

Audio Buying Confusion Solved! (Page 33)

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THE MAGAZINE OF AUDIO, VIDEO, CLASSICAL MUSIC, AND POPULAR MUSIC

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Guide to Stereo System Hookups

**Best and Easiest Ways to
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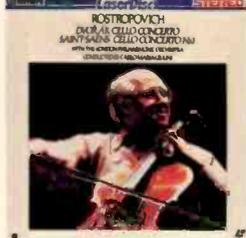
George Shearing



La Bohème



Rostropovich



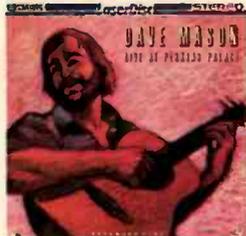
Swan Lake



America in Central Park



Dave Mason



Grover Washington, Jr.



Paul McCartney & Wings
"Rockshow"



The Tubes Video



Kingston Trio



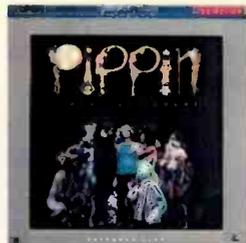
The Nutcracker



Horowitz



Pippin



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AUDIO

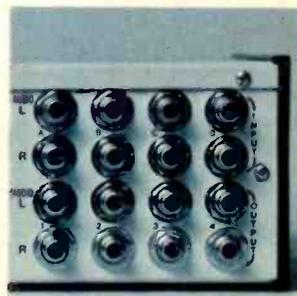
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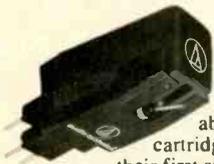
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*Cover Story

Number 1 in a series

The First Component



Most stereo system buyers have little to say about which phono cartridge is installed in their first system. Indeed, many buyers aren't aware of the cartridge as a separate component, and certainly not as an *important* one!

A Vital Position

Yet the phono cartridge is unique in its position as the *first* component for record playing. It must touch your records, translate the tiny groove swings into a varying electronic signal, and complement the virtues of the tone arm, while minimizing any limitations.

The Limiting Factor

Because it is so small and light, and because some models sell for so little, it is easy to ignore the importance of the cartridge. But, to the degree that it is less than perfect, it limits the potential of *every* other part of your stereo system. And it can literally grind the nuances of music out of those expensive records you buy.

Microscopic Precision

Many of the goals of cartridge designers are contradictory, requiring imaginative approaches and superb workmanship on a microscopic level. Ideally, the stylus will barely touch the groove, yet it must also firmly follow its every vibration, changing direction in two planes as often as 20,000 times a second or more! It must also carry along the entire tone arm mechanism, as it slowly works its way to the inside of the long recording spiral.

A Crucial Choice

Any deviation from perfection gives rise to one or more forms of distortion. And unfortunately, this kind of distortion can't be removed, no matter how sophisticated the electronics, or how expensive the speakers. Your choice of a phono cartridge and turntable will actually determine the ultimate performance of your system, and how long your records will maintain their like-new quality. In this series, we'll discuss some of the important factors you should consider when selecting this vital component.

Jon R. Kelly
Jon Kelly, President



audio-technica.

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About This Issue

Inside the pages of March's HIGH FIDELITY

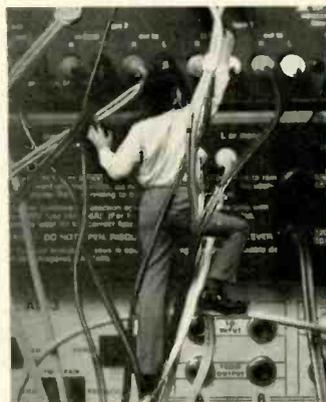
SOMETIMES THE BEST ARTICLE ideas come from our own personal experiences. "Taking Control of Your Stereo System," for instance, was an outgrowth of the complex and constantly changing array of equipment in HF's listening room, and of our combined frustrations with our home systems. Author and consulting technical editor Robert Long not only has spent some fifteen years of shuttling equipment in and out of stereo systems, but he is well along on designing what could turn out to be the ultimate audio switching box for his own setup.

Coincident with the development of that piece, several video switchboxes came to our attention. For the increasing number of you who own or are planning more than a basic video system, we selected two for our video hands-on test.

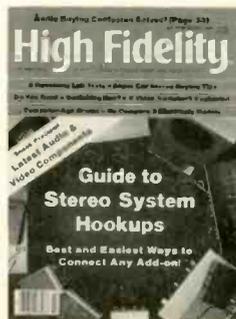
Also featured this month is our "hot-off-the-press" preview of new audio and video components for spring 1983. As electronics features editor Peter Dobbin points out, our predictions are based on a number of pre-Winter Consumer Electronics Show press conferences, as well as personal visits by and to various manufacturers. To help you sort through the array of new products, we've included "Prescription for Audio Indecision." Author Harold Rodgers (a former member of HF's technical staff and currently technical editor of *Technology Illustrated*) details the numerous factors governing the choice of approach to a particular component, such as belt-drive vs. direct-drive in a turntable. And in the "Autophile" column, Gary Stock outlines the three steps to making the right choice when buying a receiver/tape deck for your car.

If you think you've heard everything electronic music has to offer, have you heard electronic drums? You probably have, though you may not know it. Record producer and frequent drum-machine user J. B. Moore tells you where you can hear them and compares five of these revolutionary instruments that are spawning both raves and skepticism.

Next month's issue will feature our annual spring roundup of the WCES, with special reports by all of HF's technical staff analyzing the trends in audio and video. You'll also find valuable tips on getting and keeping your stereo system in phase in "Retsoff's Remedies"; a look at how FM tuners work in "Basically Speaking"; a hands-on evaluation of some new interactive laser video discs; our usual six test reports, including one on the new Nakamichi Dragon cassette deck—the first deck to have automatic continuous playback-head azimuth alignment; and a provocative interview with the ever irreverent Randy Newman.—W.T.



Taking control, page 36



Cover design: Robert Maddocks
Cover photo: Dennis Purse

ON THE COVER: (clockwise from center, rear) Allison Nine loudspeaker, DBX 200 switcher, Russound SP-1 switcher atop Sansul AU-22 integrated amp, Showtime Video Ventures 5000S audio-video switcher, Benchmark Acoustics ARU ambience enhancement system, Channel Master Video Control Center atop Audiopatch 465 patch bay, and Akai GX-F91 cassette deck

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plugged into the optional pedestal shown below.

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And other components housed in modules of the same size and shape are on the drawing board, which is to say that what you see on this page is the beginning of a system which can someday soon satisfy all your audio dreams.

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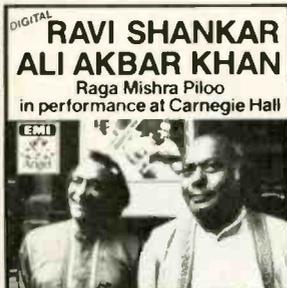
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DS-37843



DS-37954



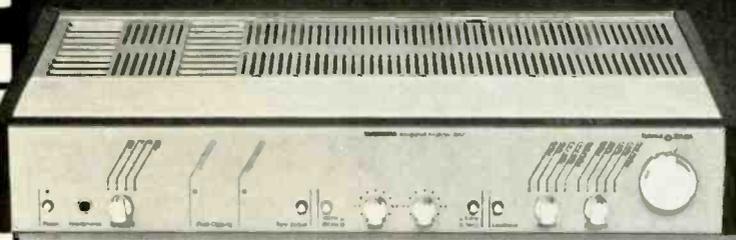
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Letters

A Tip for Good Music

I want to thank you for Peter Mitchell's article "Is Your Stereo System Obsolete?" [November 1982]. I was particularly struck by the discussion of stylus replacement, since my Shure cartridge and stylus were about ten years old. By your two-year replacement rule, they were long overdue. Just this past Friday, I installed a new stylus in the cartridge, and the improvement was astounding! Here I thought I was growing tired of my system and my record collection, when all that was needed was an investment of less than \$20. It was like having a whole new system.

Ed Heiss
Cincinnati, Ohio

Return of the Pod

In the November 1982 issue of *HIGH FIDELITY*, Robert Long mentions a friction type of record-hold-down device. About two years earlier, HF reported on the Eon Pod, a clamp-down unit made in Canada by Eon and distributed here by Hervic. The article said it proved effective.

Is the device Mr. Long had in mind the Eon? I have looked all over this area for it with no success.

Ralph G. Abbott
Anaheim, Calif.

Mr. Long replies: *Yes, I was thinking of the Eon, but I was also thinking of the rubber hold-downs made for 7-inch open-reel tapes, which fit a 1/4-inch spindle and can help stabilize a disc. [The Eon is available for \$20, money order or cashier's check, from A & N Electronics, 14225 Ventura Boulevard, Sherman Oaks, Calif. 91423.—Ed.]*

Quite some time ago, I had a chance to hear the remarkable improvement in sound quality that a record-hold-down device can provide. For more than a year, I've been searching for a record clamp that will work with my new Yamaha PX-2 turntable. I had used a clamping device called "The Pod" on a previous turntable, but the Yamaha's low dust cover does not provide adequate clearance for it.

Much to my delight, an illustration to Robert Long's article "Record and Tape Care Products That Really Do Work" showed a hold-down device fastened to a PX-2. Much to my dismay, the product was not identified in the accompanying caption. Can you tell me what brand of record clamp was shown in the illustration and whether the device does perform satisfactorily with the PX-2?

Ed Scheer
Windsor, Ontario

The product shown (on a PX-3, by the way) is Kenwood's DS-21 Inner Disc Stabilizer, which measures 1 1/16 inches high. According to Yamaha, the clearance between the PX-2's turntable pad and the dust cover is a sparse 3/8 inch. Unless you're willing to play records with the dust cover raised, I'm afraid you're out of luck.—Ed.



Alcohol for Tape Heads

I enjoyed reading Robert Long's article "Record and Tape Care Products That Really Do Work" [November 1982], but his advice to use "isopropyl alcohol" for cleaning tape heads instead of "rubbing alcohol" is chemically amiss. The compound 2-propanol is known by many less technical names, including isopropanol, isopropyl alcohol, dimethyl carbinol—and rubbing alcohol.

Jim Houghton
Carrollton, Ga.

True, except that much of what is sold as rubbing alcohol contains lubricants, such as glycerine, which can coat the tape heads, defeating the very purpose for which the alcohol was applied. The point is to get pure isopropanol, diluted with no more than about 10% water and no other additives.—Ed.

Thomson Ill-Served

I was pleased to read Kenneth Furie's perceptive review of the new Nonesuch recording of Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* ["Classical Reviews," January], and can only second his clearly expressed hope that its release will introduce this great, necessary American work to a broad audience.

Since the whole tenor of Mr. Furie's review was to stress the constructive, positive aspects of a highly flawed recording, I hesitate to suggest that I wish he had found room to mention what is clearly the major liability of the performance: the conducting of Joel Thome. Even without resorting to comparisons with Thomson's own work in the same piece (in the old RCA abridgment) or with tapes of the late Roland Gagnon's mini-Met performances (which featured many of the same singers as the Nonesuch recording), it's obvious that Thome is simply inadequate. The recording has that tentative sound *not* of underrehearsal or "sight-reading," but of singers and instrumentalists trying to deliver their best with incompetent leadership.

I mention this because it is my understanding that Thome was the moving force behind the recording, for which he should be thanked. It's just a pity that, for whatever reasons, this golden opportunity was thrown away by his direct participation in a role for which he is clearly unsuited.

Nicholas Deutsch
New York, N.Y.

Sheffield Shuffle

I was disappointed to find no mention of Sheffield Lab direct discs in Sam Sutherland's "The Audiophile Collector" [December 1982]. Sheffield Lab pioneered direct-to-disc recording fif-

teen years ago, and our efforts have led to the existence of today's audiophile market. We are the only company still pursuing the most difficult but rewarding method of making a record: live, without editing, directly onto the master lacquer. We have released two dozen titles. Two of them—Thelma Houston and Pressure Cooker's "I've Got the Music in Me" and Dave Grusin's "Discovered Again!"—sold a total of more than 400,000 copies before going out of print. I'm sure many of your readers will be pleased to know that new editions are available.

I was also surprised Mr. Sutherland made no reference to the two albums we released featuring vocalist/composer Amanda McBroom and pianist Lincoln Mayorga. Their "Growing Up in Hollywood Town" won us one of our eight Grammy nominations and has sold more than 80,000 copies in two years. Nor did he mention our recent "The Sheffield Track Record," the fastest-selling album (45,000 copies) we have ever released.

I feel it is most unfortunate Mr. Sutherland did not give Sheffield Lab even the most glancing reference in his article, despite our leadership and longevity in this field and our proven ability to make enormously popular pop and rock audiophile records.

Andrew Teton
Marketing Director
Sheffield Lab

HIGH FIDELITY has been covering audiophile discs—including Sheffield Lab's—since their inception, so anything other than a market update at this point would be redundant for our readers. Mr. Sutherland was commissioned to write an overview of audiophile albums released during calendar 1982. Neither this office nor the author has been made aware of any Sheffield Lab pop records issued within that period.

Two further points: "Growing Up in Hollywood Town" was reviewed in these pages in November of 1980, and Sheffield Lab is not the only company making direct-to-disc recordings. Nautilus has announced plans for several projects in that area, one of which, "Secret of the Andes," was released last June.—Ed.

Stereo Fidelity

I've enclosed a clipping from *Stereo Review's* January 1983 "Audio Q. and A." column, which contains a question [about modifying a garage for use as a listening room] that is also answered in January's "CrossTalk" in *HIGH FIDELITY*. I've noticed quite a few duplications in test reports, too. Are you and *Stereo Review* merging?

Jason Z. Hartmann
Portland, Ore.

No, and we're usually just as surprised as you are when something like that happens. Neither magazine knows exactly what the other is doing, and some readers send duplicate letters in hope of seeing a reply in print. And in a time of technological innovation (paradoxically combined with few new-product introductions), some overlap in equipment coverage is inevitable.—Ed.

Letters should be addressed to The Editor, HIGH FIDELITY, 825 7th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019. All letters are subject to editing for brevity and clarity.



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coreless FG-servo direct-drive capstan motor and the Dyna-Scape filter with Hold-Back Tension servo, glides the tape smoothly over the three high-performance heads.

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Putting more pleasure in sound



Spring '83 Component Preview

A first look at the newest and most exciting audio and video products
by Peter Dobbin

Though a soft economy and bulging inventories are forcing manufacturers to trim down the number of product introductions, 1983 will still see several important new audio and video components. And without the distraction of "fill-in" models—engineered chiefly to satisfy a price point—our job in reporting on the audio-video scene is a lot more exciting this year.

The majority of the 1983 introductions took place in Las Vegas at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show as this issue went to press. Prior to the twice-yearly trade event, HF's editors attended special press briefings whose product demonstrations provided a good indication of what was to come in Las Vegas. Over the next few months, many of the models introduced at the CES will be discussed in detail in our "High Fidelity News" and "Video Fronts" columns.

AUDIO



If one company could be singled out for consistently advancing the state of the art in cassette-deck technology, it would surely be Nakamichi. The Dragon, its newest recorder and first with automatic reverse, actually senses and corrects azimuth errors during playback, completely eliminating the need for special test tones. Azimuth alignment has a profound effect on high-frequency response, and the beauty of the NAAC (Nakamichi Automatic Azimuth Correction) system is that it functions on every cassette, whether commercially recorded or homemade. It accomplishes this with a playback head that derives two signals from each track (using a total of eight gaps—four for forward play and four for reverse), read from the upper and lower portions of the track. The signals then pass through a bandpass filter and squaring circuit, after which a phase comparator deter-

mines the phase error between them. The error signal is amplified and used to drive a servomotor that manipulates the playback head until the error disappears. Very neat, indeed.

The Dragon is also said to be the first automatic-reversing cassette deck to use a closed-loop, dual-capstan drive system in which each capstan has its own direct-drive motor. And finally—though we've barely begun enumerating all its attributes—the Dragon will automatically switch from the recording mode to the recording-pause mode whenever a program break of more than ten seconds is detected. If you're interested, you might start saving up now; this incredible machine is priced at \$1,850.

Pioneer joins the ranks of Carver and NAD in making a stunning breakthrough in FM tuner performance. Thanks to a circuit it calls a "digital direct decoder," Pioneer says adjacent-channel selectivity can be raised to 70 dB (to our knowledge, no previous tuner ever exceeded 20 dB) and channel separation can be raised to a mind-boggling 75 dB (35 dB is usually considered excellent). The company accomplishes this by using a 1.26-MHz intermediate frequen-

cy and a pulse-count detector that switches a regenerated 38-kHz sine-wave stereo subcarrier. (Most tuners use a square-wave subcarrier that can produce harmonics.) Pioneer expects to introduce the technology to the U.S. market this spring in a separate tuner and in some receivers.



Electro-Voice's latest venture in consumer audio is a new loudspeaker design. Called the CD Series Type 35i, the system is the result of E-V's work in controlled-directivity devices—particularly the horns that are the hallmarks of the company's professional loudspeakers. The dish-like structures (dubbed "direktors") surrounding the

Digital: The Countdown Continues

THOUGH ONLY SONY AND Hitachi have publicly announced that they will bring their Compact Disc players to these shores by spring, we expect that just about every Japanese manufacturer will be exhibiting production models of their CD players at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show. Many brands have been on sale in Japan since October; the delay in bringing the players to the U.S. seems to have been caused by the reticence of American record labels to embrace the format. And without software, the players have no market value.

The good news is that CBS has climbed aboard the CD bandwagon. As we reported in February, the company will allow discs pressed in Japan by its

CBS/Sony affiliate to be sold in the U.S. The introduction date for CBS/Sony discs is planned to coincide with that of the Sony player. The joint software venture will eventually broaden to include domestic production, with a pressing facility scheduled to go on line in 1984. Polygram, the international record conglomerate, has been busy pressing CDs in Europe for several months, and almost two hundred discs should be available here this summer. (See the list of Polygram titles in our January issue.)

What all this means is that the first hurdle for the Compact Disc format has been cleared. We expect further plans to be announced at the CES and will fill you in on what we learn next month.

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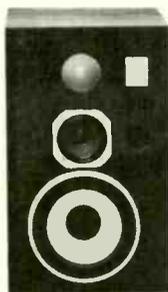
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1½-inch midrange speaker and 1-inch tweeter control the drivers' spatial coverage. This, says E-V, assures stable stereo imaging throughout the midrange-to-tweeter frequency band as well as assuring the best possible match to the system's 12-inch woofer. A "power sentinel" circuit warns the listener (via amber and red LEDs) that safe operating limits are being exceeded and then trips a relay to reduce input if the situation is not corrected. The 35i is priced at \$750; the Type 35 version with a nonremovable grille cloth and without flashing LEDs is \$550.



Sansui's introductions include a new low-priced tuner, some integrated amps, and a car stereo tuner capable of receiving all types of stereo-AM broadcasts. The company's continuing loyalty to audiophiles is reflected in its new B-2301, a beauty of a power amplifier. With a power rating of 300 watts (24¼ dBW) per side and a frequency response said to be flat from DC to 300 kHz, the amp uses "Super Feedforward" circuitry to reduce distortion. The B-2301 is also said to use separate power supplies for each channel in the power, pre-driver, and preamplifier stages. Its price is \$2,600.



JBL's new speaker introductions are too numerous for proper coverage in this limited space, so fans of the California-based company's products will have to make do with a brief overview. A compact three-way bookshelf system, the L-86 (pictured here), joins the company's high-performance L-Series. Replacing the Radiance line of loudspeakers is the J-Series, comprising three modestly priced bookshelf systems. And a new 6½-inch three-way speaker, the T-425, brings to seven the number of JBL models for the car.

Tape Trends

MEMOREX CONSUMER PRODUCTS has a new corporate name, Memtek, but its tapes retain the familiar Memorex moniker. For audio, there's the new "dB" series—an economically priced Type 1 formulation available in C-60 and C-90 lengths—and three microcassette formulations: metal, premium ferric, and standard ferric. The Memorex line of VHS cassettes has also been revamped to create a choice of three video formulations—High Grade, Pro Series, and Standard.

Sony follows up on its UCX-S introduction of last year with another Type 2 formulation, UCX. Available in both C-60 and C-90 lengths, UCX is said to have a retentivity of 1,750 gauss and a coercivity of 600 oersteds. The new tape should come in at about \$1 less at retail than UCX-S.

Nakamichi adds SX-II, a double-coated Type 2 ferricobalt tape, to its lineup. C-60 and C-90 lengths are priced at \$5.85 and \$8, respectively. And finally, Denon's latest is DX-4, a Type 1 ferric for \$4.25 (C-60) and \$6 (C-90).



One can't help but be impressed by the prices of Citation's two new preamps and power amp—\$3,500, \$2,500, and \$3,500, respectively. A division of Harman Kardon, Citation is actively involved in realizing Finnish designer Matti Ojala's electronic imperative: low negative feedback. The \$2,500 Model X-II preamp, pictured here, employs independent power supplies for the left and right channels in both the phono and main amp stages. Each electrical connector in the device is gold plated, and the faceplate bears the signature of Dr. Ojala. We'll bring you more Citation details next month.

When the FCC failed to establish a stereo-AM standard, leaving the decision up to individual manufacturers and broadcasters, it seemed that chaos would rule and that

stereo AM would cease to be a commercial possibility. A recent announcement by Delco Electronics, however, has revived the medium's promise. The billion-dollar electronics manufacturing subsidiary of General Motors intends to recommend the Motorola stereo-AM system for use in GM vehicles' receivers. In its statement to the press, Delco said its decision was based on a five-month evaluation of three of the competing systems. Don't expect to see Delco car receivers equipped with the Motorola circuit until the 1984 model year, though.



