *En Saga*, but *Pohjola's Daughter* is full of poetry and drama. Patrick McFarland plays a lovely English-horn solo in *The Swan of Tuonela*, and the disc comes to a resplendent conclusion with a really rousing *Finlandia*. Fairly close miking, but the overall sonics are up to Telarc's best. *D.H.*

FRANCISCO ARAIZA:

The Romantic Tenor

Munich Radio Orchestra, Weikert
RCA VICTOR 61163 (62 min)

There are seventeen songs on this CD, all international favorites with echoes of Caruso (*Mattinata, O Sole Mio*), Gigli (*Non Ti Scordar di Me*), Tauber, and Wunderlich (three Lehár songs). And that's where the problem lies. Francisco Araiza is a decent, musicianly singer but lacks the vocal charisma to measure up to those ghosts. He pushes his agreeable but not innately beautiful lyric voice to uncomfortable limits, and he cannot sustain long notes without an intrusive vibrato. The songs, in five languages, range from Chopin to Lennon/McCartney, the orchestrations from the appropriate to the unduly inflated. For Araiza fans only. *G.J.*



MARKUS KLINKO

French Harp Music

EMI 54467 (57 min)

Sometimes described as a classical sex symbol, the Swiss harpist Markus Klinko makes his EMI debut with this recital of pieces by Debussy, Satie, Fauré, Roussel, Saint-Saëns, and others. Some were written for the harp, others were transcribed for it. The standout is Alphonse Hasselmans's *La Source*. All told, the music is pleasant, soothing, and serene. It should reduce stress and promote bliss. *W.L.*

a sort of Brazilian street version of the Portuguese *fado*. Many of his *chôros* are scored for wind instruments, and at their best—the *Quintet in the Form of a Chôros* on this CD—they have an inventiveness and an individuality that are engaging.

The Four Songs here make the deepest impression, however. The music, originally written for the film version of the W.H. Hudson novel *Green Mansions*, was mangled by Hollywood arrangers, and the composer made a song recycle out of it and, later, a symphonic poem. The version here for winds and piano is by the pianist Alfred Heller, a protégé of Villa-Lobos as well as founder and president of the Villa-Lobos Society. It has a tropical languor and lushness that the other pieces lack, and its appeal is undeniable.

The performances are capable, but the overall effect of the playing and the close, tight recording is too dry. The CD should have led off with the songs, and the softer style of that music should have spread out over the other performances, which could have used more of that steamy Brazilian sad-song treatment. *E.S.*

Collection

SHURA CHERKASSKY

80th Birthday Recital
from Carnegie Hall, Volume 2
LONDON 433 654 (78 min)

Performance: Unforgettable
Recording: Excellent

Perhaps more than any of his previous releases, this live recording from Shura Cherkassky's eightieth-birthday concert displays the pianist in all his eccentricity. Next to Cherkassky, Vladimir Horowitz seems as straitlaced as Walter Cronkite. The program encompasses standard repertoire, Schumann's Symphonic Etudes and Chopin's Nocturne in F Minor; works that fell out of fashion fifty years ago, such as the Bach/Busoni Chaconne, Josef Hofmann's *Kaleidoscope*, and Paul Pabst's paraphrase on themes from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*; and one that may be in fashion fifty years from now, the modernist Three-Page Sonata by Charles Ives. And for an encore he attacks Morton Gould's loud, jazzy *Boogie Woogie Etude*.

The program's not the only thing that gives this recital a what-will-he-do-next? air of suspense. Though Cherkassky's technique is in good shape, there are always a few hair-raising seconds when you wonder if he'll emerge from a heaven-storming climax with all the notes in place—somehow, he always does. As an interpreter, he has great originality. In the opening moments of the Schumann, he takes breathtakingly long rhetorical pauses, stopping time with an eloquence that few musicians have ever possessed. From there on, he seems to breathe with the music on every possible level, giving life and shape to the melodic line as well as the least audible inner voices. He also gives the music a sense of progression, even during repeats, with his subtle variation of nuance and color. Even when he sticks close to the letter of the score, he has such a strong sense of identification with the music that performer and composer meld seamlessly. Not for everyone, but surely worth hearing. *D.P.S.*