All three decks in Teac's new Z series are equipped with Dolby B and C and DBX noise reduction circuits. The top-of-the-line Z-7000 is fairly mouth-watering in its complement of features: automatic tape-tuning circuitry (bias, level, and EQ), a real-time tape counter, and a dizzying array of programmable music-search functions. We are most intrigued with a button labeled "STR"; if tapped while the deck is in the recording mode, the control orders the transport to rewind the tape to the point where recording was initiated, thus facilitating fast retakes. The automatic fader is also quite neat: The fade-in and fade-out

IN APRIL'S ISSUE:

complete coverage of the Winter Consumer Electronics Show, with details on the new tape decks, receivers, loudspeakers, digital-disc and record players, and other components introduced there—as well as an analysis of important new trends

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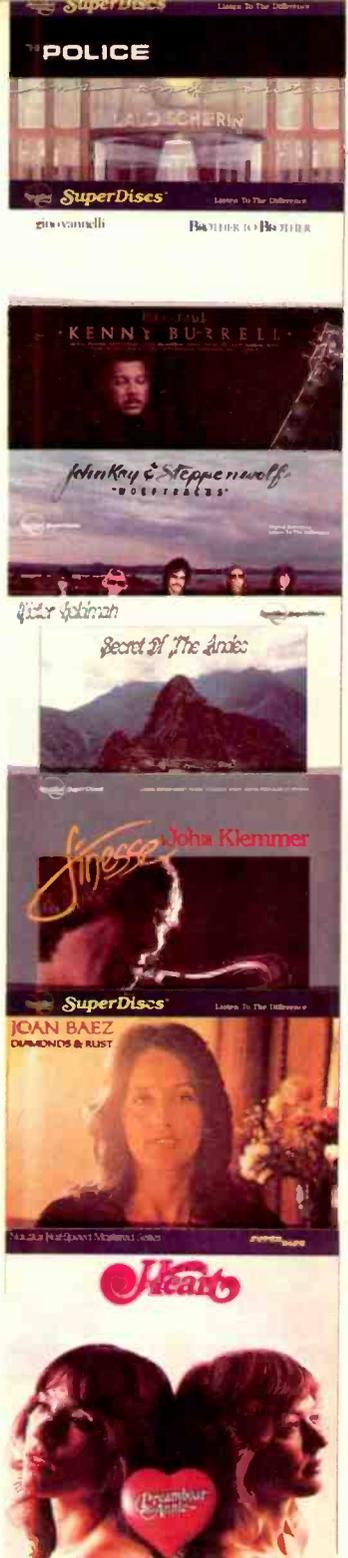
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times are separately adjustable from one to ten seconds. The three-head, three-motor Z-7000 is priced at \$1,800, but siblings in the line can be had for \$1,000 and \$1,400.



A portable phonograph that you listen to with earphones, Audio Technica's AT-770 "Mister Disc" represents the lengths to which manufacturers are willing to go to satisfy the burgeoning market for high-quality portable sound. The battery-operated record player measures just over 11 inches long, 4 inches wide, and 2½ inches high; it weighs about 2½ pounds. It plays standard LPs and 45s—yes, they do protrude out of the player case—and uses a belt-drive motor and a tonearm equipped with an A-T fixed-coil pickup. Normally, you listen to the AT-770 with high-efficiency headphones (included with the system), though line-out jacks on the player allow it to be plugged into a standard stereo system. A note for joggers: Though Audio-Technica calls "Mister Disc" a personal portable phonograph, it can only be used on a stationary and stable surface.



The beautifully finished, massively built Denon DP-60L turntable this year receives a new arm and a new model number, DP-62L. Dubbed Servo Tracer, the arm responds automatically to vertical and horizontal displacements caused by warped LPs, generating a counter force sufficient to prevent excessive infrasonic output. Denon says that just about any phono cartridge can be mated to the arm with little fear of warp-induced mistracking. The upgraded turntable is priced at \$600.

Those of you who want KEF loudspeakers at a lower price can now choose from three models in the new Standard Series. Each,



says KEF, incorporates technology developed for the Reference Series: vertical driver alignment, low-diffraction baffles, computer-aided design, and sophisticated crossover networks. The three models range in price from \$300 per pair to \$750 per pair. The top-of-the-series Carlton III (pictured here), a two-way system with a passive bass radiator, is rated at $\pm 2\frac{1}{2}$ dB over a frequency range of 47 Hz to 20 kHz, measured on-axis.



Among the new Radio Shack products, we admit to an overwhelming fondness for the looks of the Realistic ST-500/SA-500 tuner/amplifier combination. The whole package costs just \$300 and includes a power amp section rated at 30 watts (14¼ dBW) per side, an FM signal-strength meter, and a variable mike echo feature for vocal sweetening.



The popular Bose 301 bookshelf loudspeaker has been modified and now bears a Series II suffix. Gone is the high-frequency directing vane, and in its place is a Free-Space array—two side-mounted angled tweeters, one delivering its output to the front and one to the rear. The enclosure has also been modified with a new ducted port that is said to improve low-frequency response at high playing levels. External dimensions, however, are the same as the original speaker's. The 301 Series II is priced at \$390 per pair.

With no direct connection to the signal path, the output protection circuitry in Tandberg's TIA-3012 integrated amplifier makes use of heat-difference sensors to eliminate DC voltage at the amp's output.



The unit is rated at 100 watts (20 dBW) per side, uses MOS FET output transistors, and has foil-type capacitors in place of electrolytic or ceramic devices. With an optional set of rosewood side panels, the amp can be paired with a Tandberg tuner to make a thoroughly deluxe "receiver." Shown here are the T1A-3012 amp (\$995) joined to the TPT-3001 tuner, for a total price (including side panels) of \$2,090.



Canton, the West German speaker manufacturer, is introducing the Ergo P to the

U.S. market. A handsome (if somewhat stark-looking) loudspeaker, it contains two woofers mounted in acoustically divided chambers, a specially loaded midrange driver, and a titanium dome tweeter. The \$1,000 speaker is said to have extremely good dispersion characteristics.



If you've been wanting to try DBX noise reduction but have been put off by the price of add-on encode/decode devices, DBX's Model NX-40 should strike a happy note. The \$159 add-on processor supplies simultaneous encode/decode circuitry, making accurate off-the-tape monitoring possible with three-head recorders. Separate switching on the device makes decoding of DBX-encoded discs possible.

VIDEO

If the number of new products is any indication, the video boom is losing some steam. What the market needs—and what we are eagerly awaiting—is Beta HiFi, the

Sony-developed technique for recording a stereo soundtrack via a VCR's helical-scanning tape head. The system promises to be capable of audio performance as good as, or better than, that of audio-only open-reel decks. Decks so equipped will, according to Sony, still be capable of playing back the mono soundtracks of previously recorded Beta cassettes; a standard stationary audio head will handle that job. A joint press conference by all the Beta HiFi licensees—Aiwa, Marantz, NEC, Sanyo, Technika, Toshiba, and Zenith—is scheduled for the Consumer Electronics Show and should result in more detailed information on price and availability. VHS fans, do not despair. Word has it that the VHS camp has developed a similar audio recording system.



The inventor of the VHS format, JVC has remained adamant on the importance of four-head VCRs. The company feels that, with separate heads for the SP (two-hour) and EP (six-hour) recording modes, picture quality in both speeds is maximized. Though playback in the intermediate LP (four-hour) speed is available in JVC decks, the company maintains that LP recording

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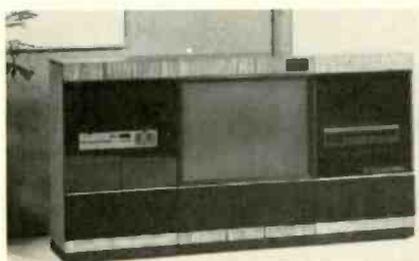
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would entail too great a compromise.

All of this is by way of introduction to JVC's new, bottom-of-the-line HR-7100U VCR. Priced at \$700, the new recorder may lack some of the features of its more expensive siblings, but it retains their four-head design. Moreover, its transport and timer controls (ten-day/one-event) have all been designed to be accessible and easy for the novice to operate. Also new from JVC this year is the C-2073US color receiver (\$750), a 19-inch set with direct audio and video inputs, comb filter, 134-channel tuning capability, and full-function wireless remote control.



Acknowledging that projection television systems can be an eyesore, Magnavox has come up with a number of approaches to

ease the aesthetic strain. Particularly successful in that regard is the Model RC-8515 40-inch projection set, pictured here between two HD-5640 video organizer cabinets. The rear-projection TV set is equipped with a wireless remote control, 112-channel tuning capability, direct-access tuning, channel scan, and a "stereo" audio system. The entire setup costs \$3,600.



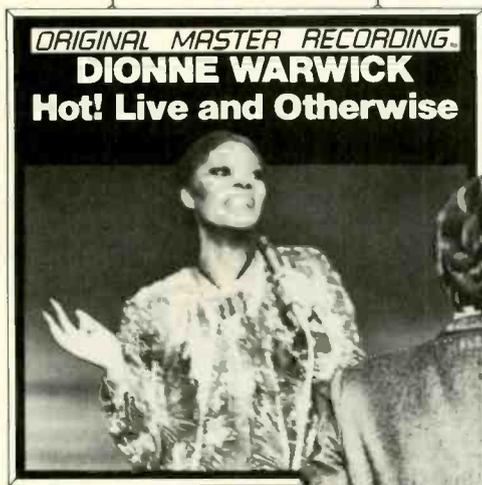
At \$400, Sanyo's new Beta-format VCR-3900 is the least expensive deck we've seen yet. (Just a year ago, the industry was wondering when the \$500 retail price barrier would be broken.) It also has a very respectable complement of features, including a three-day/one-event programmable timer, a freeze-frame function, and Betascan high-speed picture search. For \$600, Sanyo also has the new VCR-6300, which offers a thirteen-function wireless remote control, a seven-day/one-event programmable timer, and a 105-channel tuner.



BP Electronics' five-in-one V-1880 processor is among the most versatile video accessories available. It combines a stabilizer to ensure good dubs, an image enhancer to increase detail, an RF converter, a fader, and a dual-output distribution amplifier in one compact box. The V-1880 costs \$250.

A Phoenix-based company calling itself the PortaVideo Entertainment Group is about to give some competition to RentaBeta, the Beta VCR rental plan inaugurated by Superscope two years ago. PortaVideo is presently setting up distributorships for a specially designed sixteen-pound playback-only VHS deck. The VCR is encased in tough plastic, and its operating controls and connections have been designed for maximum ease of use. To be offered on a per-night basis, the PortaVideo player should further broaden the market for rental cassettes; VCR owners might also make use of it for their periodic dubbing needs. **HF**

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Circle 18 on Reader-Service Card

Practical answers to your audio questions by Robert Long

All Glitter?

Are gold-plated input and output contacts or low-loss patch cords with gold-plated plugs superior to the everyday varieties?—Don May, East Aurora, N.Y.

Yes. By preventing oxidation, the gold plating minimizes RF interference, signal loss, and intermittency in the contacts. I'm not so sure about some of the other virtues claimed for them, but the demonstrable advantages are enough to make me, for one, go for the gold.

A Question of Bias

In your February 1982 issue, you report on the Yamaha K-960 cassette deck, which I have since purchased. In the report, you suggest that a bias higher than the "zero" setting recommended in the manual might be desirable for TDK SA tape. By how much should the control be advanced for SA or SA-X or Maxell UDXL-II or XL-IIS? Also, I notice in your tape tests in the same issue that the relative bias of the thirty-odd tapes varies from 87% to 127% (a spread of forty percentage points). But the Yamaha's bias adjustment range is $\pm 8\%$, or just sixteen points. If I read your test reports correctly, the deck's range of adjustment is insufficient to cover the bias requirements of all the available tapes.—Bert Sharp, London, Ontario, Canada

The cassettes we reported on in the February 1982 issue included some very atypical ferrics and some slightly atypical metal tapes. If you stay with the Type 2 tapes (which evidently is what you're interested in, since all the tapes you ask about fall into that group), the relative bias spread runs from 90% to 110%—approximately the same as the Yamaha's control range. Our "100% standard" for this group is the bias requirement of a Nakamichi SX sample some four years old. Relative to it, the bias requirements of our test samples of UDXL-II and SA (both tested in August 1978) were 99% and 107% respectively; XL-IIS and SA-X (February 1982) both measured 108%. But we have no objective fix on the calibration of the Yamaha control, and current samples of these tapes—particularly those we tested four years ago—would probably yield somewhat different results.

Although you might try turning the

control half-way up from its "zero" setting as a starting point for SA, SA-X, UDXL-II, and XL-IIS, aural comparison of results with the original source material is the only way to get the best possible match without test instruments. A very noisy disc can be a big help. (A 78 is ideal, if you're set up to play them.) Record a passage; play it back, synchronizing the tape to the disc; adjust the output of the deck to match the disc level; and compare the relationship of the music to the record scratch in each. If the disc sounds scratchier, the tape is over-biased and you should back off on the control; if the tape sounds scratchier, its response curve is still peaking at the high end from insufficient bias.

Keep in mind that by providing this control, Yamaha gives you more flexibility than you would have without it. But by limiting its range, the designer has eliminated the possibility of gross misadjustment—which could easily occur without instruments to assist in the adjustment if the range were anything like forty points.

What's Left?

My Sansui 4900Z receiver's right channel is much louder than its left. The meters read that way, and if I turn the volume down the sound disappears altogether in the left channel. Is the fault in the receiver or in the speakers?—Tommy McNamara, Bronx, N.Y.

Congratulations! You have just discovered a use for output meters. In this case, they demonstrate that the receiver needs servicing—assuming that you get the same results with all signal sources. If the left channel is low only when a particular external source is selected (especially if the device is something other than a turntable), then it's probably the attached unit that needs servicing, rather than the receiver.

To Break the Mold?

I made the mistake of storing some of my records in a closet, where they seem to have become quite attached to some mildew. My Discwasher doesn't completely free the records of the resulting noise. Can you tell me what to do?—Steve Pieri, Oceanside, Calif.

Unfortunately, no. The Discwasher solution contains a mild antifungicide to prevent

the growth of mildew and similar molds, but once they have eaten into the record vinyl, the damage is irreversible.

On the Level

I would like to know at what signal level to record on my Harman Kardon hk-400 cassette deck when using a DBX 128 noise reduction unit. To date, I haven't received the same answer twice.—Jimmy Ray Hunter, Fort Myers, Fla.

This is an endlessly confusing subject, partly because the recent decks with DBX built in put the compression after the metering, whereas an outboard DBX unit like yours applies the compression ahead of the metering. The rules for the two situations are entirely different.

Some years back, DBX was recommending leaving about 8 dB of headroom as standard with cassette recorders. If your tape can normally be recorded to +3 on your deck's meters, for instance, -5 (8 dB lower) would be a good maximum level for recordings with an outboard DBX unit—at least for starters. The ideal headroom depends on a number of factors, but basically it is required because the compression of DBX encoding squeezes maximum high-frequency levels closer to maximum mid-range levels, thereby exceeding the very limited high-frequency headroom of cassette tapes—if the midrange is recorded at the highest possible level. You may not need the full 8 dB, however. You can chip away at it if (1) your deck's meters have quick peak-reading response, as most new ones do, (2) there is some means of supplying extra high-frequency headroom (HX Professional does an excellent job here), or (3) the deck's meters are equalized (as Tandberg's and Dual's have been for some years, though few other companies have followed this lead). I'm not familiar with your deck and therefore cannot say how much of this applies. But if you're in doubt, a series of experiments in copying recordings with lots of high-frequency energy (bells, solo trumpet, loud triangle, etc.) should help. When these sounds begin to get dull, fuzzy, or distorted, you've got the level too high.

If you had a deck with the DBX built in, the reply would be simple: Follow the directions in the owner's manual.

We regret that the volume of reader mail is too great for us to answer all questions individually.

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Circle 12 on Reader-Service Card

The Autophile

Going on the road with stereo by Gary Stock

Choosing a Front End

ONE OF THE FEW penalties we pay for living in an era of plenty is having to choose from its cornucopia of pleasures. It's a backhanded curse of sorts, and nowhere is it more apparent than in the area of electronics. The prolific peoples of Europe and the Far East have given us so many options that it's difficult enough to know what all of them are, much less which one of them is the best.

A quick shuffle through my files tells me that there are at least 150 different AM/FM cassette players for the car (I'll call them front ends henceforth, for reasons of brevity) available at this moment. So if you're the owner of a conventional automobile, the winnowing process will have to eliminate 149-odd contenders.

That's not quite as difficult a task as it may initially seem, especially if you're systematic about it. By using a logical process of elimination, you can chop your way through the jungle of possibilities, hacking away dozens of poor choices with each machetelike stroke of your pencil. In the

end, you should be down to a manageable handful of contenders, all of which will be equally suitable for your vehicle. Here's the system:

Step one is figuring out what will fit into your car. Front ends come in a bewildering array of sizes, with code names like "minican," "DIN nosepiece," and "GM vertical." But don't worry about the nomenclature at this stage; just go out into the driveway and measure the size of the opening in the dash and the depth of the aperture, using a flexible steel tape measure. You might also want to jot down the year, make, and model of the car, as well as whether it came with any optional equipment such as air conditioning or a gauge package that might occupy space behind the dashboard. (If you're replacing a factory-installed AM radio, you'll have to remove it before making your measurements.)

Armed with this information, you should be able to look through the application guides put out by virtually all of the reputable makers of car stereo front ends (they're usually available at the dealer) to determine which models will work in your car. A few general remarks here: If you own

a traditional American land cruiser from the Sixties or Seventies, virtually anything will fit with room to spare. Japanese cars usually accept only the small models in a manufacturer's line—so-called "mini" or "import" designs—while European cars may take intermediate-size front ends or minis. A handful of oddball vehicles accept only special front ends: GM X-body cars, for instance, use vertical-format units offered by only a few manufacturers.

Having now eliminated any front ends that won't fit, press on to weeding out those that won't *look* right. Burlwood faceplates clearly won't do in a high-tech Mazda RX-7, while the black digital look of many other designs will hardly be appropriate in a restored '57 Chevy Nomad.

Step two is deciding how much you're willing to spend, which should reduce the field even more dramatically. Front ends from name makers cover an astonishingly broad price span: from about \$50, which will buy you a unit with a modest radio, a distinctly limited tape section, and a couple of watts of power per channel, to more than \$1,000, which purchases not only superb radio and tape performance, but also conveniences like automatic mono/stereo switching, automatic reverse for the tape, elaborate tone controls, and—in most cases—a healthy power output.

Where on the price continuum you decide to operate depends on how important a place music occupies in your mobile life. For the casual, noncritical listener looking for on-the-go aural wallpaper, any of the \$75 to \$100 models should provide adequate fidelity and power. The \$125-\$200 range upgrades the fidelity of reception and tape playback to standards approximating those of midpriced home stereo equipment. Beyond that point, additional money essentially buys convenience and automation—a front end that thinks more for itself (by, say, adjusting radio reception parameters and reversing the tape), remembers more (in the way of electronically stored station frequency presets), and plays louder (by virtue of either a higher power output or an external power amplifier included in the total cost).

When making a decision on how much to spend, it's also wise to bear in mind the question of compatibility: Budget speakers with limited range certainly won't reveal the sonic subtleties that a high-priced front end can deliver, while an elaborate subwoofer/component speaker system can sound equally bad, mercilessly reproducing the sonic errors of a cheap radio/cassette-



Car stereo receiver/cassette decks, or "front ends," come in a wide variety of models. Typical of deluxe units are Panasonic's CQ-S747 (top) and Pioneer's UKE-1000 (bottom). Features include Dolby, tape EQ switching, separate bass and treble controls, circuits for improving FM reception, and electronic station presets (15 each, in the case of these two models). Especially with units that have a substantial number of controls, it's important before you buy to make a hands-on evaluation, preferably in dim light. This will help you determine how easy they are to operate under typical nighttime driving conditions, when you must use them primarily by feel.

player. Try to maintain a balance between the costs and capabilities of the front end and the loudspeakers—with a ratio of about 3:2 between their respective costs (e.g., a \$150 front end and a speaker package that totals about \$100).

Step three is evaluating two important factors: the comparative performance of the remaining contenders and their relative ease of use. Performance is not an easy thing to measure in car equipment, but for the purposes of comparison, look at the specification sheets of the units in question. See if they contain a note to the effect that the measurements were made in accordance with "IHF," "EIA," or "Ad Hoc Committee" standards: These phrases all mean the same thing—that the measurements have been performed using the one set of conditions the huge and disparate electronics industry has been able to agree on for testing auto sound gear. (Discard any spec sheet that doesn't mention any of these standards: It might just as well be blank, for all the useful comparative data it will provide.) Look at power output, amplifier distortion, and tuner distortion, giving a mental "plus" to any unit that offers a two-to-one numerical advantage over its competitors on any of these figures (lower distortion figures and higher power outputs are better). Hence a unit with 0.5% or less amplifier distortion gets a "plus" relative to a unit with 1% or more distortion, while a unit with 8 watts of power into 4 ohms for each channel receives a "plus" compared to one of 4 watts or less. At the end of the performance comparison, add up the number of pluses for each model. The winners should be clearly apparent.

As to the question of ease of use, this is best evaluated hands-on in the showroom. Try to do this in dim light, to approximate night-driving conditions. Repeatedly insert and withdraw tapes. Close your eyes and try to use the controls. See how rapidly the fast forward and rewind switches cycle the tape to desired positions, and note whether the controls are locking or whether you have to keep your finger on to make them work. In general, fiddle with all the knobs, dials, and pushbuttons to see whether the unit feels comfortable to you.

A few minor, though nonetheless significant, points remain to be factored in: length of warranty for your remaining contenders; the relative reputations and attitudes of the various dealers selling them; and whether wiring, an installation kit, and other needed accessories are included in the price of the unit.

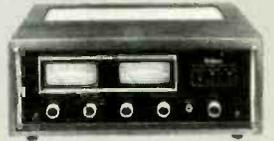
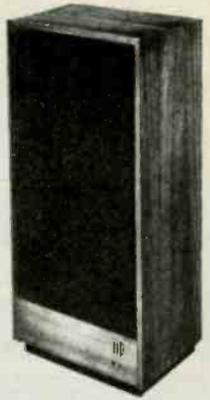
By the time you've considered all of the above, the best model for your purposes should have emerged, front and center. In which case, congratulations! You've succeeded against odds of 150 to 1, and all it took was a little organization and a cool head.