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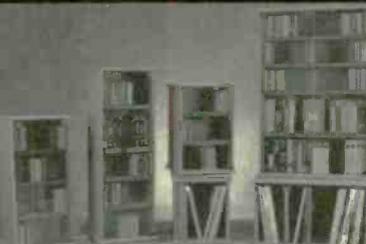
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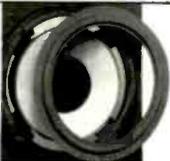
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THE HIGH END

BY RALPH HODGES

Goosebumps

THE Yellow Room, my self-styled listening environment that I have long been determined to bring to perfection, is just about completed. It can now produce goosebumps.

When I say "environment," I of course mean "room," and when I say "room," I mean both the boundary space and the sound equipment I have put in it. But when I say "goosebumps" I don't know what I mean. It is just an attempt to express a state of mind in which a deliberately constructed illusion can finally overcome a known reality. The sense of the presence of an orchestra becomes more persuasive than the sense of the presence of paper and plastic diaphragms. You tell yourself that the object before you is merely a loudspeaker, but it replies with sounds that attest that it is in fact a chorus of horns, a slash of tympani, a skirl of oboes and clarinets. It can fool you, and keep you fooled, even though you know better.

Getting a sound system and its listener into this condition is the goal of high-end audio as I perceive it, and it seems to be a realistic goal, although perhaps not for everybody. Andy Singer of Sound by Singer, one of New York's leading high-end retailers, estimates that 10 to 20 percent of his customers are able to find their way into this sort of euphoria. Add possibly 15 percent more who might be capable of experiencing these transports but whose systems or listening rooms are inadequate, and you still have less than half of the audiophile world realizing the full delights of their often considerable investments. The remainder are far from discontent, says Singer. Many are happy just knowing their equipment is the most highly acclaimed available, while others are satisfied to pursue the technical intricacies of audio without worrying obsessively about changes in sound. But are they missing something?

Bob Carver of Carver Corporation is one who knows the euphoria well, but he doesn't entirely trust it. "I've

always felt that much of it is my imagination anyway," he remarks, "but I've never taken the time to prove it." Carver offers an interesting anecdote. In the midst of his career, having designed many amplifiers and feeling that much of the thrill of it was gone, he decided to reassemble his old college system, the one that aroused the passion that got him started. He was actually able to locate every piece of it and buy it back. He even re-rented the house from his student days. With everything set up as it was before, the sonic experience was, "Well, normal. The violins were fine, but there wasn't much depth, and in general nothing at all to get excited about."

Singer professes a little more faith. "I don't believe people are crazy. When customers return to my store to say they've stumbled into something astonishingly wonderful, I have no difficulty taking them seriously because I know them as customers." And what if they later lose the eupho-

even paying attention. The loudspeakers had to be listened to before I could ship them on to the next reviewer, but no one had said I couldn't reorganize my file cabinet while getting the listening chore out of the way. And then I was grabbed, and so were skeptical colleagues who came by shortly after. The speakers themselves were by no means exceptional in price or presumption, and they had a midrange irregularity that could readily be heard and measured. It didn't seem to matter. They were simply able to cooperate with the room and the rest of the system to erect an illusion that overwhelmed one's critical faculties. What was heard seemed much more real than unreal, and that was the end of it.

In the end, the illusion faltered and broke down, and I didn't have continued use of the room for long enough to learn whether it could be fixed. (Accumulated evidence suggests that the room, at least as much as anything else, makes the illusion.) Nor did I

I get goosebumps when the sense of the presence of an orchestra is more persuasive than the sense of the presence of paper and plastic diaphragms.

ria, as frequently seems to happen? "Something has changed, and it's not necessarily just the customer's psychological perspective. A power line fluctuates, temperature and humidity vary, or something has been done to the system that the owner wasn't aware would make an audible difference. Of course, there are a few people—very few—who seem unable to tolerate satisfaction for any length of time. They need to discover new mechanisms to torment themselves, and the loss of transcendent sound quality is a good one."

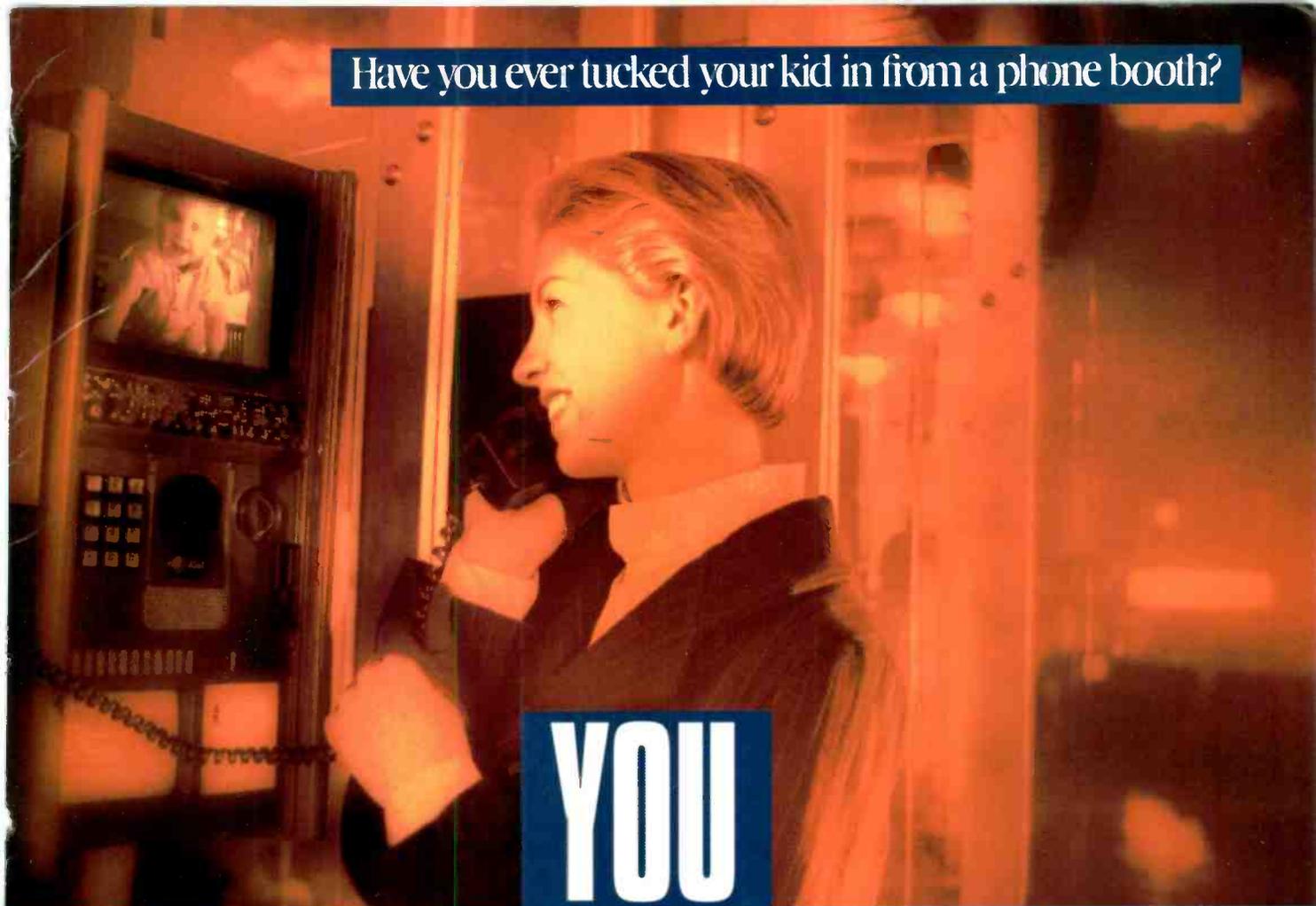
For my part, I've arrived at the euphoria on three different occasions, and in three different listening rooms. In all instances it has cropped up unexpectedly and has been largely uncorrelated with the price or reputation of the equipment. The first time I wasn't

have time to discover whether the illusion could persuade everyone. Perhaps I and my friends were more believing back then, more willing to accept the impossible. Perhaps our susceptibility to being drawn into music was greater. There seems to be no reliable way to probe the goosebump phenomenon, especially since friends move away and, in these times, take evening jobs and even die.