HF

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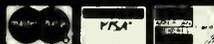
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Basically Speaking

Audio concepts and terms explained by Michael Riggs

Grand Central for Signals

THE NERVE CENTER of a stereo system is its preamplifier, which performs a variety of essential functions. (Even systems that don't appear to have a preamp really do, bundled up in an integrated amplifier or receiver that does other things, as well.) It switches and routes input signals from turntables, tape decks, tuners, and other sources, provides basic (and sometimes not-so-basic) signal-processing facilities, boosts the very weak signals from a magnetic phono cartridge to levels high enough to drive a power amplifier, and supplies appropriate electrical terminations for equipment connected to its inputs and outputs. All this is necessary to transform what otherwise would be merely a conglomeration of disparate, almost useless machines into a flexible, high-performance audio system.

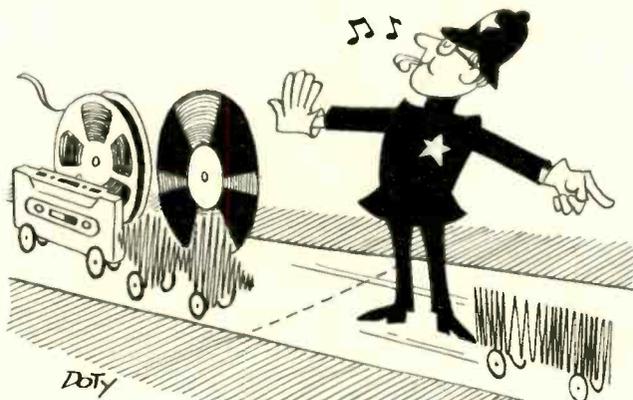
A typical preamplifier has three types of inputs (aux and tuner, magnetic phono, and tape) and two kinds of outputs (main and tape). Let's begin by following the path from an aux (or tuner) input to the main output feeding the power amp.

The signal first goes to an input selector switch, whose position determines whether the signal stops there (so some other can pass) or goes on to the volume and balance controls. The VOLUME is used to change signal levels in both channels simultaneously by the same amount, while the BALANCE is used to adjust the levels of the two channels relative to one another, so as to correct for imbalances in source material and so forth. Although the VOLUME can be used to increase the strength of an incoming signal substantially, it far more often is used as an attenuator, since most power amplifiers require only about 1.5 volts of input to achieve full output.

What features come after the balance control varies considerably, from none to built-in parametric equalizers, noise reductions systems, and image enhancers, depending on the preamp. Usually, however, there will be at least a stereo/mono mode switch, bass and treble tone controls, and perhaps some filters as well. One particularly beneficial item is a good infrasonic filter, rolling off at 12 dB per octave or

more below 20 Hz. This does not necessarily mean that you have to see a switch labeled "subsonic" on the front panel: The filter need only affect the phono input and can therefore be built into it and remain on all the time. Indeed, that is the better arrangement, since then it will protect your tape deck as well as your amp and speakers from the ill effects of infrasonic signals from warped records and badly placed arm/cartridge resonances.

The signal's last stop is the main output itself, which serves as an exit portal and as a suitably low-impedance termination for the power amp's input circuitry. The rule of thumb is that impedances of inputs should be at least several times (preferably ten times or more) higher than the impedances of the outputs feeding them, to prevent



high-frequency rolloff in the audible range. Because most power amps have input impedances of 10,000 (or 10k) ohms while most preamps have main-output impedances down in the low hundreds of ohms, mismatch is seldom a problem. Nevertheless, it's a good idea to check impedance specifications before you buy.

Phono signals follow a path just slightly different from the one just described. Instead of going directly to the selector switch, they first pass through a special circuit dedicated to handling the very weak signals from magnetic cartridges. This phono preamplifier, as it is called, has three functions: to boost these low-level signals up to the strength of the outputs from high-level sources, such as tuners and tape decks; to correct for the treble boost and bass cut applied to all LPs by the RIAA recording-equalization curve; and to supply an electrical termination that will assure flattest possible frequency response.

Because of their low output imped-

ances, moving-coil cartridges are almost entirely insensitive to electrical loading, but many moving-magnet, moving-iron, and other fixed-coil cartridges are quite touchy about it. Most require the industry-standard 47,000 ohms of resistance in parallel with some capacitance between 100 and 500 ohms, the exact value depending on the particular model. Without optimum capacitive loading (within about $\pm 10\%$), fixed-coil cartridges are often prone to high-frequency response errors.

The capacitance seen by a cartridge is the sum of the tonearm wiring and cable capacitance and the phono input capacitance. Some preamps have trimmer switches to adjust their phono-input capacitance, but many do not. In the latter case, it is mainly important that the input capacitance not be so high that the total (including tonearm capacitance) exceeds your pickup's rating: It's easy to add extra capacitance (DB Systems, for example, sells a handy kit for that purpose), but it is usually very difficult to get rid of a surplus.

Although a few preamps handle tape inputs the same way they do other non-phono inputs (aux, tuner, and so forth), most use an isolated tape monitor loop between the main selector switch and the volume control. The output feeding the tape recorder (or signal processing device) is tapped directly off the main selector switch, just as in the other system. The difference is that the output from the tape deck goes to a separate switch downstream from the main selector and the tape output but ahead of the VOLUME. This eliminates any possibility of a three-head tape deck's output being fed back to its input during recording and thereby creating severe and possibly speaker-damaging feedback (the primary disadvantage of putting tape inputs on the main selector). It also enables you to make source/tape comparisons during recording simply by switching the tape monitor.

Ideally, there should be a buffer circuit at each tape output to keep the input impedance high and the output impedance low. Often, however, the input signal goes directly into whatever is connected to the tape outputs, making the tape loop's output impedance the same as the source's. And the source's output impedance may be quite high, so, again, it pays to check the specs, just to be on the safe side. **HF**

Sound Views

Opinion and comment on the changing audio scene by Peter Dobbin

Mystery on The Mountain

IN SOME RESPECTS, this column continues the theme I began in January—the return of innovation in audio design. Though we have always charted the progress and direction of high fidelity by the component milestones along our path, the past several years had left us somewhat jaded in our expectations: Though faceplates underwent their periodic redesigns, the actual performance of audio components seemed to have reached a plateau. In this atmosphere, the recent, almost simultaneous appearance of four remarkable products—the Philips/Sony Compact Disc, the Carver TX-11 tuner, the Polk SDA-1 loudspeaker, and Sony's proposed Beta HiFi system—came as a delightful surprise. As milestones, their clustering in time told us that the plateau might be nearing its end.

The notion of the broader audio market as still being stuck on a performance plateau figured heavily in a recent discussion we had with Dr. Amar Bose at The Mountain, Bose Corporation's hilltop headquarters in Framingham, Massachusetts. What we had expected to be a brief meeting, timed to coincide with his return from M.I.T. (where he teaches a class in electrical engineering), became a long and thought-provoking encounter. The future and necessary redirection of high fidelity was the topic of the day. As it turns out, the founder of one of the most successful American loudspeaker companies is not at all happy with the state of the audio industry.

Many estimates put the total market penetration of audio components at fewer than 30 percent of American homes. As an engineer and researcher with a vested interest in expanding that market, Dr. Bose sees the need for a new class of equipment, designed for simplicity of purchase choice and operation. From his adamant insistence on its necessity, we gathered that he is presently working on such a system, though our efforts to pin him down as to its configuration and functions were greeted with smiles and polite refusals.

As Dr. Bose explains it, the high fidelity industry started in the '40s as an adjunct to the radio parts business. Armed with more enthusiasm than knowledge, would-be audiophiles built their own amplifiers and speaker systems, scouring stores for raw drivers, tubes, unmounted record



The listener is the neglected link in the traditional audio system.—Dr. Bose

changers, and the like. Some of those same earnest audiophiles eventually banded together to form the nucleus of the American audio industry. As manufacturers, they periodically reinvented the wheel, announcing the news with advertisements cloaked in oblique, pseudo-scientific jargon. The result, according to Dr. Bose, is that the high fidelity industry as we know it now is still predicated on complex separate components, whose welter of controls is more cosmetic than functional.

As illustration, Dr. Bose points to the average owner of a complex audio setup. Should anyone approach his bank of equipment and attempt to alter its settings, said owner shivers with anxiety, pronouncing that he likes to listen to music with everything set flat. Why then, wonders Dr. Bose, do manufacturers continue to compete on the basis of complexity? Why continue to elevate the prices and intricacies of components by loading them down with features that go unused? A novice approaching such a piece of equipment, he opines, is frequently so put off as to avoid investing in it at all.

If Dr. Bose is right about the need for simplicity, then the future of the audio industry does not lie with separate components. Though the analogy he chooses to illustrate his argument—assembling your own refrigerator by purchasing parts chosen

on their individual merits—is questionable, his underlying premise is well taken. If psychoacoustics and user convenience are given high priority in the design of audio equipment, then the listener becomes part of the total audio system. Otherwise, equipment becomes an end unto itself, appealing more to gadget lovers than to music lovers. Women are said to purchase less audio equipment than men; that in itself is evidence of the off-putting, techno-macho nature of the high fidelity business.

Though we must content ourselves at present with musings on the form and nature of Dr. Bose's mysterious new approach, it is not surprising that he would be the one to suggest it. His most renowned work—the Model 901 loudspeaker—shocked the audio world when it was introduced in 1968. Here was a loudspeaker envisioned as part of a larger system: the room itself. By projecting a mix of direct and reflected sound, the 901 presented the listener with a more spacious and, arguably, more lifelike stereo soundstage. Each succeeding Bose loudspeaker—and there have only been a handful over the past fifteen years—has remained true to the 901's design objective. The venerable patriarch of the clan endures as well; still flagship of the line, its Series IV suffix attests to subtle fine-tuning over the years.

Car stereo, too, has received the real-world systems touch of Dr. Bose's hand. The Delco/Bose setup (evaluated by Gary Stock in his November 1982 "Autophile" column) demonstrates that the automobile listening environment can be conquered, and that natural-sounding, well-balanced musical reproduction need not be limited to the home. The significance of the achievement—aside from the pleasure it affords owners of certain GM cars—lies in its acknowledgement of the car's interior as an integral part of a successful stereo system.

The introduction of a home system that integrates the user/listener into its basic design may well have a profound effect on the audio industry. By making high fidelity music reproduction available to a wider audience, even the troubled record business should benefit. We are most intrigued, however, by Dr. Bose's insistence that such an integration would also elevate performance beyond its present plateau. For fear of missing the mark, we will forgo airing our conjectures now on the configuration of his mysterious new system. Indeed, only one thing is certain: Audio in the '80s will bear little resemblance to audio in the past.

HF

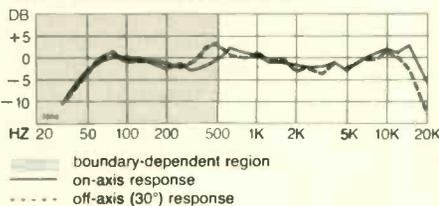
New Equipment Reports

Preparation supervised by Michael Riggs, Peter Dobbin, Robert Long, and Edward J. Foster.
 Laboratory data (unless otherwise noted) supplied by Diversified Science Laboratories.

Allison's New-Look Loudspeaker

Allison Model Nine floor-standing loudspeaker system, in wood cabinet with oak veneer finish and integral metal base. Dimensions: 12½ by 37¼ inches (front), 10¾ inches deep. Price: \$495. Warranty: "full," five years parts and labor. Manufacturer: Allison Acoustics, Inc., 7 Tech Circle, Natick, Mass. 01760.

ROOM RESPONSE CHARACTERISTICS



SENSITIVITY (at 1 meter; 2.8-volt pink noise, 250 Hz to 6 kHz) 92 dB SPL

AVERAGE IMPEDANCE (250 Hz to 6 kHz)

6.3 ohms*

APPROX. TWEETER CONTROL RANGE (re "flat")

-3 dB above 6 kHz*

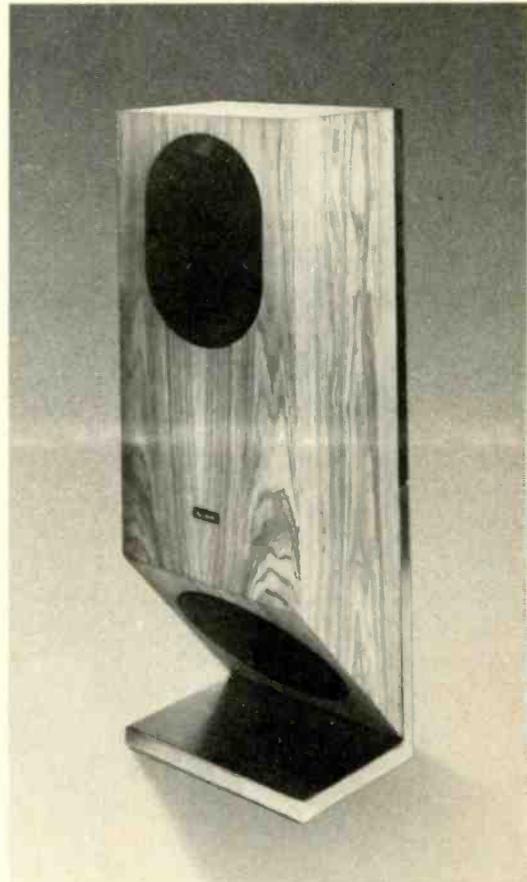
APPROX. MIDRANGE CONTROL RANGE (re "flat")

-2 dB, 600 Hz to 2 kHz*

*See text

LIKE THE VERY FIRST Allison loudspeaker (called, appropriately, the Model One), the Model Nine lets you know right away that it is something out of the ordinary. Finished in oak veneer, with dark, acoustically transparent grilles over the drivers, it tapers at the bottom to a wedge resting on a virtual knife-edge atop a nickel-plated steel base. It looks like nothing else on the market. And indeed, the Allison Nine is different—not merely in appearance, but in design as well.

In the early Seventies, Roy Allison's research led him to the conclusion that acoustical interactions with room boundaries significantly affect a loudspeaker's low-frequency power response, almost always adversely. Proximity of a driver to one or more room surfaces augments its deep-bass output, because the wavelengths are long enough that the reflected energy from those boundaries is almost perfectly in phase with the direct radiation. As the drive frequency goes up, the wavelength shrinks and the reflected sound gradually slides out of phase with the direct, until the distance from the driver to nearby surfaces is equal to a quarter-wavelength. At that point, there can be as much as 11 dB of cancellation, usually somewhere in the upper bass or lower midrange between 100 and 300 Hz, creating a clearly audible dip. When all the sums are done, it turns out that boundary effects alone (never mind room resonances) can create peak-to-trough swings of as much as 20 dB in a speaker's response, with typical systems showing 6 to 12 dB of variation.



Allison's strategy, which has influenced the design of many other speakers since, begins with a specified optimum placement for the speaker: standing on the floor two feet or more from the nearest side wall and with its back against the rear wall. That puts the side wall far enough away to have negligible effect on the system response. The woofer is mounted as close as possible to the floor, with the distance from the center of the driver to the rear wall approximately equal to its distance from the floor, thereby ensuring uniform bass reinforcement. This is achieved by angling the baffle, which accounts for the enclosure's unusual shape, with the woofer mounted on its sloping bottom surface.

As a result of this unconventional

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arrangement, the woofer's response remains essentially flat up to an unusually high frequency before cancellation sets in. Placing the midrange drivers well up off the floor pushes their "dip frequency" down below that of the woofer. Flat low-frequency response can then be achieved by selecting a crossover frequency between the two response notches, rolling off the woofers below their dip range and the midranges above theirs. Variations of this technique, which Allison calls Stabilized Radiation Loading, are at the heart of all of the company's speakers. The particular version used depends on the room position for which the model is designed.

The Model Nine's woofer crosses over at 350 Hz to a 3½-inch midrange driver, which in turn gives up at 3.75 kHz to a 1-inch tweeter. The two upper-range drivers are unusual, in that they are neither cones nor ordinary hemispherical domes. Rather, they are what Allison calls Convex Diaphragm drivers. Unlike conventional domes, which they superficially resemble, these units are not driven at the rim. Instead, the rims are fastened directly to the mounting plate and the voice coil is attached about half-way up the inside of the diaphragm. According to Allison, this results in a driver that, in addition to moving fore and aft in the usual manner, also flexes radially, thereby improving dispersion.

All three drivers are mounted flush to their baffles and protected by removable perforated plastic grilles. On the rear panel is a pair of flat, two-position toggles that control the outputs of the midrange and tweeter. Below the driver-level controls are two pairs of color-coded binding posts linked by jumpers. Removing the jumpers separates the woofer from the upper-range drivers for biamping, with or without an external electronic crossover. Leaving them in place enables you to use either set of posts for conventional connection to a single stereo amp.

For both listening and lab tests, the Nines were set up according to Allison's recommendations, standing on the floor away from side walls and with their backs against the rear wall. Diversified Science Laboratories' measurements show the Nine to be a high-sensitivity loudspeaker—2 dB better than Allison's specification, in fact. Its impedance varies somewhat according to the settings of the driver-level controls, especially at high frequencies, averaging between 6.3 ohms in the flat setting and 6.6 ohms in the full-slope position. Maximum impedance is 10 ohms with either setting, occurring at 40 Hz for flat and additionally at 600 Hz for full-slope. The minimum is 3.5 ohms at 13 kHz at flat and 3.8 ohms at 110 Hz for full-slope. Most amplifiers should have no difficulty with this load, provided you don't run another pair of speakers in parallel.

On 300-Hz tone bursts, the Nine

accepted the full output of DSL's test amp—67 volts peak, equivalent to 27½ dBW (561 watts) into 8 ohms or 30½ dBW (1,122 watts) into 4 ohms—indicating excellent power-handling ability. This is confirmed by the speaker's exceptionally low distortion. At a moderately loud sound pressure level (SPL) of 85 dB, total harmonic distortion (THD) averages less than ½% over DSL's entire test range, from 30 Hz to 10 kHz, rising above 1% (just barely) only at 40 Hz. In fact, average THD doesn't top 1% until a thunderous 100 dB SPL is reached; even then, the maximum THD is less than 5% and the average is a mere 1¼%. The absence of the usual distortion peaks near the crossover points further emphasizes the ruggedness of Allison's drivers.

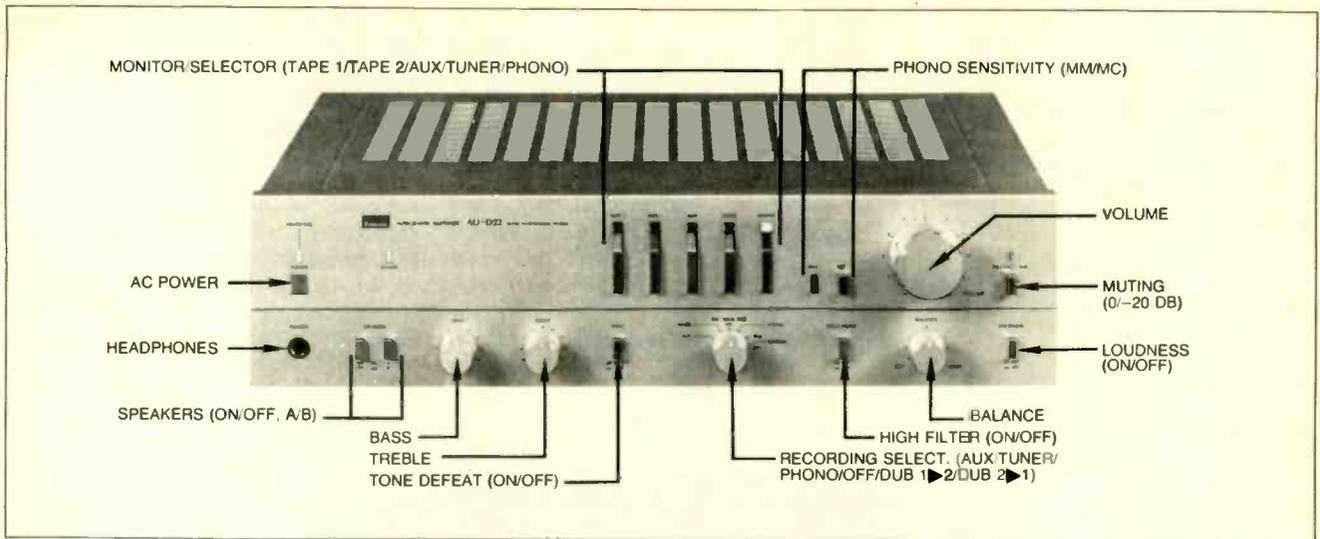
The response curves shown here represent the Nine's performance with the slope toggles set to flat. Both are smooth and extended, remaining within approximately ±3½ dB from 45 Hz to 20 kHz on axis and within approximately ±4 dB from 45 Hz to 16 kHz off axis. The close match between the two curves, even out to high frequencies, indicates very good dispersion.

Because Allison suggests using one or the other of the slope settings for all but the very best recordings, DSL ran on-axis response plots at all possible positions of the driver-level controls. The results are intriguing. We have not generally been kindly disposed toward the switches and knobs that sometimes adorn loudspeakers, given the usual grossness and irregularity of their effects, but those on the Nine are smooth and gentle in their action and seem to provide useful results. Depressing the tweeter switch flattens out the high-end peak and yields the smoothest looking curve. Depressing both squashes down a bump in the octave between 500 Hz and 1 kHz and gives a slight southbound tilt to the entire treble.

In listening, we have found all four settings useful at one time or another, though usually we prefer to operate the drivers flat. The Nines are, in any case, resolutely musical reproducers: It does not seem possible to make them sound bad, except by feeding them ugly program material (all of whose warts the Allisons will dutifully reveal). On really good material, they sound superb—smooth, clean, and transparent, with a rarely encountered degree of solidity and punch in the lower registers. String tone is particularly impressive, exhibiting none of the stridency so often apparent with lesser reproducers. Occasionally we have detected a touch of heaviness or sometimes a just-noticeable lack of sparkle, but never enough to cause discomfort. And the Nines image very well, with a sense of unstrained openness.

In short, the Allison Nine is an excellent loudspeaker and well worth the attention of serious listeners.

Circle 96 on Reader-Service Card



Fine Value in a Sansui Integrated Amp

Sansui AU-D22 integrated amplifier. Dimensions: 17 by 4 inches (front), 12 inches deep plus clearance for controls and connections. AC convenience outlets: one switched (100 watts max.), one unswitched (300 watts max.). Price: \$250. Warranty: "limited," two years parts and labor. Manufacturer: Sansui Electric Co., Ltd., Japan; U.S. distributor: Sansui Electronics Corp., 1250 Valley Brook Ave., Lyndhurst, N.J. 07071.

RATED POWER 15½ dBW (35 watts)/channel

OUTPUT AT CLIPPING (both channels driven)
8-ohm load 16¾ dBW (47 watts)/channel
4-ohm load 16¼ dBW (42 watts)/channel
16-ohm load 15 dBW (32 watts)/channel

DYNAMIC HEADROOM (re rated power, 8-ohm load)
+24½ dB

HARMONIC DISTORTION (THD; 20 Hz to 20 kHz)
at 15½ dBW (35 watts) ≤ 0.015%
at 0 dBW (1 watt) < 0.01%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE
+0, -½ dB, 13 Hz to 22.7 kHz;
+0, -3 dB, <10 Hz to 55.2 kHz

RIAA EQUALIZATION
fixed-coil phono +0, -1 dB, 20 Hz to 20 kHz;
-7¼ dB at 5 Hz
moving-coil phono +<¼, -3 dB, 27 Hz to 20 kHz;
-20 dB at 5 Hz

INPUT CHARACTERISTICS (re 0 dBW; A-weighting)
sensitivity S/N ratio
fixed-coil phono 0.43 mV 77¼ dB
moving-coil phono 42 µV 68 dB
aux 35 mV 82 dB

FEW COMPANIES HAVE HAD more success than Sansui in making separates (tuners, preamps, and the like) whose good looks and high performance belie their modest prices. The AU-D22 integrated amplifier is yet another model in this tradition: ample but unassuming in its power rating and more than capable in both performance and design.

Among its nicest features is a separate recording selector (including two-way tape-dubbing options) below the five main selector pushbuttons on the front panel. There are two sterling benefits to having separate main- and tape-output switching. One is that it enables you to tape from one source while you listen to another. The second is that the recording circuit can be turned off altogether to eliminate any possibility of distortion from nonlinear loading of the preamp section by attached tape decks when you're not recording. (An alternative, but more expensive solution is to add an active buffer stage to the recording output.) The main selector buttons have green pilot lamps for the tuner, aux, and phono, and amber ones for the two tape monitors that make it easy to distinguish from across the room whether, for example, you're listening to the tuner directly or via the tape monitor. The speaker switches light a small red pilot (similar to that for the power switch) when either speaker pair is connected. The switching prevents simultaneous use of both speaker pairs and is so arranged that

normal operation (that is, with the main pair on) leaves both buttons in the out position, for a neat appearance.

Despite the aforementioned flourishes, however, this is a relatively simple integrated amp. Among the touches that have been omitted in keeping the quality high and the price low are pre-out/main-in connections and an infrasonic filter, although there is some rolloff built into the infrasonic region of the phono response—especially in the moving-coil position. But for many users, this degree of simplicity will be not only adequate, but welcome.

The data from Diversified Science Laboratories indicate that the bass control shelves below about 50 Hz, with a maximum effect of approximately ±10 dB; the treble control has its maximum influence (+12, -7½ dB) at around 7 or 8 kHz. In the measured sample, response rises slightly at the top end of the spectrum—by about 1½ dB above 15 kHz—with the tone controls at their centered positions, but is admirably flat throughout the audio range when you push the TONE-DEFEAT. The LOUDNESS boosts a broad range in the bass, shelving below 100 Hz, and the very top of the treble range. The amount of emphasis varies according to the volume setting, measuring 6 dB at DSL's standard setting for this test.

The one disappointment is the high-filter curve, which starts much too high (down 3 dB at 12.5 kHz) and rolls off too

CONVERSION TABLE FOR POWER OUTPUT

About the dBW . . .

We currently are expressing power in terms of dBW—meaning power in dB with a reference (0 dBW) of 1 watt. The conversion table will enable you to use the advantages of dBW in comparing these products to others for which you have no dBW figures.

WATTS	dBW	WATTS	dBW	WATTS	dBW
1.00	0	10.0	10	100	20
1.25	1	12.5	11	125	21
1.6	2	16	12	160	22
2.0	3	20	13	200	23
2.5	4	25	14	250	24
3.2	5	32	15	320	25
4.0	6	40	16	400	26
5.0	7	50	17	500	27
6.3	8	63	18	630	28
8.0	9	80	19	800	29

AUDIO New Equipment Reports

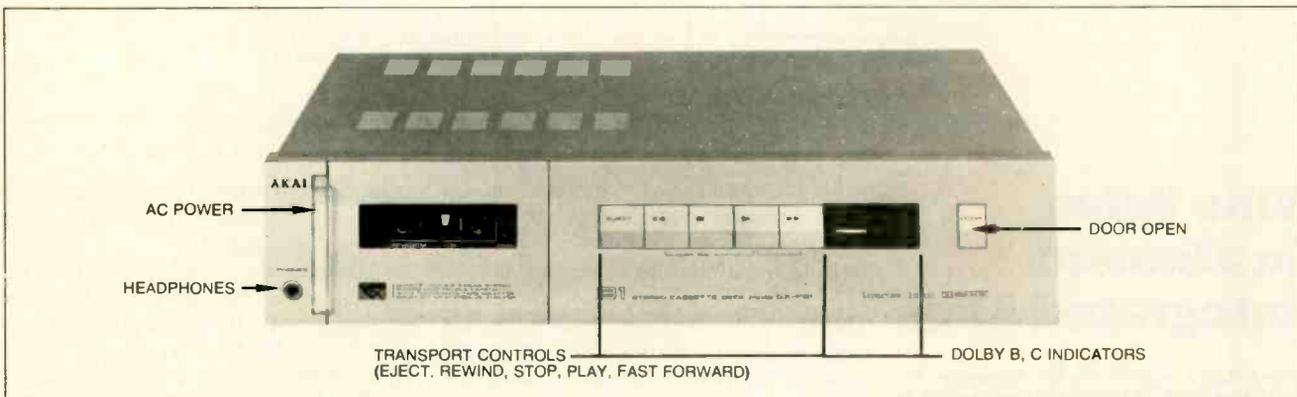
PHONO OVERLOAD (1-kHz clipping)	
fixed-coil phono	170 mV
moving-coil phono	16 mV
PHONO IMPEDANCE	
fixed-coil input	51.3k ohms; 150 pF
moving-coil input	100 ohms
HIGH FILTER	-3 dB at 12.5 kHz; 6 dB/octave

slowly (at 6 dB per octave) to be of much use. The owner's manual suggests that it may help reduce noise from AM tuners, but most models cut off well below the filter's operating range. (Sansui, however, is among the exceptional manufacturers that have attempted broad and relatively flat response in high-performance AM gear and may be thinking of its own top products.)

Distortion is very low at rated power and essentially unmeasurable at more normal levels (around 0 dBW, or 1 watt). The generous dynamic headroom of 2 1/4 dB

means that in reproducing music the amplifier's 8-ohm power limit is the equivalent of 18 1/2 dBW, or about 67 watts, per channel. Power into 4 ohms is less than into 8 ohms, however, suggesting that the AU-D22 will work best when not required to drive very low-impedance loads. The remaining data represent, at minimum, all you could expect in a good, up-to-date amplifier. In fact, that description is an apt summation of the AU-D22: a fine modern product—and at a surprisingly moderate price.

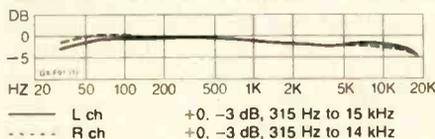
Circle 99 on Reader-Service Card



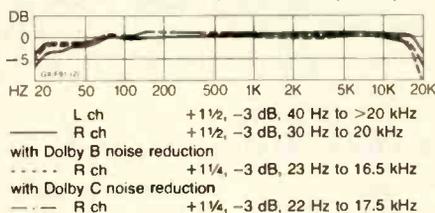
Akai's "Thinking" Cassette Deck

Akai GX-F91 cassette deck, with automatic tape tuning control, Dolby B and C noise reduction. Dimensions: 17 1/4 by 3 3/4 inches (front), 14 1/4 inches deep plus clearance for controls and connections. Price: \$750; optional RC-31 wired remote control, \$35; optional RC-91 wireless remote control, \$115. Warranty: "limited," one year parts and labor. Manufacturer: Akai Electric Co., Ltd., Japan; U.S. distributor: Akai America, Ltd., 800 W. Artesia Blvd., Compton, Calif. 90224.

PLAYBACK RESPONSE (BASF test tape; -20 dB DIN)



RECORD/PLAY RESPONSE, TYPE 2 TAPE (-20 dB)



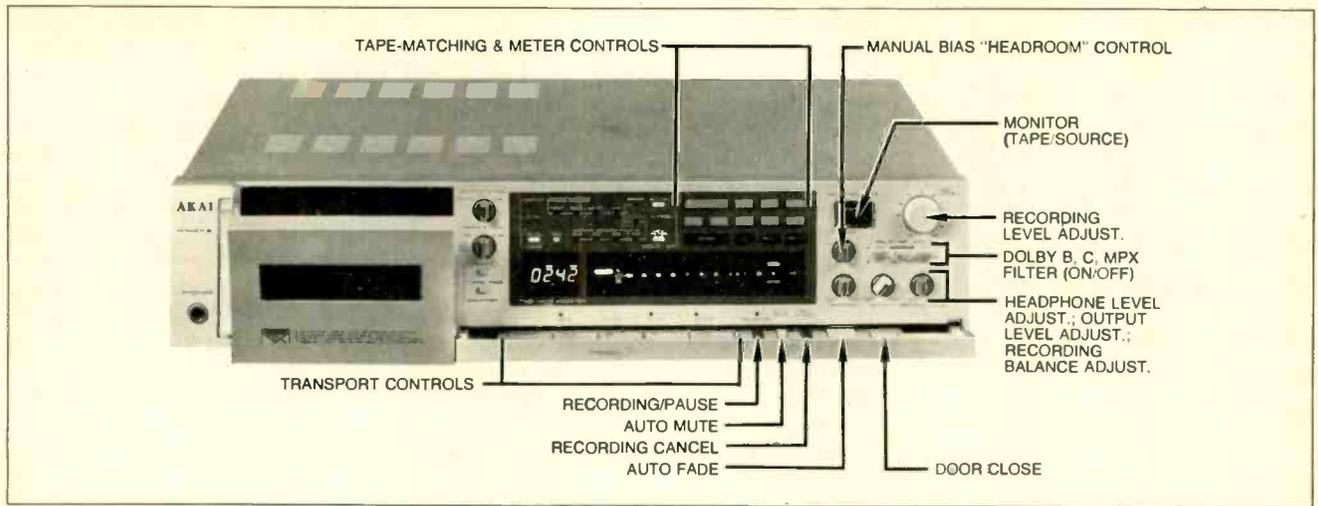
THAT THE MICROPROCESSOR has had a profound influence on the look and "behavior" of home cassette hardware is by now abundantly clear. Few models, however, have taken its multiple talents so much to heart as Akai's GX-F91. Indeed, at times that heart seems almost to beat. Not only does the microprocessor's logic control the transport and tape-matching functions, but it also encompasses some others normally left to the operator. This can be somewhat disconcerting at first, if you're used to doing things for yourself, but misgivings turned to admiration on point after point as we saw how the deck's "impulses" can really help the user.

A minor exception is the motorized faceplate, which when closed presents a set of transport controls and a button for the door itself. Press it, and the entire panel swings down, pivoting along the bottom until it is horizontal, and then retracts beneath the deck, leaving only a narrow row of controls along the front edge protruding. We can't discern any sound functional reason for the motorization, but the control layout is more convenient with the key elements arrayed horizontally—so that they can be seen easily even when the deck is well below eye level—than is the all-vertical arrangement of typical front-loaders. And it makes for a very clean look when the door is closed, while retaining most playback control functions. So the only outstanding question is whether the motor driven panel may be significantly less reliable than a manually operated door would be.

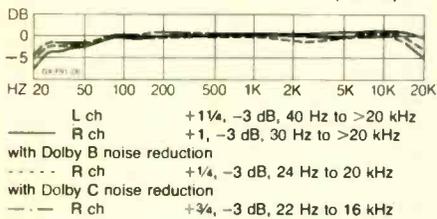
The inside transport controls (in the lip of the door) are somewhat unusual. There is a red button for RECORDING/PAUSE (not the usual interlock), a RECORDING CANCEL, an AUTOMATIC MUTE, and an AUTOMATIC FADE. Once the deck is in the recording/pause mode, you can either begin actual recording by pressing PLAY or convert to the playback mode (even after you have begun recording) by pressing the CANCEL. You can also go the other way—for a so-called flying start—by holding in PLAY during playback and touching RECORDING/PAUSE (which, in this instance, will put the deck directly into the recording mode with no pause) at the point where you want recording (or erasure) to begin. The MUTE records about a four-second blank before going into the pause mode, no matter how long you press it.

The AUTOMATIC FADE delivers a brisk fade-in to whatever recording levels you have preset and a moderately quick fade-out. One button is used for both functions; the logic knows which to employ, depending on whether the deck is in the recording/pause mode or the recording is already in progress. The logic also figures out from the commands you've given it which monitoring mode—source or tape—makes the most sense and switches accordingly. (If you disagree, you can always press the monitor button, which doubles as an illuminated source/tape indicator, and override the logic.)

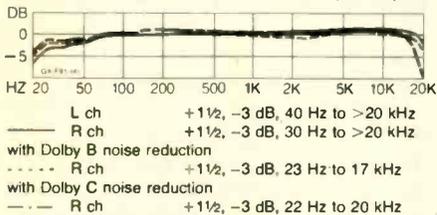
We find this automatic switching particularly useful in dubbing excerpts from another tape, using the automatic fader to



RECORD/PLAY RESPONSE, TYPE 4 TAPE (-20 dB)



RECORD/PLAY RESPONSE, TYPE 1 TAPE (-20 dB)



S/N RATIO (re DIN 0 dB; R/P; CCIR/ARM-weighted)

	Type 2 tape	Type 4 tape	Type 1 tape
without noise reduction	55 dB	55 dB	53 1/4 dB
with Dolby B noise reduction	65 1/2 dB	65 1/2 dB	64 dB
with Dolby C noise reduction	73 1/2 dB	73 1/2 dB	72 1/4 dB

INDICATOR READING FOR DIN 0 dB (315 Hz)*

Type 2 tape	+6 dB (with 1.9% THD)
Type 4 tape	+6 dB (with 2.1% THD)
Type 1 tape	+5 dB (with 1.1% THD)

INDICATOR READING FOR 3% DISTORTION (315 Hz)*

Type 2 tape	+8 dB (for +1 dB DIN)
Type 4 tape	+7 dB (for +1 1/2 dB DIN)
Type 1 tape	+7 dB (for +2 3/4 dB DIN)

DISTORTION (third harmonic; at -10 dB DIN)

Type 2 tape	≤ 1.2%, 50 Hz to 5 kHz
Type 4 tape	≤ 0.75%, 50 Hz to 5 kHz
Type 1 tape	≤ 0.80%, 50 Hz to 5 kHz

create graceful elisions. When you put the Akai into recording/pause, it automatically switches to SOURCE. You can then listen to the original tape and, when your recording cue comes around, press AUTOMATIC FADE. Instantly, the transport starts and the sound goes dead as the monitor switches to TAPE. A moment later, you hear what you recorded, and you know immediately, with no guesswork, if you've mistimed the fade. When the passage you want copied is over, you press AUTOMATIC FADE again, hear the resultant fade-out and the few seconds of muting (slightly less absolute here than with the mute itself, for some reason) that follow the fade, and then the return to source monitoring when the transport goes back into the pause mode. It's almost like having a well-trained assistant at your elbow.

Tape selection is strictly automatic on the basis of cassette-shell keyways, with no manual override for nonstandard shells. The GX-F91 accommodates Type 1 (and 0), 2, and 4 tapes. As in most current decks, there is no provision for Type 3 ferrichrome formulations. There are preset values of bias, recording equalization, and level (tape-sensitivity compensation) for each type, and the manual names specific tapes appropriate for use with each preset. The manual also indicates the reference formulations, which Diversified Science Laboratories used in measuring the deck: TDK SA as the basic Type 2 ferricobalt, TDK MA as the Type 4 metal, and Maxell UD as the Type 1 ferric.

There is also an automatic fine-tuning system that can match recording parameters to a wide spectrum of formulations. When you press TUNING, the transport fast-winds past the leader, records a series of tones, evaluates the recorded results, supplies any necessary alteration of recording values, and rewinds the tape to the head of the leader. It will stay adjusted accordingly until you change to a different class of tape (say, from a Type 4 formulation to a Type 2). If you want to save the values arrived at by the automatic adjustment process, you can use any of four memories. Each memory has room for data on three tapes, one of each type for which the deck has provision, for a total of twelve—the most generous tape memory capacity we've yet encountered. The contents of these memories, or the standard settings for the reference tapes, can be summoned up at the press of a button any time you don't want to spend the fifteen seconds required for the auto-calibration process.

There are two further features designed to give the user an extra measure of control in optimizing his recordings. Neither is adequately explained in the owner's manual (which is otherwise distinctly above average). The first is what Akai calls an "auto tuning bias control"—actually a vernier that supplies a bias adjustment range of about ±14% with respect to the standard values delivered at its center detent. The idea is to "bend" the tape's headroom curve a bit, depending on the nature of the

A Quick Guide to Tape Types

Our tape classifications, Type 0 through 4, are based primarily on the International Electrotechnical Commission measurement standards.

Type 0 tapes represent "ground zero" in that they follow the original Philips-based DIN spec. They are ferric tapes, called LN (low-noise) by some manufacturers, requiring minimum (nominal 100%) bias and the original, "standard" 120-microsecond playback equalization. Though they include the "garden variety" formulations, the best are capable of excellent performance at moderate cost in decks that are well matched to them.

Type 1 (IEC Type I) tapes are ferrics requiring the same 120-microsecond playback EQ but somewhat higher bias. They sometimes are styled LH (low-noise, high-output) formulations or "premium ferrics."

Type 2 (IEC Type II) tapes are intended for use with 70-microsecond playback EQ and higher recording bias still (nominal 150%). The first formulations of this sort used chromium dioxide; today they also include chrome-compatible coatings such as the ferricobalts.

Type 3 (IEC Type III) tapes are dual-layered ferrichromes, implying the 70-microsecond ("chrome") playback EQ. Approaches to their biasing and recording EQ vary somewhat from one deck manufacturer to another.

Type 4 (IEC Type IV) are the metal-particle, or "alloy" tapes, requiring the highest bias of all and retaining the 70-microsecond EQ of Type 2.

AUDIO New Equipment Reports

ERASURE (100 Hz)		
Type 2 tape		64½ dB
Type 4 tape		57¾ dB
CHANNEL SEPARATION (315 Hz)		
		40 dB
INDICATOR "BALLISTICS"		
	VU mode	peak mode*
Response time	220 msec	≈ 1 msec
Decay time	≈ 300 msec	≈ 1 sec
Overshoot	0 dB	0 dB
SPEED ACCURACY 0.3% slow, 105–127 VAC		
FLUTTER (ANSI/IEE weighted peak; R/P)		
		±0.094%
SENSITIVITY (re DIN 0 dB; 315 Hz)		
		108 mV
MAX. OUTPUT (from DIN 0 dB)		
		0.77 V

*See text

signals you're recording. (It might also be thought of as a brightness/richness soup-up control, in view of the response changes that accompany those in the headroom curve.) When the music is abnormally demanding in the highs, you can steal a little midrange headroom and apply it to the high end by reducing bias a bit; increasing bias reduces headroom in the highs in favor of maximum midrange headroom for signals that concentrate their energy in this band.

This is the second deck we've tested with a headroom control of this general description, and though we consider the concept to be an interesting approach to yet greater refinement in home decks, it seems to us not altogether successful. For a user with a good deal of savvy about the recording process and the nature of audio signals, it can yield a slight improvement in the quality of home-recorded tapes under some circumstances. However, one who is not so well informed, careful, and alert is equally likely to get some tapes that are not quite as good as they might have been were this control ideally adjusted.

The other special control is the so-called dynamic-compensation button among the metering controls. When this feature is on, the signals are metered after they pass through the recording equalization (a technique that has been used by some European equipment makers for years, but that has been slow to catch on in Japan). Meters normally read only midrange values, because energy levels are so much lower outside this frequency band. By boosting the highs before metering, the deck can tell you when levels approach tape saturation here, even though the signal values involved are much weaker than those that would be needed to produce overload in the midrange. This is a genuinely useful feature—so useful that we wonder why Akai bothered to make it defeatable (though some might argue in favor of the normal, unequalized metering in order to reduce confusion when the same signal is monitored on a more conventional deck as well as the Akai).

There are three other buttons for the metering, marked VU, PEAK 1, and PEAK 2. According to the owner's manual, the VU mode is the basic reference, though its behavior (which approximates the ballistics of conventional meter movements) is too damped to respond to fast transients. The peak modes, on the other hand, respond so quickly that they will display transients too brief to cause audible distortion, according to the manual, should they be recorded at excessive levels.