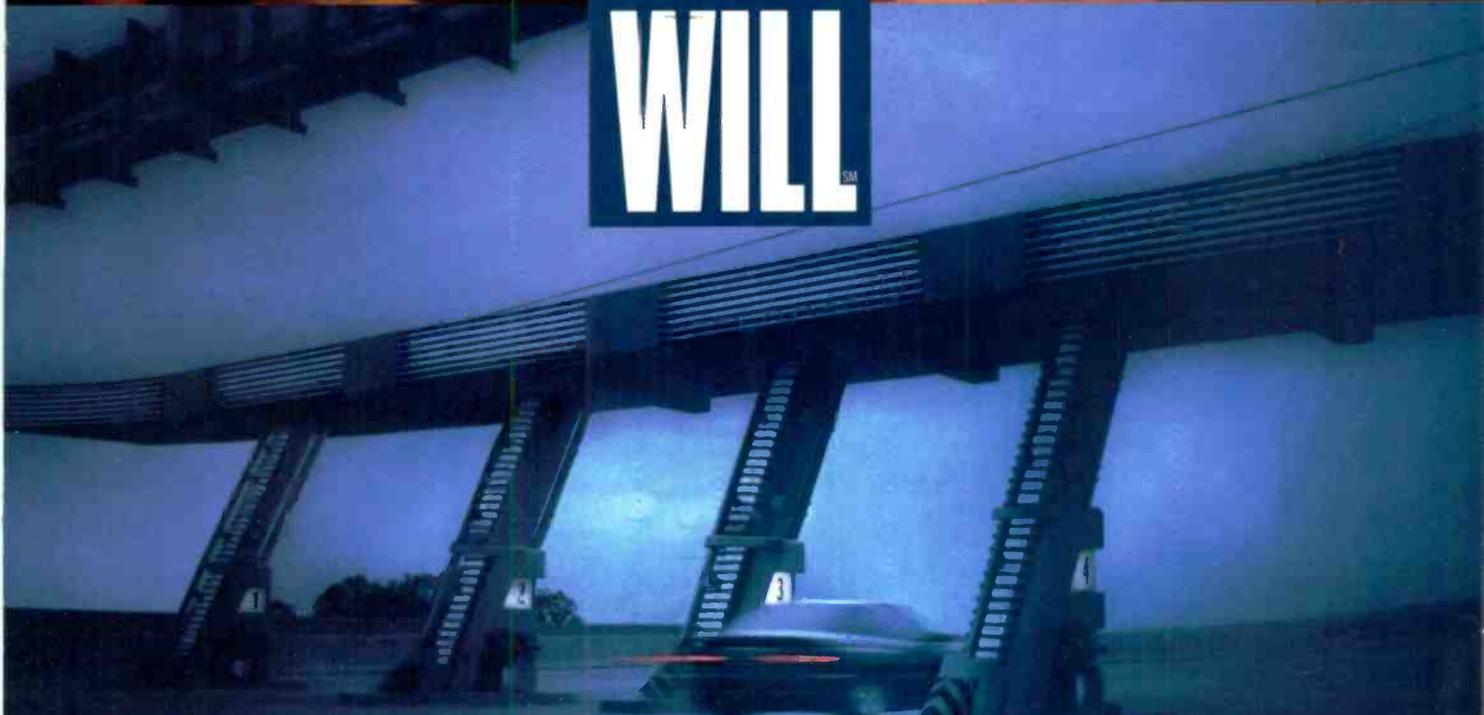
But the goosebumps *are* back, this time for me alone, unfortunately. My wife and our current friends don't seem to get them. They like the system, as they have always liked it, but they detect no transformation. As midnight approaches, my wife often asks me to turn it off.