Ideal signal evaluation might therefore involve a comparison of readings in the peak and VU modes. There is little difference in time constants between the two peak modes, but PEAK 2 has a peak-hold feature (displaying maxima for about one second) combined with an otherwise faster

response characteristic than PEAK 1, which has no peak hold. When you switch from VU to peak, the indications for tape overload (which light at different places on the scale, depending on which of the three tape types has been inserted in the well) stay fixed, but the calibrations shift to the left by about 8 dB. For example, the overload range for Type 2 tapes is marked at about +2 dB in the VU mode, +10 dB in the peak mode. Peak-to-average ratios differ considerably with different types of music, of course, and the careful recordist will check both meter modes. With sine-wave inputs, DSL found the two meter modes and the source/tape comparison to be well matched and generally within 1 dB of the figures in our data column, which were measured in the VU mode while monitoring the source signal.

The test results generally are very good, though the measured distortion is a little higher than we might have expected of an Akai in this price range, and there are some anomalies (of even less consequence) in the response curves. We don't really understand the latter, which include a slight improvement in the lowest bass when the noise reduction is turned on, a slight rise around 5 kHz when the multiplex filter is turned on, and some instability of output at very high frequencies (making our 3-dB-down cutoff points a little less reliable than usual) with SA and MA tapes (but not with UD). That the slight droop at the top end of the playback response curves is due to a minor azimuth disparity between the deck and the test tape is evident from the record/play curves, which don't reflect that rolloff. The GX-F91's DC servo motor and dual-capstan closed-loop drive doubtless contribute to the good flutter performance.

More important even than the measured performance is the ease with which you can elicit the best the deck has to offer. In addition to the features we have already discussed, there are a number of random-access and related capabilities: a scan to sample ten seconds of each recording that is preceded by a four-second blank, what Akai calls IPLS (instant program locating system, which fast-winds in either direction to the nearest four-second blank and begins playback there), automatic playback from the head of the tape (rewinding from any point), memory play (from counter zero), and memory stop. The counter can be set to read either the usual position numbers or elapsed recording or playback time in minutes and seconds.

Then there are the separate level controls for the line output and the headphone jack—particularly welcome if you're recording live, though you would then need an accessory mike mixer since no microphone preamps are built into the GX-F91. (The line-output level control facilitates making careful source/tape comparisons by ear, using the monitor switch on your receiver or preamp. This is fortunate, since

Akai's own monitor switch leaves a slight—shorter than one second—hiatus in the sound whenever you use it, compromising such comparisons.) The recording controls include a separate balance adjustment, which we always welcome in favor of clutched controls for the two channels. And a back-panel jack accepts either of two optional Akai remote-control units, wired or wireless.

Altogether, the GX-F91 offers an outstanding array of features for the price. With the front panel closed, only the most essential controls are exposed. And for most everyday purposes, they're all you need, given the GX-F91's high degree of automation. With the panel open, the full panoply of options is available, to delight the heart of the creative taster. *Circle 98 on Reader-Service Card*

A Technics Tangent-Tracker for Everyman

Technics SL-5 two-speed (33 and 45) tangential-tracking automatic single-play direct-drive turntable. Dimensions: 12¼ by 12½ inches (top); 3½ inches high with cover closed, 15¼ inches high with cover open. Price: \$200. Warranty: "limited," two years parts and labor. Manufacturer: Matsushita Electric Co., Japan; U.S. distributor: Panasonic Company, Division of Matsushita Electric Corporation of America, One Panasonic Way, Secaucus, N.J. 07094.

SPEED ACCURACY
at 33 0.27% fast, 105–127 VAC
at 45 0.17% fast, 105–127 VAC

WOW & FLUTTER (ANSI/IEEC weighted peak)
±0.040% average; ±0.046% maximum

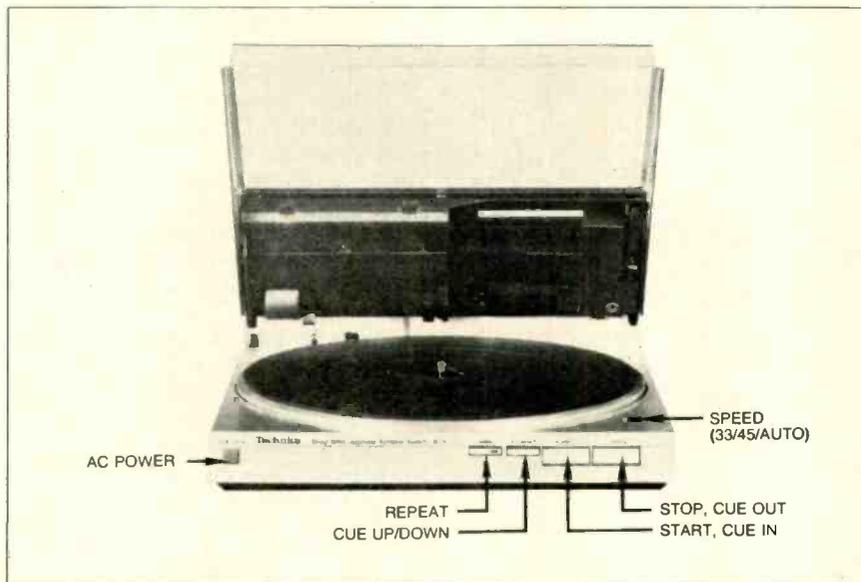
TOTAL AUDIBLE RUMBLE (A_{WLL}) -61 dB

TONERARM RESONANCE & DAMPING (with AT-122EP*)
vertical 15.5 Hz; 8½-dB rise
lateral 15.4 Hz; 13¾-dB rise

STYLUS GAUGE ACCURACY see text

TOTAL CABLE CAPACITANCE 95 pF

*See separate report in this issue.



THIS IS OUR THIRD TIME around with Technics' expanding line of tangent-tracking turntables, all of which use the P-Mount plug-in cartridge mounting system inaugurated with the very first model, the SL-10. When we reviewed the SL-10, in our May 1980 issue, it sold for \$600, including a built-in pre-preamp and a moving-coil cartridge. It offered manual or automatic single-play operation with a repeat option, all in a package so compact that you could practically hide it under an LP jacket. In December 1981, we tested the similarly sized but considerably more elaborate SL-15. For \$875, it gave you a fixed-coil pickup (with no pre-preamp, of course) and a programmable random-access track-selection system that would play the bands of an LP in any sequence you liked.

Now, with the SL-5, we have a turntable that is only slightly simpler than the SL-10, but retails for a mere \$200. This is a tribute to the format's popularity, which has enabled Technics both to reduce production costs and to stop including a cartridge (compatible models now being available from virtually every major pickup manufacturer). Aside from the cartridge and head amp, surprisingly few features have been eliminated. The SL-10's optical disc-size sensors have been replaced by mechanical ones, and the record hold-down is gone (making it impossible to play records vertically—which wasn't encouraged even with

the models that could do so). The main controls have been moved from the top front edge of the lid to the front of the base, where they are only a little less convenient, and the momentary-on switch, which aided record cleaning by turning the platter, has been omitted. (This last doesn't mean you can't use record-cleaning devices—only that you must turn the platter by hand.)

The basic operation of the turntable resembles that of the SL-10 very closely. The two main pushbuttons (or touchbars) control start and inward arm motion, and stop (or reject) and outward arm motion, respectively. For automatic operation, you need only press START; the arm will cue up to the lead-in groove of a standard 12- or 7-inch disc and begin play, then return to its rest position when the record is over. If you like what you hear, you can press REPEAT and the entire side will play over and over; pressing REPEAT once again or STOP cancels the feature. If you tap START during play, the arm will return to the beginning of the record side and start over. But if you hold the button in for more than a second, the turntable reverts to "manual" operation and the arm recues toward the label—either continuously (though not, like the SL-10, with two speed options) if you hold the button in or in tiny increments when you merely tap it. The STOP works similarly, but recues toward the start of the record side. The remaining cue button raises and lowers

the arm in manual operation.

Instead of automatic speed selection (based on record size) with a manual override, the SL-5 has a three-position switch, labeled 33/auto/45. The owner's manual sensibly instructs you to leave the switch at AUTO unless you're playing a nonstandard record, such as a 12-inch 45-rpm superdisc. The turntable's disc-size sensor is an arm that comes out through a window in the base to touch the edge of the record; where it stops determines the rotation speed and the arm's setdown point in the automatic mode. If you're playing a *really* unusual disc—something as esoteric as a 10-inch LP, for instance—you can use a little gadget Technics supplies with the SL-5. It is a red plastic plug of sorts that fits over the window and stops the feeler arm, making it "think" a full-size record is present when you're playing a smaller one. Without it, the turntable's logic prevents the arm from cueing down any farther from the spindle than the lead-in groove of a standard 7-inch disc.

With the adapter—and even without it—we have been able to play an astonishing variety of records with oddball combinations of speed, diameter, cut, and physical characteristics, some of which have proved troublesome even on the simplest of manual turntables. Some warped or very light records (the so-called sound sheets, pressed in plastic film) need the help of a firm finger to trigger the platter sensor that decides whether a record is present. (If it senses none, the turntable won't turn and the arm won't move.)

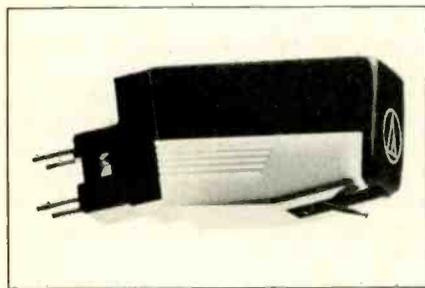
Also very capable, in our estimation, is the way the design "bails out" of an emergency. For instance, if you absentmindedly raise the cover before a record has

finished playing, the arm simply retreats to its rest position, out of harm's way. If the power goes off while a record is playing, the arm rises from the record; when power is restored, it returns to rest and awaits your command.

Some of Diversified Science Laboratories' usual measurements simply couldn't be made with the SL-5 because the necessary apparatus (to check vertical tracking force, for example) can't be introduced through the cover, which must be closed for the turntable to operate. Nor could the lab mount its "standard" test cartridge in the SL-5's arm to measure resonance and effective mass. Instead, all measurements were made with the Audio-Technica AT-122EP P-Mount pickup reviewed in this issue. The low-frequency resonance thus measured is moderate in amplitude, though it falls a little above the 10-Hz "ideal." (Resonance characteristics depend on the cartridge as well as the arm, so another pickup might yield different results.) Warped records track very well on the SL-5, and only very strong external shocks are transmitted audibly to the pickup. We therefore judge mechanical performance in these areas to be very good.

In fact, the level of performance in all regards belies the SL-5's modest price and diminutive dimensions. (Note that, for once, no extra clearance is needed at the back when you open the lid.) Even with fewer features, it would be an admirable design and a good value; the automation is enough to raise the SL-5 above most competing models. You may be able to find higher performance in one respect or another elsewhere, but we don't think you'll find a significantly better buy.

Circle 95 on Reader-Service Card



P-Mount Excellence from Audio-Technica

Audio-Technica AT-122EP fixed-coil pickup cartridge, with biradial (elliptical) diamond stylus, for plug-in mounting in P-Mount tonearms. Price: \$95. Warranty: "limited," one year parts and labor. Manufacturer: Audio-Technica Corp., Japan; U.S. distributor: Audio-Technica U.S., Inc., 1221 Commerce Drive, Sfo, Ohio 44224.

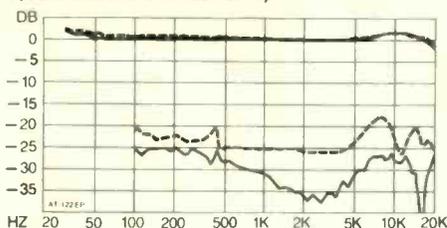
THE P-MOUNT PLUG-IN CARTRIDGE system seems to be taking the record-playing world by storm—and with good reason. Installation is simplicity itself: The electrical contact pins on the cartridge plug directly into matching sockets in the headshells of P-Mount tonearms (no tiny wires to fiddle with), and a single, built-in setscrew holds the cartridge in place (no lilliputian nuts, bolts, washers, and whatnot to get lost on the living-room carpet). And optimum performance of P-Mount systems is virtually guaranteed by the tight compatibility specifications enforced by the concept's originator, Technics. It isn't even necessary to adjust overhang or tracking force.

Audio-Technica was one of the first manufacturers to introduce P-Mount cartridges. The AT-122EP under consideration here is number four in the company's present line of five models—all moving-magnet designs. Its biradial nude-diamond stylus is mounted in a thin-walled tubular

alloy cantilever, whose damping and compliance are said to be hand-adjusted at the factory. Nominal tip dimensions are 0.3 mil (the scanning radius) by 0.7 mil; the next model up (the AT-122LP) uses a slightly finer line-contact stylus, while the bottom model's bonded biradial tip is slightly coarser (0.4 mil). The Vector-Aligned dual magnets (an Audio-Technica hallmark) are positioned just forward—that is, toward the stylus tip—of the damped cantilever pivot. This construction is said to promote maximum channel separation and vivid stereo imaging.

We tested the AT-122EP exclusively in the Technics SL-5 turntable. The adapter needed for mounting the pickup in a conventional arm did not arrive in time for Diversified Science Laboratories to measure dynamic compliance. The cartridge's absolute performance in this regard seems moot, however, in view of the unlikelihood that it would be chosen over a conventional

FREQUENCY RESPONSE & CHANNEL SEPARATION
(test record: JVC TRS-1007 Mk. II)



Frequency response
 — L ch +1½, -2½ dB, 30 Hz to 20 kHz
 - - - R ch ±2½ dB, 30 Hz to 20 kHz
 Channel Separation
 ≥ 24½ dB, 450 Hz to 4.5 kHz;
 ≥ 17½ dB, 100 Hz to 20 kHz

SENSITIVITY (1 kHz) 1.47 mV/cm/sec

CHANNEL BALANCE (1 kHz) ±¼ dB

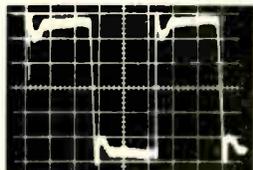
VERTICAL TRACKING ANGLE 25°

LOW-FREQUENCY RESONANCE (in Technics SL-5)
 vertical 15.5 Hz; 8½-dB rise
 lateral 15.4 Hz; 13¾-dB rise

MAX. TRACKING LEVEL (re RIAA 0 VU; 1¼ grams)
 lateral ±15 dB
 vertical ≥ +12 dB

WEIGHT 6.1 grams

SQUARE-WAVE
 RESPONSE



model for use (with the adapter) in a non P-Mount arm. Use of the Technics arm also raised some question about tracking force. The arm is fitted with a VTF-adjustment setscrew calibrated for three forces: 1, 1¼, and 1½ grams. These figures correlate neatly to Audio-Technica's rated minimum, median, and maximum recommended tracking forces, respectively, for the AT-122EP. The lab couldn't use its VTF gauge in the SL-5, so we don't have our usual confirmation of that parameter; but we have no reason to assume that the SL-5 is inaccurately calibrated and therefore accept its markings without further caveat.

The pickup passed DSL's tracking "torture test," for frequencies in the audio band, at its minimum recommended VTF (1 gram). It did break up at bass resonance (about 15 Hz in the SL-5's arm), but since commercial recordings aren't cut to frequencies that low, there is no cause for complaint. (The breakup decreased with increasing tracking force, but never entirely disappeared.)

The remaining tests—including our listening—were done at the 1¼-gram median setting. Output is high, even for a moving-magnet pickup, and interchannel balance at 1 kHz is good. As measured by the low-frequency twin-tone method, vertical tracking angle is 25 degrees (5 degrees over DIN standard)—only marginally dif-

ferent from the 24-degree reading obtained on the midfrequency test intended to ferret out poor rake-angle alignment (which would be indicated by a significant discrepancy between the results of the two tests). Maximum tracking levels are not quite as high as those of some costlier pickups, but are certainly satisfactory for well-cut discs. Resonance is only moderately pronounced and just a little higher than the 10-Hz ideal. Warp-tracking—and the AT-122EP had an unusually tough workout here as we put the SL-5 through its paces with all manner of oddball discs—is therefore excellent.

So, too, is the sound. The AT-122EP is the sort of pickup that confounds critics because it's so self-effacing: You keep finding you're listening to the music instead of the cartridge. And that's exactly the way it should be. It's true that when we compared the sound to that of our favorite pickups—costing considerably more—we discovered subtle virtues that didn't appear in the AT-122EP's sonics, but we never once detected a sonic fault intrinsic to the little Audio-Technica. Its output is very clean, very well balanced (the slight rise near the top of the response curves lending a little crispness, perhaps, but never harshness or edginess), and very well focused in stereo imaging. It is, in short, an excellent cartridge and a fine value.

Circle 97 on Reader-Service Card

Ambience Enhancement à la Benchmark

Benchmark ARU Ambience Access System, in two metal cases with maple end caps. Dimensions: 13½ by 2 inches (front panel of main unit), 7 inches deep plus clearance for controls and connections; 5¾ by 2 inches (front panel of remote unit), 7 inches deep plus clearance for controls. Price: \$950. Warranty: "full," two years parts and labor. Manufacturer: Benchmark Acoustics, Inc., 201 W. 89th Street, New York, N.Y. 10024.

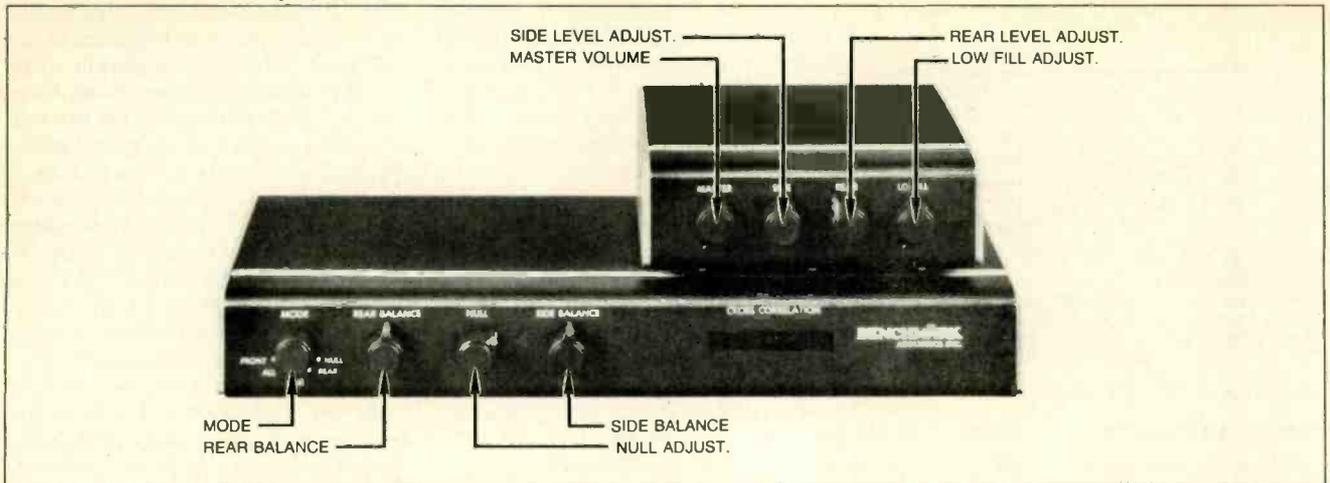
IF YOU LIVE ON A STEADY diet of recorded music (as most of us do), it's easy to forget how glorious the real thing can be. Live music has a rich, open, three-dimensional sound that stereo, even at its best, can't quite deliver. The function of an ambience-enhancement unit, such as the Benchmark ARU Ambience Access System, is to help you transcend the limits of ordinary stereo and thereby reclaim a large measure of what normally is lost in the long journey from concert hall to living room.

The Benchmark has six channels. The first two feed regular, unprocessed stereo signals to the amplifier driving the main loudspeakers at the front of the room. A second pair delivers the same signals, rolled off slightly at high frequencies and delayed about 30 milliseconds, to speakers at the sides of the listening room. The treble attenuation simulates the tonal balance in the reverberent field of a concert hall, while the delay effectively unmasks the ambience information in the signal without disturbing normal stereo localization. (Without equalization and delay, the side speakers would tend to compete with the front ones for your attention, instead of contributing the desired sense of unobtrusive, nonlocalized ambience.) A third pair of outputs sends randomized out-of-phase (L-R) signals to yet another set of speakers at the back of the

room, again with a treble rolloff and a 30-millisecond delay. The rear channels are designed to take advantage of the high concentration of ambience information in the L-R component of a stereo signal and to further diffuse the ambient sound field.

As you have undoubtedly gathered by now, use of the ARU requires at least one additional stereo amplifier and set of speakers, for the side channels—preferably two, so as to take advantage of the rear outputs, as well. But since you can start with just the side channels and a relatively modest amplifier and speakers, the cost need not be exorbitant. Power requirements for the ambience channels are usually less than a quarter of those for the front channels, so inexpensive, low-power basic or integrated amps will serve nicely in most installations. And you can use very compact speakers, provided they have some reasonable bass response (true minispeakers are usually less than optimum in this respect) and a tonal balance similar to that of the main speakers (the more so, the better).

The ARU comes in three pieces, the first being a power-supply module that plugs directly into a wall socket. It attaches to the main chassis by a cord that terminates in a miniplug, staying on continuously to prevent turn-on and turn-off transients. Besides the power jack, the main unit has a



OUTPUT AT CLIPPING	
Front channels	8.9 volts
Side channels	8.9 volts
Rear channels	3.8 volts
MAXIMUM INPUT LEVEL	
	5.7 volts
S/N RATIO (re 0.5 volt; A-weighted; IHF loading)	
Front channels	73½ dB
Side channels	71½ dB
Rear channels	69 dB*
HARMONIC DISTORTION (THD; 20 Hz to 20 kHz)	
Front channels	
at 1 volt out	≤ 0.091%
at 2 volts out	≤ 0.18%
Side channels	see text
Rear channels	see text
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	
Front channels	+0, -¼ dB, <10 Hz to 27.4 kHz;
Side channels	+0, -3 dB, <10 Hz to 99.1 kHz;
	+0, -¼ dB, <20 Hz to 3 kHz;
Rear channels	+0, -3 dB, <20 Hz to 11 kHz*;
	+0, -¼ dB, <20 Hz to 2 kHz;
	+0, -3 dB, <20 Hz to 10 kHz*
DELAY	
Side channels	30 msec.
Rear channels	30 msec.

*See text

pair of input pin jacks and three pairs of output jacks, for front, side, and rear. It is designed for installation between a preamp's main outputs and the inputs of whatever amplifiers are used. But an easily prepared set of homemade voltage dividers (see "Sonic Ambience—The Missing Ingredient," October 1982, for details) will enable you to run the ARU from the speaker outputs of an integrated amp or receiver that lacks pre-out/main-in jacks. It is also possible to operate the ARU from a set of tape-output jacks, although that necessitates readjustment of the side and rear levels any time you change the volume setting on your preamp. (Even that is not much of an inconvenience, however, since the ARU has its own master VOLUME that can be used for the whole system without altering the critical front-side-rear balance.)

There are four front-panel control knobs: a mode switch, a null control, a side-speaker balance control, and a rear-speaker balance control. The mode switch selects front channels only, all channels, side channels only, rear channels only, or null. This last position enables you to use the null control proper to adjust the rear-channel circuits for maximum L-R extraction. The remaining two knobs control balance for the side and rear speaker pairs.

The controls on the main unit are pretty much of the "set-and-forget" variety. The more commonly used ones are relegated to a smaller, remote module that attaches to the main unit by a long, flat cable. It, too, has four knobs: a master VOLUME for all six channels, individual side- and rear-channel level controls, and a "lo-fill" adjustment for adding mono information to the rear channels below 60 Hz, to beef up the bass-shy L-R signals commonly found on LPs.

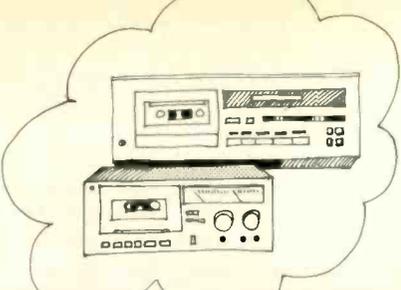
Diversified Science Laboratories' measurements document generally very good performance in all the traditional respects, despite a couple of peculiarities. For one, the rear-channel noise increases about 6 dB with the "lo-fill" control turned all the way up (which is, however, an

unlikely setting). Front-channel total harmonic distortion (THD) rises somewhat at high output levels, but nonetheless remains well below the threshold of audibility. In the side and rear channels, THD is reasonably low at midband; at the frequency extremes, however, it reaches several percent. But much of this, especially at high frequencies, consists of noise spikes and other phenomena that are not true harmonic distortion. Considering that, and the dominance of the front channels, we're not surprised that we hear no evidence of distortion.

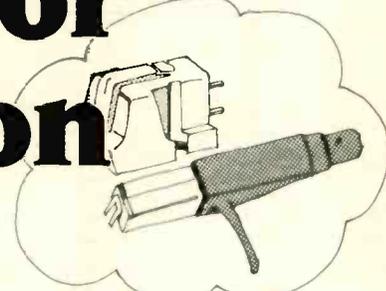
For our listening tests, we used Allison Nine speakers up front and Allison Sixes at the sides and rear, with the latter driven by low-power integrated amplifiers. Once we had everything adjusted properly—a few minutes of easy work with the handy remote control—we sat back to enjoy. And enjoy we did! With the ARU in the circuit, the sound blooms, taking on a vivid, three-dimensional quality that's hard to give up once you're used to it. Indeed, it's possible to forget that anything out of the ordinary is going on—until you switch the ARU out and hear the sound collapse back into the front speakers. We do sometimes detect a trace of hiss from the unit when listening to very low-level passages. This can be ameliorated by bouncing the sound from the side and rear speakers off nearby walls and by turning down the ambience channels. It is not always possible to eliminate the noise entirely, however, without recourse to tone controls or filters.

But even when we have to accept a little extraneous hiss (which isn't often), we prefer listening with the ARU on: Stereo alone sounds dull and lifeless by comparison. In fact, our experience with the Benchmark reaffirms a long-standing conviction that the single most dramatic improvement one can make to an already good system is to add ambience enhancement. And the Benchmark ARU stands among the best ambience-enhancement units we have tested to date.

Circle 94 on Reader-Service Card



Prescriptions for Audio Indecision



Practical advice for solving the six most perplexing audio shopping dilemmas
by Hal Rodgers

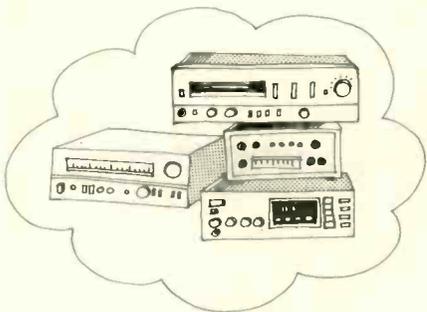
AUDIO INDECISION SEEMS to be on the upswing these days. Triggered by the anxiety of making the wrong choice, its most noticeable symptom is temporary paralysis of the right hand, frozen enroute to the pocket or purse. Interestingly, those most prone to the condition are usually the best informed: The classic victim can, for instance, recite the relative merits of various components, but finds it almost impossible to choose among them.

This sort of vacillation responds quite readily to treatment, however, provided the patient is willing to make an accurate assessment of his or her particular needs and to separate meaningful information from the myth and mystique that often pass as fact in audio lore. To that end, we've re-created some typical shopping dilemmas and provided some practical prescriptions.

should be looking for a receiver. Combining tuner, preamp, and power amp on one chassis, a receiver's ultimate functionality is limited by the number of devices (tape decks, turntables, signal processors, and so on) that can be accommodated by its inputs, outputs, and switches.

Separates, on the other hand, are more suitable for someone who likes to change things around and experiment. Individual components divide up the jobs done by the receiver; they don't necessarily do them better. But since you have access to the connections between components, it is easy to replace one or to introduce new elements into the system. This flexibility comes at a price: The use of three chassis, along with multiple power supplies, adds considerably to the overall cost.

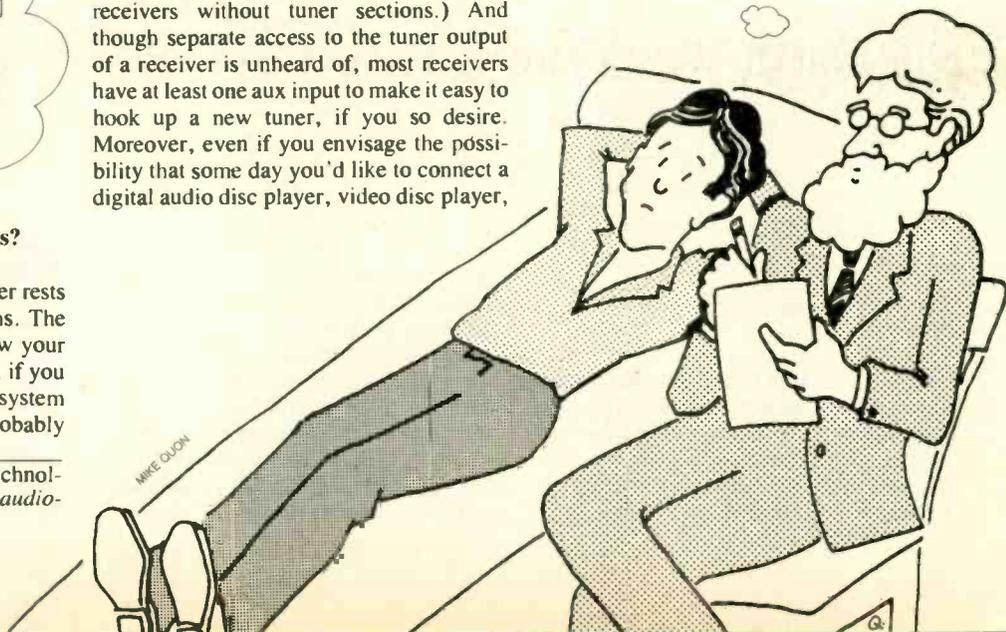
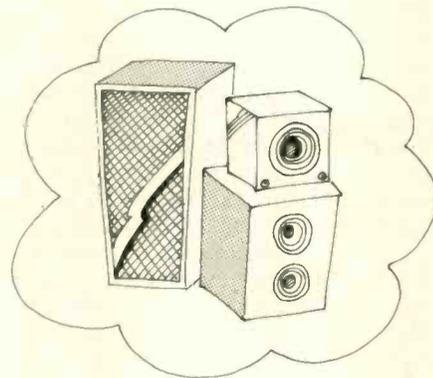
Of course, receivers are catching up a little in flexibility. Some now incorporate a "pre-out/main-in" connection that allows separate access to the power-amplifier section. (This feature also is found in many integrated amplifiers, which are essentially receivers without tuner sections.) And though separate access to the tuner output of a receiver is unheard of, most receivers have at least one aux input to make it easy to hook up a new tuner, if you so desire. Moreover, even if you envisage the possibility that some day you'd like to connect a digital audio disc player, video disc player,



Electronics: Receiver or Separates?

This is an old question, and its answer rests very little on technical considerations. The key point is: How well do you know your own needs and habits? For example, if you want to put together an excellent system with a minimum of hassle, you probably

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and VCR to your audio system, you can always expand even a single aux input with an inexpensive switch box.

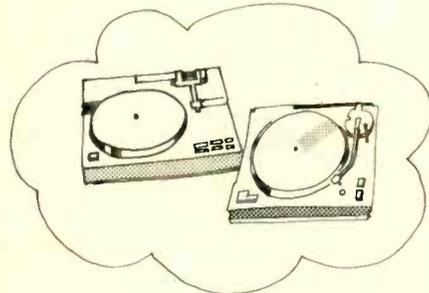


Turntables: Direct-Drive or Belt-Drive?

Most turntables nowadays have direct-drive motors. The system is simple, accurate, and reliable. Belt-drive models are generally found at the low end of manufacturers' lines. Apparently, a belt-drive turntable that is just about adequate can be made quite inexpensively, but one that can equal or outperform a direct-drive model will most likely outprice it as well.

Direct-drive turntables usually match or exceed belt-driven units in speed accuracy, wow and flutter, and start-up torque. Where belt drive makes its claim to fame is in freedom from rumble; some manufacturers even say that their belt-driven turntables have rumble levels below the residuals found on test discs. Considering that test records are cut under conditions at least as good as (and usually far better than) those used for commercial pressings, it's doubtful that this advantage can be heard at all.

Which is right for you? The choice has less to do with the turntable's drive system than with the features and performance of the specific models that fall within your budget. Remember, even a direct-drive turntable can exhibit poor performance if it has not been well engineered. HIGH FIDELITY's equipment reports are a particularly good source of performance data and hands-on analysis of features.



Tonearms: Tangential-Tracking or Pivoted?

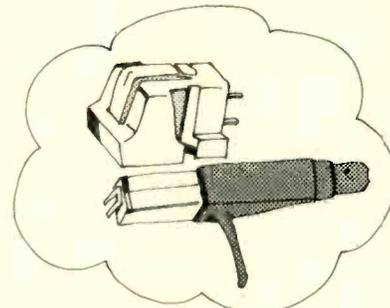
Although prices for turntables with tangential-tracking tonearms are beginning to come down, the extra machinery contained in their fairly complex arm assemblies still makes them more expensive than comparable tables with pivoted arms. In fact, if I

were presented with two \$200 automatic turntables, one with a pivoted arm and one with a tangential, I'd pick the pivoted model. Chances are the manufacturer had to cut corners somewhere to make the tangential-tracking model's price so competitive.

If you are willing to spend a bit extra, however, tangential arms do make sense. Basically, since the entire arm moves across the record in a straight line, skating force is not an issue, eliminating the need to apply counterbias. Also, a tangential or linear-tracking arm can be made shorter (and therefore much less massive) than a conventional tonearm, which improves warp tracking with a high compliance pickup.

A tangential arm's most touted benefit is its ability to keep the stylus perfectly oriented in the groove, thereby minimizing tracking-error distortion. This does not seem to be a big improvement over a pivoted arm's performance, however. Recent work has shown that a linear-tracking arm's servo mechanism (which must sense some deviation from tangency before it can remedy it) does keep tracking error down to levels lower than the peak errors with pivoted arms. But when averaged over the playing surface of a record, the tracking errors of the two types of arms are often quite comparable.

Ultimately then, the choice of a turntable comes down to economics and how involved you're willing to be in the initial setup procedure. Getting the best performance from a pivoted arm involves painstaking cartridge alignment. With a tangential arm, one simple overhang adjustment (setting it to zero) is all that's required.



Phono Cartridges: Fixed Coil or Moving Coil?

You should resist the temptation to choose a phono pickup on the basis of the much touted (and often mystically expressed) benefits of moving-coil over fixed-coil designs. Some of the most expensive and highly regarded moving coil models have probably gained their reputations for sonic excellence more on the basis of how they react electrically to the preamp that boosts their minute output than on any inherent superiority of their transduction scheme. Your primary concerns in selecting a phono cartridge should be how it will sound with your amplifier and whether it provides a good match to your tonearm.

An important electrical difference between a moving-coil cartridge and most fixed-coil pickups is that the former will have a very low output impedance. This ensures that its frequency response will not be significantly affected by the impedance of the phono input to which it is connected. And (though this is somewhat less important) a moving-coil eliminates any possibility that RIAA equalization errors might arise from interaction between the pickup's output impedance and the response-shaping circuits of phono preamps susceptible to this now relatively rare problem. Usually, however, moving-coil cartridges pay a penalty in the form of reduced output—often to such a degree that an additional step-up transformer (or pre-preamp sometimes called a head amp) is necessary between the cartridge and the phono input.

It is possible to make a low-impedance fixed-coil cartridge, but again, usually at the expense of sensitivity. A typical fixed-coil cartridge will have enough output to assure adequate volume and a good signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) with any phono input designed for use with magnetic cartridges. To be sure of getting flat frequency response, however, you will usually have to make sure that the total capacitance contributed by the tonearm cables and the phono input is close to that recommended by the cartridge's manufacturer.

Another common difference between fixed-coil and moving-coil cartridges is compliance. Most of the top fixed-coil models are highly compliant designs, whereas moving-coil units are relatively less so. As a result, many fixed-coil cartridges require a fairly low-mass tonearm to track warped records properly. The majority of moving-coil cartridges, on the other hand, can be used successfully with heavier arms.



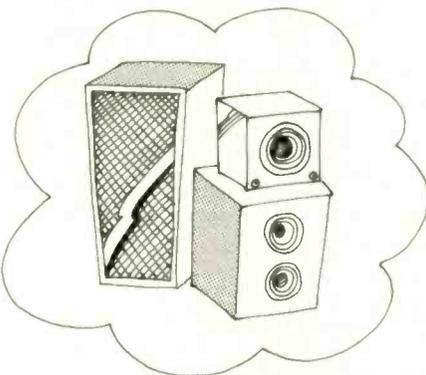
Cassette Noise Reduction Systems: Which One(s)?

There is no single best noise reduction system. Under certain unusual conditions both Dolby C and DBX—the major contenders right now—will produce audible artifacts of one sort or another. Although there are differences in philosophy between the systems, they do not, in my opinion, lead to differences in performance clear-cut

enough to provide a basis for choice. As in so many cases, the determining factor lies elsewhere.

There are indications that the popularity of prerecorded cassettes is growing, particularly as a premium-quality alternative to audiophile discs in the \$20-and-up range. But with most prerecorded tapes, noise reduction is *de rigueur*, and Dolby B (not the newer C-type) dominates the field. However, there also exists a fairly large catalog of DBX-encoded tapes (not to mention DBX discs, which can be played back through the circuitry used to decode DBX tapes). These, in general, duplicate material already released on conventional LPs, but they retain a good deal more of the master tapes' dynamic range. For the time being, there is not much prerecorded material encoded with Dolby C. It's somewhat like the situation back in quadraphonic days, when to be sure of enjoying all one's favorite artists, one had to acquire decoders for all of the various competing four-channel systems.

If you already own a cassette deck, therefore, it makes sense to look at outboard DBX units. Unfortunately, very few decks currently offer all three noise reduction schemes (two is the usual limit, with Dolby B always occupying one slot), so if you're in the market for a new recorder and want to listen to prerecorded cassettes, you might be wise to invest in one of the new models equipped with Dolby C (which, of course, always appears with Dolby B). Though cassettes encoded with Dolby C are rare, outboard Dolby C decoders are rarer still. (And there are none at all designed for use in a car system.) And if the experience with Dolby B is any basis for prognostication, Dolby C outboard decoders will become virtually unobtainable in years to come. DBX, on the other hand, is committed to the aftermarket, and you're assured of a ready supply of DBX tape and disc decoders for years to come.



Loudspeakers: Conventional Pairs or Subwoofer-Plus-Satellites?

Traditionally, loudspeakers for home use have been dominated by models in which drivers for a given channel are contained in a single box. In recent years, as very small

speakers attained popularity, it became clear that their bass response could be extended by the addition of an outboard woofer. Because bass frequencies below about 100 Hz (the region small speakers have trouble handling) propagate nondirectionally, the placement of the outboard woofer (or "subwoofer") is relatively non-critical. In fact, one subwoofer can even serve both channels. (And when the bass of the two channels is combined, most turntable rumble cancels out.)

In small rooms especially, a satellite/subwoofer system can have definite advantages. Often it is difficult to find space for loudspeakers at all, and the diminutive size of the satellites can be a big help in bookshelf mounting, for instance. The largest of the three elements, the subwoofer, can be placed virtually anywhere provided that doesn't result in too much or too little bass from room reinforcement or cancellation. Satellite/subwoofer systems have acoustic advantages as well. It often turns out, particularly in small spaces, that the locations that are optimum for low-frequency response give poor results for middle and high frequencies, or vice versa. Here the satellite/subwoofer system allows a flexibility that the all-in-one systems simply can't. Where such a system begins to falter is in a large room where loud playback is desired. The power-handling capability of most satellites is somewhat limited, and if pushed too hard in a large room, they can distort badly. Fortunately, in large rooms the placement of all-in-one speakers becomes simpler.

It would be convenient to say that satellite/subwoofer systems are the best solution for all small rooms. However, depending on the shape of the room, more conventional types of speakers will often work as well. The key point, though, is that a three-piece (or four-piece) system will solve placement problems that conventional speakers simply cannot.

What Not To Worry About

Audio components should be bought with care, but certainly not with trepidation. If your power amplifier can supply enough power to make your speakers play as loud as you want, and your speakers can take that power, you won't blow anything up. The only other crucial matches are between the tonearm and the phono cartridge and between the phono cartridge and the preamp. And if you live in a problem reception area, you may have to give careful consideration to your choice of FM tuner. But once those factors are under control, that's about it. From then on you are dealing with matters of personal preference or convenience. Don't let anyone try to frighten you away from components you like. And don't worry about distortion in the electronics. The days when it was a significant factor are long gone.

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Taking Control of Your Stereo System

A practical guide to system interconnections by Robert Long



PHOTOS BY JOHN COLE

CONNECTING A STEREO SYSTEM that includes outboard components—signal processors, in particular—can be a confusing and sometimes frustrating procedure. In fact, system interconnection dilemmas account for much of the reader correspondence I've received over the years. Often, the difficulty stems from trying to arrive at a configuration that will create or preserve all the desired switching options within a complex system. And sometimes the salient problem is interaction: Will signals that have been altered by component A be appropriate for processing by component B, or should the signal be routed through B first?

If a complicated audio system is to be hooked together in a way that will make sense—a way that will allow you the full intended use of all the parts—it's always helpful to begin by preparing a flow chart. I invariably make one when I want to hook up a system in a way that's substantially more ambitious than usual. If the signal path is merely a variation or elaboration of my usual practices, the flow chart is strictly mental. But even then, a clear picture of the routing is an absolute necessity, and it's hard to picture the easy cases unless you've mapped the hard ones.

A crucial element in such a flow chart is, of course, the so-called tape loop. Often described as a "circuit interruption" feature, at least one such loop (and the monitor switching necessary to "enter" it) is stan-

dard equipment on all modern receivers and all but a handful of preamps. The basic monitor function does, indeed, interrupt the signal flow from the source (say, the turntable) to the power amplification stages and speakers by routing it through whatever equipment is connected to the recording output and tape-playback input of the receiver, preamp, or integrated amp.

When there are connections (and monitor positions) for more than one tape deck, there may also be switching to enable easy dubbing between decks. There are various ways this switching can work, and owner's manuals aren't always very clear on the subtler distinctions. Understanding the capabilities and limitations of a dubbing switch, therefore, is crucial to its full use in controlling outboard equipment that must use the tape connections. In fact, the dubbing options of a "core" component (particularly a receiver) may be the trickiest single point in the flow chart of many a home system.

The most common dubbing setup is a separate switch (or a series of positions on a monitor switch) that connects the output of one recorder to the input of another. A full control lets you copy from any (usually *both*) of the decks for which there are jacks to any other. A simpler alternative that you'll frequently find in moderate-cost receivers is one-way dubbing; here, duplicates can be made only on the deck connected to Tape 2, copying from that on Tape 1.

Usually such a scheme offers no monitoring capability, particularly if the control is part of the monitor switch. With separate switching for the two functions, it's often possible to monitor either deck during the dubbing.

I'm assuming standard nomenclature throughout this article, but your system may not be so cooperative. In general, equipment is marked in terms of its own *inputs* and *outputs*, and these are the most appropriate terms to think of when you're devising a signal-routing scheme. It's a question of feeding the output of one to the input (or an input) of another.

On your preamp, integrated amp, or receiver, however, the tape outputs may simply be marked "recording" and the tape inputs marked something like "tape play." Similarly, recorders may have "recording" inputs and "playback" outputs. These terms aren't incorrect, of course, but they leave it to the user to puzzle out the crucial input/output distinction.