It's amazing how hard that has become to do. Once you get to the same place, you'll see. □

Have you ever tucked your kid in from a phone booth?

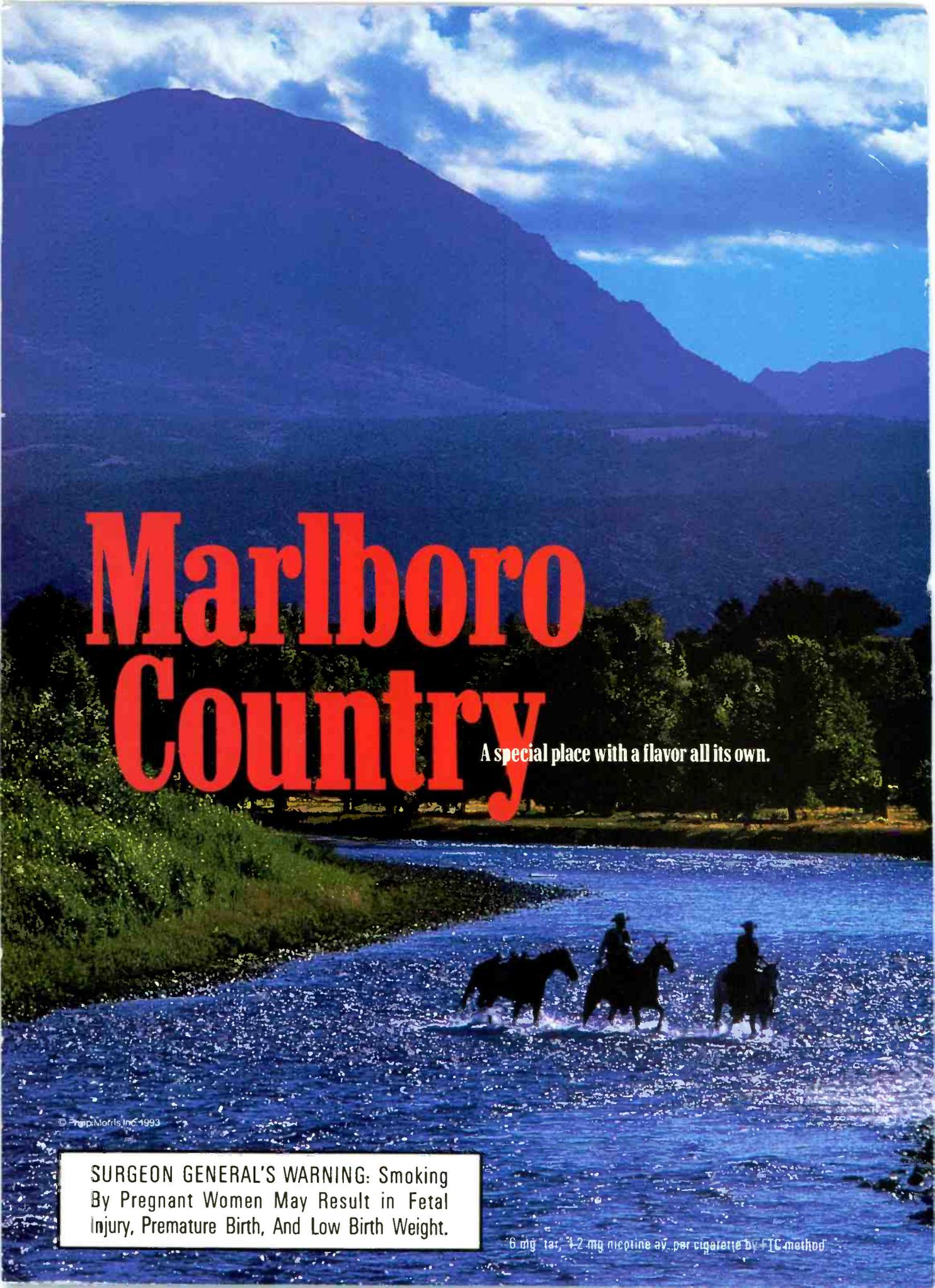


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