Much more confusing are the components (usually switching boxes or other outboard units) whose terminals are identified in terms of the inputs or outputs *to which they are to be connected*. Thus an equalizer's *output* for routing signals to a tape-deck recording *input* may be labeled "to tape input" (which isn't too confusing) or simply "tape in" (which is). When I get a component that indulges in ambiguous nomenclature, I usually relabel the connections

What You Should Know Before Hooking Up Your Outboards

When connecting components to the tape or processor loops of your main stereo system, there are several *dos and don'ts* you should be aware of. Here's a rundown of factors you should take into account in making your plans.

Equalizers

Most equalizers, graphic and parametric alike, can be used for two purposes: program EQ (to ameliorate response anomalies in the source material) or speaker EQ (to smooth and otherwise refine the speakers' inherent response). Even if the equalizer is equally adept at both functions, using it for both poses perplexing questions of application (at least if you plan to record equalized signals, but still need the same equalizer to adjust the tonal balance of your speakers) and system routing. I'd strongly urge separate equalizers for each function.

For program EQ, a so-called pre/post switch (by means of which you can equalize either the feed to or the playback from a deck connected to the equalizer's tape terminals) is just about obligatory for the serious recordist. The alternatives to having such a switch are to reconnect the unit whenever you want to change between equalized recording and equalized playback or to use a separate tape loop plus a full dubbing control to route the equalized signal to or from the main tape loop. Some (though by no means all) of the separate switching boxes solve such problems neatly.

For speaker EQ, which you presumably will want in the circuit whenever you're listening to the speakers, a nonswitchable connection (such as that between preamp and power amp in many systems) may be the most convenient. But—particularly if the speaker equalizer is designed as an inherent part of the speaker system—consult the owner's manual to see what hookup is recommended. Equalizer hum that can be reduced to inaudibility by lowering the volume in normal systems may be all too audible if the equalizer is used after the volume control—that is, following the preamplifier section.

Expanders

Along with the drama that is created when an

expander exaggerates the existing program dynamics, you may also get some sonic problems, unless every element in the signal path "downstream" can handle the wider dynamics. For that reason, it's generally best to keep the expander as close to the system's core component as possible. It should, however, remain ahead of ambience or delay devices that require separate back-channel amplification; otherwise, the dynamics in the back channels won't match those at the front.

Filters

Filters, whether fixed or dynamic, generally work best when they're as near to the source as possible, and therefore as close as possible to the signal from which something (rumble, infrasonics, hiss, or whatever) must be filtered. The longer the polluting element is allowed to remain in the audio chain, the more opportunities it has to create intermodulation, overload, and other forms of sonic "mud" that can't be filtered out.

Noise reduction

Sometimes this term is used for dynamic filters (see above), but most often it specifies the encode/decode companders of which Dolby Laboratories and DBX are the best-known exponents. Ideally, no signal processor should ever come between the signal encoder and the recording tape deck or between the playback deck and the decoder. Otherwise, decoding will fail to some degree—depending on the type of processing and on the type of noise reduction—to restore the original signal as it should. Some recordists insist on using both Dolby B and DBX simultaneously for their tapes—a practice advocated by neither of the companies. If you must, though, make the order DBX encode, Dolby encode, tape, Dolby decode, DBX decode.

Some DBX equipment offers a provision for decoding DBX discs, in addition to (or instead of) tape processing. You'll want to route signals from the phono input through the decoder, even if you're not recording. Generally, such a path is no problem, because DBX is good about offering appropriate switching.

monitor to interrupt itself (when the main selector and the monitor are switched to the same deck), creating feedback. And if a tape input doesn't necessarily imply a loop, neither is a loop always identified with tape: Some products have "signal processor loops" with in/out switches on the front panel. Don't let the nomenclature throw you: Every processor loop I've looked at closely is constructed exactly like the component's tape-monitor loops and is interchangeable with them.

Channel labeling can also confuse the neophyte. Instead of "left" and "right," some pro and semipro gear says "Channel

CX decoding

The CBS CX system is somewhat similar to that of DBX, but there's one practical difference in terms of system configuration: Whereas CX discs are designed to be playable without decoding, DBX discs are not. Consequently, to make a tape of a DBX disc you must employ a DBX decoder somewhere in the process—either in recording or playback. This holds true whether you plan to play the tape at home or away (say, in your car). CX discs can be taped and played back undecoded. But you can realize the full potential of the CX recording's dynamics only when you play it through a system that includes a decoder.

Spatial enhancement

The ambience recovery or simulation devices that derive a third (or third and fourth) channel for separate amplification at the sides or back of the listening room generally should be at the end of the processing chain. Otherwise, later signal manipulations would have to be duplicated (via a separate processor) in the extra channel(s) so the ambience channels would sound as though they "belonged."

Stereo enhancers like the Carver Sonic Holography Generator, on the other hand, are best placed close to the source of the music. Since they must make the best possible use of subtle interchannel differences, it is best to let them process the signals before those differences have been altered or blurred by other signal-processing devices. Since no extra signal channels are involved, any subsequent processing will cover the full output of the stereo enhancer.

Tape decks

Finally, remember that tape decks are not all alike in their signal routing. From a systems point of view, it makes a big difference whether or not you can monitor the signal from the tape as you record. (A few decks won't even feed the *source* signal through to the output terminals.) So know your equipment's capabilities when you're laying out your flow chart. Don't include a signal path that doesn't exist.

(using Dennison or Avery stick-ons from the stationery store) to prevent getting things wrong every time I reconnect the component.

Make a careful distinction on your receiver between source inputs and input/output loops. With some equipment, most or all of the tape inputs can be chosen by way of the main source selector. That control usually makes a distinction between those that are intended for playback-only purposes (the equivalent of an aux input) and those that can be used as full record/play monitoring loops. There have even been models in which it's possible for a tape

1" and "Channel 2" (or "A" and "B"). You can use either for left or right, but standard practice is to put the left signal into Channel 1 (or A). With consumer equipment, the right signal (Channel 2 or B) is usually denoted by a red marking on the input and output jacks. You'll find it much easier to keep channels sorted out if you use standard double-wire stereo interconnect cables, with a red plug at each end for the right channel, and save any single-wire cables for mono signals. If you have equipment whose permanently attached cables use the European gray and black color coding, I'd suggest a dot of red paint on the

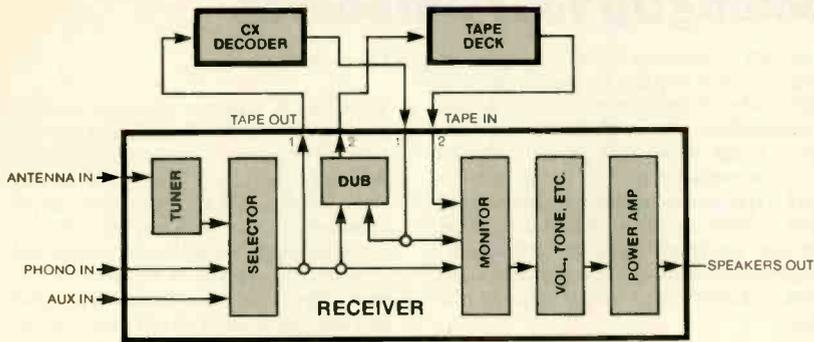


Fig. 1A: A simple receiver-based system with one-way dubbing switch, CX decoder, and one tape deck

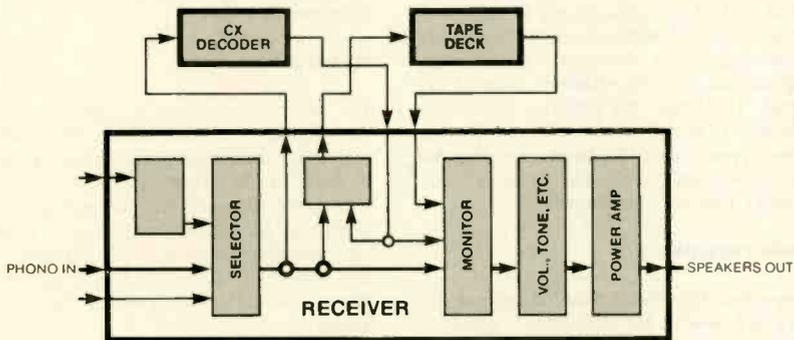


Fig. 1B: Signal path when switched for playing standard non-CX-encoded LPs

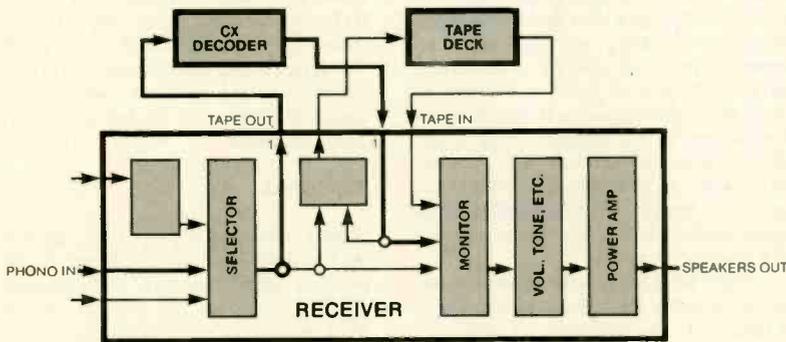


Fig. 1C: Signal path when switched for playing CX-encoded LPs

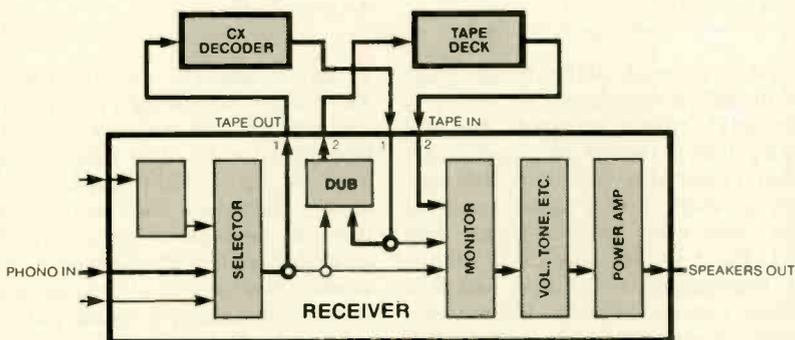


Fig. 1D: Signal path when switched for copying CX-encoded LPs

right-channel plug. (I never can remember whether right is black or gray—that's why I use the red paint.)

If it were not for one exception, I'd hesitate to raise the question of mono connections, because they've so seldom been required in modern audio. But that one exception—audio tracks from most TV sources, including all domestic broadcasts—is an application for which allowance is being made in more and more home equipment. If you need to make a transition from mono to stereo wiring, Y-adapters are the easiest and cheapest solution. You can buy them with two male plugs and one female (which mates a stereo component to a mono cable) or with two female and one male (to connect mono equipment to stereo cables). I like to keep both handy.

Typical home stereo systems—whether based on a high-quality receiver or built up from separates—have inputs for no more than two line-level source inputs (aux or equivalent) and two line-level in/out (tape or processor) loops. Leftover loop inputs can be used to accommodate sources (CD player, video-disc audio, or whatever) for which you don't have enough aux connections. (In that case, of course, the output connections for the loop in question will go unused.) But conversely, if you run out of loops, extra aux inputs without corresponding outputs won't fill the need.

To solve this problem, many of the add-on components that will need loop connections include their own replacement tape-monitor loop. The basic idea is that if you have used up all the loops in your system, you can disconnect a tape deck, attach your new component in its place, and then attach the deck to the tape-monitor jacks on the back of the newcomer. To get the deck into your signal path, you must engage the main monitor, turn on the added component (though many don't even have a power switch and are intended for use from a switched AC outlet), and then turn its monitor switch to the tape position.

Fig. 1 shows how a fairly simple receiver might be used with various outboards. The receiver has two sets of tape connections, one-way dubbing, and full monitoring. With it, we've decided to use a single tape deck along with a CX decoder to recover the full dynamic range of appropriately encoded discs. We'll need to be able to play records both with and without decoding, of course, and we'll want to be able to record from either radio or LPs. If the LP is CX-encoded, we might choose to tape it that way and save decoding for playback (which would put the least strain on the dynamic range of the tape medium). On the other hand, we could decode the signal before it's fed to the recorder (yielding tapes that can be played with maximum dynamic range on any system, even if it has no CX decoder).

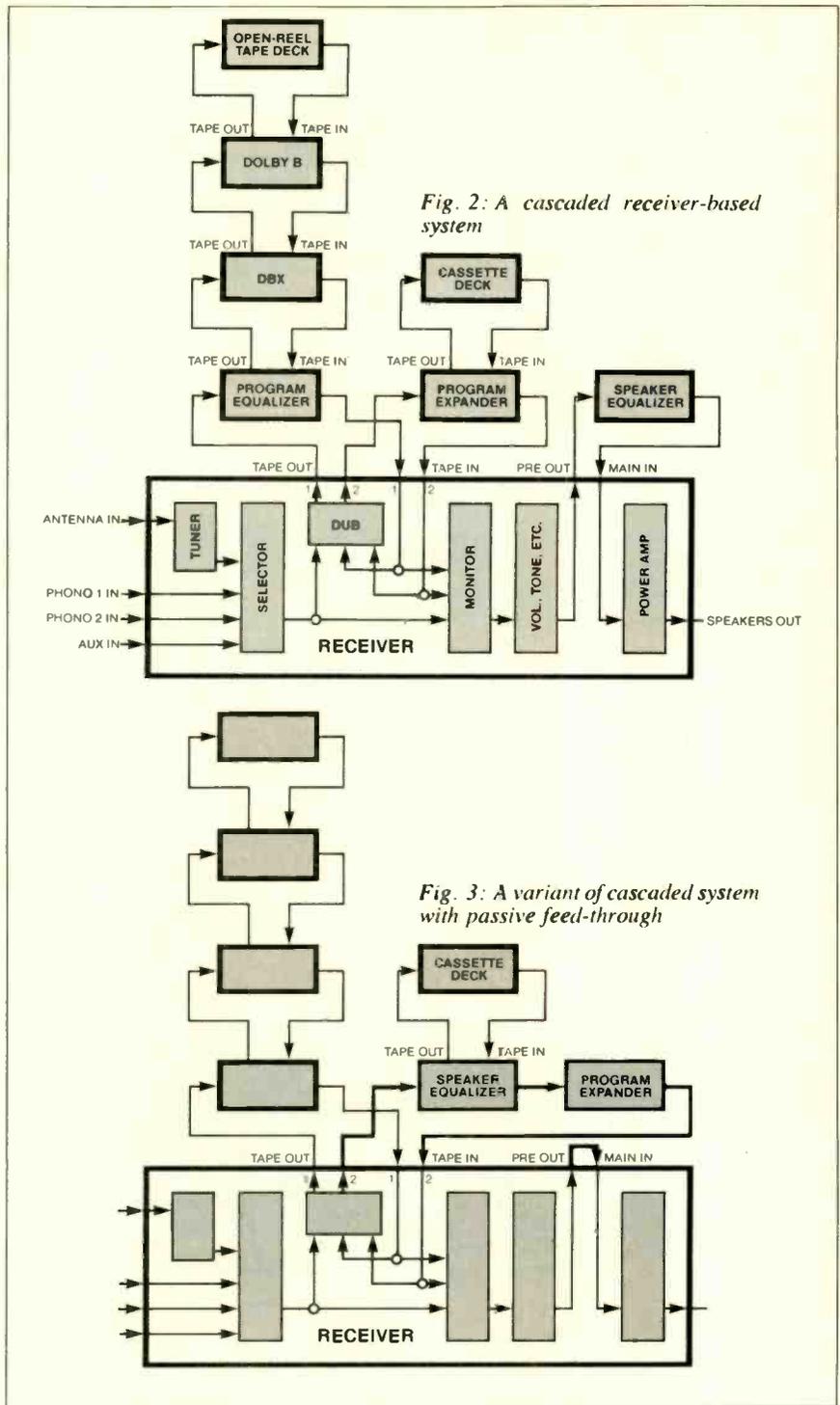
Let's assume the latter case, which means that we must be able to insert the

decoder into the recording circuit but need not use it in playback. If we attach the deck to the Tape 2 connections and the decoder to Tape 1, we can do just that. When playing regular records, we would leave both the monitor and dubbing switches turned off, in order to feed the signal straight through the receiver (Fig. 1B). For taping records, we would leave the switches set the same way and monitor the source signal. Or, if we had a three-head deck, we could switch the monitor to Tape 2 and monitor the copy. When we play a CX disc, switching the monitor to Tape 1 puts the decoder into the signal path (Fig. 1C). If we want to tape it, we can switch in the tape-dubbing circuit, which will feed the output of the decoder to the deck at Tape 2 in our hookup (Fig. 1D). The deck itself can be played using the Tape 2 monitor position.

Cascading one loop off another is illustrated in Fig. 2. Here we're assuming a receiver with two tape loops plus a pre-out/main-in connection. A program expander and a cassette deck are cascaded, or piggy-backed, from Tape 2; a program equalizer, a DBX disc-decoder/tape-noise-reducer, a Dolby B noise reduction unit, and an open-reel deck are cascaded from Tape 1.

Let's take the big group connected to Tape 1 first. The two noise reduction systems are included there because both may be used with the open-reel deck. (Cassette decks normally have noise reduction built in, but additional systems can be outboarded.) You'll find the logic of cascading the Dolby B from the DBX, rather than the reverse, among the points discussed in "What You Should Know Before Hooking Up Your Outboards." The equalizer must head this group—that is, be closest to the receiver's tape out—for several reasons. It should not be placed between the Dolby unit and the recorder if using the noise reducer and the equalizer simultaneously is a possibility; switching logistics are handier if you keep the Dolby/DBX noise reducer group together; and with the equalizer close to the receiver, it's easy to add EQ to any signal without turning on all the remaining outboards. Note that a dubbing switch in the receiver will allow you to route signals from the main output of the equalizer to the cassette deck; however, unless the equalizer itself has pre/post switching (see "What You Should Know . . ."), you'll be able to equalize only the open-reel deck's playback output. If you wish to equalize playback from the cassette deck, you can use the dubbing switch (Tape 2 to Tape 1).

The remaining system elements are relatively simple. You might make a case that the program expander (a dynamic-range-enhancement unit) and speaker equalizer could be transposed to keep the expander last in the processing chain (always a good idea). In fact, that arrangement would promote the best possible signal-to-noise ratios through the speaker equalizer, because higher signal levels are to be



expected at tape-loop connections than between the volume control and the power amp. I've gone the other way here, however, on the assumption that this equalizer is engineered for such a hookup and that, because we won't want to reset it once we've gotten any adjustments just right, the separate connection may make it easier to stow this unit out of harm's way, while the expander controls must be easily accessible. Remember, however, that the expander—particularly at high expansion ratios—puts maximum stress on the dynamic range of this equalizer; if hum or clipping

prove a problem with this setup, we'd better give the alternative a try.

It should be obvious that there's a limit to how far cascading can be carried if signals are not to be degraded. Purists claim that you should never have any more connections than you really need in the signal path, and it's certainly true that every time you insert a plug into a jack you increase the potential for hum, static, RF interference, and intermittency. To minimize audible degradation—which, in properly functioning modern gear, should be slight to negligible (at worst) for most music-listening

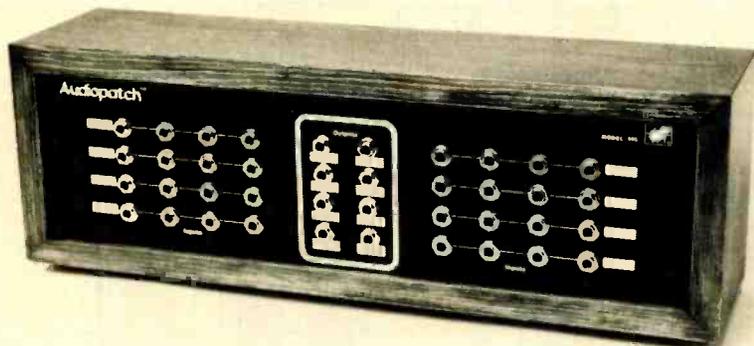
When we reviewed the Russound SP-1 (test report, January 1978), we called it a prescription for "Gordian knot" systems. Though it's no longer alone in that category, it remains among the more interesting options. Up to four decks and up to ten processors can be connected to pin jacks on the back panel. Slider switches on the front panel choose input, output, and dubbing options for the four decks; miniature phone jacks and patch cords permit you to insert any processor or sequence of processors into the input, dubbing, or output sections of the tape signal-routing scheme. You can monitor the playback and the dubbing buses before and after processing. The SP-1 costs \$190.

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The DBX 200 (\$130) dispenses with patch cords in favor of front-panel switching, for a big improvement in neatness at some expense of potential flexibility. There is room for three signal processors, each with its own bypass/process switch, and the processing section can be switched to affect either the recording feed or the playback (pre/post switching). A fourth, unswitched processor loop handles encode/decode noise reducers (like DBX's own). There also are connections in the back panel for three tape decks; front-panel switching for them includes monitoring of any of the three decks, a copy switch that allows any one deck to be used as the recording source, and line/copy source selectors for each of the three decks.

Circle 92 on Reader-Service Card



By wiring a "standard" system configuration that can be interrupted and reorganized with patch cords, the Audiopatch Model 465 (\$225) combines the flexibility of patch systems with some of the neatness of switches. Eight sets of inputs and outputs are located on the back panel (pin jacks) and normally provide direct feed-through in each set. To alter this arrangement, stereo phone patch cords can be plugged into the front-panel 1/4-inch "headphone" jacks, routing an input to a different output or cascading processors between normally-connected input/output pairs.

Circle 91 on Reader-Service Card

will be signal fed through the tape connections when the processor's AC switch is off—or even when its AC cord is disconnected—but the signal will not be fed through the main processing channel. The few exceptions, in which a bypass switch or power-off switch position cuts out all active components along with the processing, permit the kind of hookup shown in Fig. 3. Here we've taken the Tape 2 loop of Fig. 2, assumed that the expander becomes passive in its off position, and moved the speaker equalizer to this group to get it ahead of the volume control and the expander. We can cascade the cassette deck from the speaker equalizer and run the expander in series with the cascade; it will simply drop out of the picture when you decide against program expansion.

Not all add-ons have tape-monitor connections, of course, and the sonic limitations of cascading remain a real barrier to unlimited system expansion using this technique. Both problems can be solved by employing switching boxes, of which there are quite a variety on the market today. The most obvious sort uses regular pushbutton, slide, or rotary switches to choose the circuit configuration. Generally, these boxes are made to solve specific problems—recording and dubbing with more than two decks, A/B comparisons, and so on—and must be purchased accordingly. More generalized devices often use patch bays, whose mating patch cords can create extremely flexible signal-routing paths. But bays move some of the rat's-nest tangle of wires, hidden at the back of most systems, out into view. Professional patching gear is usually based on the same 1/4-inch jack/plug design as old-fashioned Bell Telephone PBX equipment: good for reliability, but rather bulky and very expensive by consumer standards. An elegant recent variant on this scheme, designed specifically with home systems in mind, requires that you insert patch-cord plugs into the jacks only when you want to alter a standard system configuration. Otherwise, signals feed straight through the patch points to the equipment connected to the patch bay's back panel by standard pin connectors.

Obviously, a switching unit of some sort is the way to go if you have a really complicated stereo system. The choice of the unit—and the way in which you hook it into your system—will depend on the nature of the complications. But don't expect these devices to be cheap just because they contain no active parts. Transistors, resistors, and capacitors used in active units don't cost much in themselves, but more construction can be required to fit everything under the hood of a complicated passive switcher than you would need to build a simple power amplifier. So don't plan to skimp. If you do, you're likely to get poor-quality parts that won't stand up to regular use—and faceplates that you'll want to cover with an antimacassar. **HF**

purposes—you can seek out add-ons with passive bypass circuitry. Ideally, for example, you should not have to turn on the program equalizer in Fig. 2 in order to use the open-reel deck and noise reduction units outboarded from it; direct wiring connections should shunt signals from the equalizer's inputs to its outputs at all control set-

tings (except, of course, when the equalizer itself is selected).

The usual design approach for outboards puts completely passive circuitry into the tape-out/tape-in connections, but puts active components into the processor signal path, even when their controls are set to bypass actual processing. Thus, there

Two Video Switchboxes

**HANDS-ON
REPORTS**

The Showtime Video Ventures Systems Switcher Model 5000S and the Channel Master Video Control Center Model 0770 can add operating flexibility to your home video setup.

These Hands-On Reports were conducted under the supervision of Edward J. Foster, consulting technical editor of HIGH FIDELITY and Director of Diversified Science Laboratories.

HOOKING UP A MULTICOMPONENT video system is even more complicated than organizing an audio-only one. Audio components can be easily cascaded, and a simple dubbing control on many audio receivers affords some fairly flexible switching options. (See "Taking Control of Your System," page 7.) Unfortunately, no television receiver we know of can match even the humblest of audio receivers in switching flexibility.

A modern TV set may have several inputs and outputs, but there is usually no way of controlling signal flow from the receiver itself. Thus, should a TV receiver have inputs for a VCR and a video disc player (and precious few have even that), you would still have to reconnect cables to dub a video disc program onto tape. Add to this the problems created when a local cable operator decides to scramble certain premium channels—necessitating some mechanical switching to route the cable feed through an external decoder—and you have a frustrating situation. But you're not alone: The vast majority of video queries we receive each month address the question of how to configure a system to do B without having to reconnect everything just to do A again.

The solution is a video switchbox. But before you run out to buy one, you'd better have a clear idea not only of how to configure your system, but also how you may want to reconfigure it in order to have significant flexibility in signal handling. Not all video switchers do the same thing in the same way. In fact, the two switchboxes we are reviewing this month—the Showtime Video Ventures Model 5000S and the Channel Master Model 0770—are quite different in application and function.

The Channel Master Model 0770 Video Control Center is an inexpensive (\$50),



Channel Master's Video Control Center is a four-in/three-out RF switcher.

completely passive (no AC required) RF switcher. It allows any one of three receivers to choose among four sources—a so-called four-in/three-out arrangement. Channel Master has identified the receivers as two TV sets and one VCR on the unit's faceplate and connectors, but you needn't take those labels literally. Each TV receiver can choose among four sources—antenna, cable (called "pay") VCR, and aux. The VCR gets a choice of three sources—antenna, pay, and aux.

Inputs and outputs are made by F-connectors on the rear panel. No cables are provided; you can use your VCR's or purchase whatever extras are needed. The system accepts 75-ohm unbalanced (coax) lines, so you will need a 300-to-75-ohm balun transformer to convert twin-lead antenna signals. We found that the F-connectors were spaced far enough apart to allow use of the packaged baluns that come with many VCRs.

Switching is accomplished with eleven pushbuttons on the front panel. The left four select the signal fed to the remote TV receiver, the center four control the feed to the main TV, and the remaining three route the signals to the VCR. Pressing any one button within each group releases whatever other one might have been engaged. The buttons are equally spaced across the panel

and clearly grouped by legend and color bars.

The Channel Master is said to have a frequency range of 5 MHz to 890 MHz—which means it can handle all VHF, UHF, and cable channels—and to provide more than 60 dB of isolation between inputs in the VHF band and 40 dB on UHF. With a passive device, there will always be some loss when a signal is split to feed more than one receiver. The company specifies this loss at 8 dB (VHF) and 10 dB (UHF) when the antenna is feeding both the main TV set and the VCR; 4 dB (VHF) and 6 dB (UHF) when the antenna is feeding only the remote TV or when the VCR is feeding both TV sets.

If your system consists of, for instance, two TV sets, a VCR, and a video disc player, and your primary concern is routing signals to one or both of the TVs, the Channel Master should accommodate your needs quite nicely. You can record broadcasts off the air or from the cable (PAY) feed. If your video disc player is plugged into the switcher's aux input, you can tape from it—but only through the player's RF output. (Remember, the Channel Master switcher is an RF-only device; it cannot handle direct video signals.) This precludes stereo recording onto the VCR (if yours has that capability), and also entails

PHOTOS BY JOHN COLE

some loss in picture quality, since the signal must be modulated up onto a VHF carrier (Channel 3 or 4) in the disc player then demodulated in the VCR.

These same constraints apply if you have two VCRs and no disc player. You connect one of the VCRs to the switcher's aux input and copy from one to the other, but only from the aux VCR to the main one. This is because the Channel Master's aux input is a send-only circuit. For the same reason, the only way you can record a broadcast onto the auxiliary VCR is to buy another splitter and feed the aux deck directly from the antenna or cable feed.

There is a way to accomplish two-way dubbing, however, and that's by forgoing one of the TV links and one of the send-only inputs. If you feed the second VCR's antenna input from the Channel Master's remote TV output and connect that VCR's RF output to an unused input on the switcher (the one marked PAY, for instance), the second VCR would be able to record signals from the antenna, main VCR, and aux (disc player) sources. You would select the source you want to record via the REMOTE pushbuttons. You would not, however, use the PAY button on the remote bank; that would feed the second VCR's output back into itself.

Though the Channel Master is a fairly flexible device, it does have its limitations, most of them stemming from its reliance on the RF link. This not only injects noise and signal degradation, but also precludes routing stereo audio signals through the patchbay. Furthermore, there's no way to hook in signal processors, such as video stabilizers and equalizers, for these work only with direct video signals.

The Model 5000S Systems Switcher (\$350) from Showtime Video Ventures does handle direct video and audio signals, as well as RF. The AC-powered switcher is not, however, recommended for UHF signal switching, which could be an important consideration in some areas of the country.

The rear panel's thirty jacks make the unit look like a porcupine. All direct-audio connections are made via standard RCA phono jacks; RF and direct-video connectors are F-type coax fittings. Inputs to the 5000S are labeled with letters, outputs with numbers. These markings should help you to avoid mistakes, since switcher inputs correspond to outputs from other equipment, and switcher outputs go into input terminals on other equipment.

The rear panel gets pretty tight, and the F-connectors are arrayed so closely that plug-in baluns cannot be used on adjacent connectors. (Unless a balun is oriented appropriately, you may have a hard time fitting even a straight F-connector on the next jack!) If you use 300-ohm twin-lead in your system now, plan on using in-line baluns to convert to 75-ohm coax somewhere prior to the 5000S. You'll probably also need to buy a number of phono-jack-



Showtime's Model 5000S routes RF as well as direct video and stereo audio signals.

to-F-connector adapters since the direct-video outputs on most VCRs and disc players accept phono plugs.

The 5000S handles stereo direct-audio patching from four inputs (A, B, C, and D) to four outputs (1, 2, 3, and 4). If your video equipment is mono, only the left-channel set of input and output jacks is used. Corresponding to the four sets of stereo connections are four direct-video inputs and four direct-video outputs labeled in the same alphanumeric manner. RF connections—four-in, two-out—complete the array.

The Showtime 5000S is really two switchers in one, capable of handling both RF and direct audio-video sources. Direct signals are controlled by a pair of four-position rotary knobs and a toggle. In the toggle's normal-switching position, the rotary controls connect the output from any one of four direct audio-video sources to the input of any one of four receivers (monitors or VCRs). If you are willing to give up one source and one receiver, you have the added option of inserting whatever video processing equipment you like (enhancer, noise reducer, etc.) between them. You can also daisy-chain more than one piece of video processing gear in this loop if you wish. Enter the processing loop by switching the toggle to PROCESSING D-4 MODE; the video signal then passes through the processor chain before it gets to the receiver.

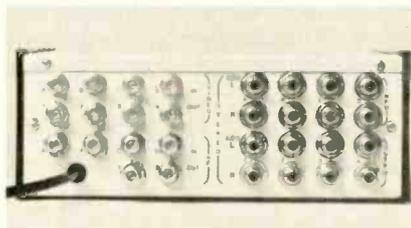
Apparently, Showtime envisions the switcher being used for dubbing. The switch that selects the source is marked MASTER, and the one that selects the receiver

is marked SLAVE. If you intend to use it that way, remember that you can copy onto only one slave at a time. We prefer to use the words source and receiver, since the master might be a source you don't want to copy—perhaps the NTSC-composite output of a home computer—and the slave might be a video monitor. The 5000S can certainly handle that situation with ease, as it can routing signals in a component-TV system that employs a separate monitor.

The RF portion of the 5000S enables two receivers—A and B—to choose among four RF sources through independent rotary controls. If one of the receivers is your TV set, then one of the RF sources would be your antenna, cable, or whatever. (But remember, the system is not designed to handle UHF signals!) The remaining RF inputs (2, 3, and 4) will then accept the outputs from your other video sources.

RECEIVER B can be assigned to a VCR, and by switching B to ANTENNA, you could record broadcasts. In such an arrangement, a second VCR would not have access to the antenna; moreover, if receiver B were a second TV set linked to an antenna input, neither VCR would be able to record off the air. The solution to this is to use a three-way RF distribution amplifier or splitter to feed the two VCRs and one of the switcher's RF inputs with the antenna signal. Each VCR could then record off the air, and receiver B could then be a remote TV set. Such a hook-up would have one other advantage. UHF broadcasts could be "received" by one of the VCRs, which would then convert the signal to VHF Channel 3 or 4 for distribution through the switcher to the TV set. This would circumvent—albeit clumsily—the UHF limitations of the device.

Signal switching can be quite complex, but Showtime's 5000S and Channel Master's 0770 go a long way toward simplifying the process. The product that is best for you depends on how you plan to use your system's capabilities. **HF**



Inputs and outputs on the back panel of the Systems Switcher are logically grouped: direct video and RF on the left, and stereo audio on the right.

For Channel Master Model 0770 circle 89 on Reader-Service Card; for Showtime Model 5000S circle 90.

TubeFood

New video programming: cassette, disc, pay and basic cable by Susan Elliott

Video Cassettes

FEATURE FILMS

CBS/Fox Video: *New York, New York; The Spy Who Loved Me; The End; Gator; Revenge of the Pink Panther.*

Embassy Home Entertainment: *Breaker! Breaker!; The Exterminator; The Soldier; Zapped; Summer Lovers; Humongous; Nightkill.*

MCA Videocassette: *Homework; Fast Times at Ridgemont High; Duel; Reel Deal; Hold That Ghost.*

Media Home Entertainment: *Johnny Got His Gun; Raw Force; Demonoid; House of Shadows.*

RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video: *The Boat (Das Boot); Things Are Tough All Over; To Sir with Love; The Professionals; The Big Heat; Lost and Found; We All Loved Each Other So Much.*

Thorn EMI Home Video: *The Dum Busters; Wolfman; The Demon; Endless Night; Waitress; Deep Red; Hatchet Murders.*

Warner Home Video: *The World According to Garp; Night Shift; Hey, Good Lookin'; Victory at Sea; The Twisted Cross; Blazing Saddles; A Clockwork Orange; Enter the Dragon; The Road Warrior. A Night at the Movies: 1959—The Young*

Philadelphians: 1960—Ocean's 11; 1961—Fanny; 1962—Days of Wine and Roses; 1963—PT 109.

MUSIC

MGM/UA Home Video: *Who's Afraid of Opera.* A three-cassette series with Joan Sutherland, puppets, and the London Symphony Orchestra (Richard Bonyngé, cond.) in *Faust; La Traviata; Daughter of the Regiment; The Barber of Seville; Lucia di Lammermoor.*

Thorn EMI Home Video: *Genesis, Three Sides Live.*

Video Discs

FEATURE FILMS

CBS/Fox Video (CED): *The Alamo; Birdman of Alcatraz; A Bridge Too Far; Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang; Dr. Dolittle; F.I.S.T.; The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.*

Embassy Home Entertainment (CED): *The Exterminator; The Soldier; Zapped.*

Embassy Home Entertainment (laser): *Zapped; Summer Lovers.*

Pacific Arts Video Records (laser): *My Dinner with Andre; The Endless Summer; Hungry I Reunion; To See Such Fun.*

HOBBIES/HOW TO

Pioneer Video: *The Creative Camera* (SLR instruction; interactive).

Pay Service Premieres

(Check local listings for availability and schedules.)

Cinemax: *Barbarosa; Ticket to Heaven; The Bible; Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears; Forbidden Games; Guys and Dolls; The Tender Trap; Never So Few.*

Home Box Office: *Chariots of Fire; Quest for Fire; Shoot the Moon; I Ought to Be in Pictures.*

Showtime: *Chariots of Fire; Shoot the Moon; I Ought to Be in Pictures; Quest for Fire; Cat People; A Little Sex; K-God; The Amateur; Butterfly; Superfuzz; Bobby Deerfield; Over the Edge; Girl in White; Scapegoat; Because You're Mine; Small-town Girl; Dead End; Enchantment; The Goldwyn Follies; Heidi; The Learning Tree; Mark Twain Theater: The Final Chapter; Santana and Heart: Concert for Americas; Divorce: Kids in the Middle.*

The Movie Channel: *Chariots of Fire; Quest for Fire; I Ought to Be in Pictures; Cat People; Shoot the Moon; Ticket to Heaven; The Beast Within.*

Q.&A.

Your video questions answered by Edward J. Foster

Q. *Can I use my bulk-tape eraser—the Radio Shack Model 44-210—to erase video cassettes? Is there any possibility of it harming them?—Rev. Andrew Comeaux, Baton Rouge, La.*

A. Your audio bulk-tape eraser certainly will not harm your video cassettes, but since I have not tested this particular model, I can't be sure it will erase them, either. Radio Shack specifically states that the 44-210 is not designed for use with metal-alloy audio cassettes, which suggests that the magnetic field it generates is of no more than average strength. Although current video tapes do not have the coercivity of a metal formulation (their magnetic properties are in the range of a chrome or ferricobalt audio tape), they are nonetheless quite difficult to erase. Also, half-inch video tape is over three times as wide as the 0.15-inch tape used in audio cassettes, so portions of it will be far from the bulk-

eraser's coils and thus subject to a weaker magnetic field.

If you want to experiment with your bulk eraser, turn it on and bring it up to one side of the cassette. Move it slowly over the entire tape pack. Then withdraw it slowly, turn the cassette over, and treat the other side. Bulk erasing the tape will not improve the audio or video signal-to-noise ratio to any meaningful extent, however. So unless you have some overriding reason for erasing the entire tape pack at once, the VCR's erase head will do a perfectly adequate job of removing previously recorded material prior to rerecording.

Q. *I've been checking into LaserDisc and CED video disc players, and I'm somewhat confused about which to buy. I've been told that CED discs are more widely available and have been more successful in the marketplace. Will*

movies continue to be available on LaserDisc?—Richard Austin, New York, N.Y.

A. I'm confident that the LaserDisc and CED formats will continue to coexist for many years and that plenty of movies will be available in each format. It's true that some early LaserDiscs would not track correctly, but the discs we have received recently have been flawless. The digital audio disc, which uses a similar laser-based pickup technology, should also generate renewed interest in the optical format. Finally, the greater popularity of the RCA CED format was largely due to the lower price of both player and discs, but CED's cost advantage is rapidly diminishing. In some markets, comparable LaserDisc and CED players are priced only a few dollars apart. (If you haven't read it already, take a look at HF's November 1982 "Hands-On Report," which compares LaserDisc and CED players.)

Zoltán Kodály: The Other Hungarian Centenary

In evaluating the art of Kodály, one always comes back to Bartók, his lifelong friend and confrere.
Reviewed by Paul Henry Lang

IT WAS NINETEENTH-CENTURY musicography that dreamed up the pairing of great composers: Palestrina/Lasso, Bach/Handel, and Haydn/Mozart—to which our century added Bruckner/Mahler, Debussy/Ravel, and Bartók/Kodály. In truth, great creative personalities cannot be lumped together on the same plane; they are always *sui generis*. Nevertheless, Bartók and Kodály, though vastly different in personality and talent, are inextricably bound together, especially in their homeland, by a great discovery they made together, which changed their life and art as well as the musical culture of Hungary. They heard a voice that, like the light of distant stars, reached them millennia after it originated: the authentic, pristine voice of the folk music of the Magyars, reaching back to the people's origins in the Ural Mountains.

Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) intended to follow the profession of scholar, earning his doctorate in linguistics and literature (1906) with a dissertation on the strophic construction of Hungarian folk poetry. But he was also a musician and felt in this poetry an inner, hidden musical quality that, like the Hungarian language itself, has no counterpart in Indo-European cultures. Impelled to investigate, he roamed the villages tucked away in the nearly inaccessible fringes of pre-Versailles Hungary and, soon joined by his friend Béla Bartók, undertook to record the songs of peasants as yet untouched by urban influences. Gradually the contours of a hitherto unknown musical culture began to emerge. Redoubling their efforts, the two scholar-musicians collected and classified this music over many years, their specimens eventually numbering in the thousands. Although at this stage their activity remained essentially ethnomusicological research, they realized that the new musical culture they dreamed about must rise from this pure layer of folk art—but how?

The next step was the recognition that, in order to join the mainstream, this “new” art must be brought into the context of the advanced art of the West, invested with the accoutrements of the modern art of compo-

sition. “Genuine folksong is to the composer what nature is to the landscape painter,” said Bartók. It is a world that has no walls of time. The danger is that when it is only quoted, or composed *à la manière de* . . . , it can become a mere exoticism. Haydn, Schubert, Brahms, Liszt, and many others used ethnic materials just that way, unaware that their sources were not authentic ethnic artifacts, but urban-descended and German- and gypsy-influenced popular music. The real Magyar folk art was like a subterranean river that here and there broke through to the surface. The creators of the new Hungarian art music immersed themselves in this river just before it disappeared forever, as the flotsam and jetsam of urban life—especially the radio—debased the ancient peasant culture into a shallow and effete “entertainment” medium.

Slowly there emerged in the music of the two young composers an unmistakably personal quality that was nourished by the spirit and idiom of folk music, already beginning to be evident in Kodály's early orchestral piece *Summer Evening* (1906). Not program music, but a sort of meditation, it has a little Wagner and Debussy peeping out of it, as well as some of the old turns and figures of pastoral music, English horn solos, and so forth. Though it's generally innocuous—a nice, warm, *fin de siècle* piece—some of the new tone is here already, even if it doesn't yet go beyond cut-flower Hungarianism. Henceforth what is “popular” in Kodály's music is no longer something exotic, nor is it a show of patriotism; it is the natural manifestation of an original creative mind.

Audiences, both professional and lay, were at first perplexed, and a heated debate was sparked when the two pioneers gave their first concerts of their own works in 1910; nevertheless Kodály began to be known and performed both in Hungary and abroad. Universal Edition, the Viennese music-publishing firm, always looking to corner the market, judged him a good risk (as it did Mahler, Bartók, and other future masters) and took him on. The deciding moment came in 1923, when *Psalmus hun-*



Conductor Kodály in rehearsal, 1946

garicus was performed at festivities commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the union of the two cities, Buda and Pest, straddling the Danube. The work met with public acclamation, soon conquered Europe, and was well received even in New York, where Toscanini, not known for his sympathy for contemporary music, performed it. With the composition of the peasant song-play *Háry János* in 1927, Kodály became the nation's recognized musical poet.

In the meantime he continued his scholarly activity and published important writings—notably, an essay on the pentatonic elements in Hungarian folk music—and, as professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music, guided the young generation with methods so original that his students hung on his words. There were none of the old standbys—figured-bass exercises, chorale harmonizations, species counterpoint, and all the other ingredients of nineteenth-century German pedagogy still practiced virtually everywhere. Instead, Kodály would distribute Eulenburg scores of middle-period Haydn quartets with the viola part pasted over with fresh note paper: “Write a new viola part,” he would order, and after the students peeled off the parts they had written, the postmortem would provide a revelation. The students could never tell what trick he would play next, but they were sure that it would be interesting and inspiring. His ideas for teaching music to children, now known as the “Kodály method” are altogether free of the pseudoscholarly baggage of his “competitor” Carl Orff, whose ideas always breathed Germanic metaphysical vapors; purely musical and direct, Kodály's

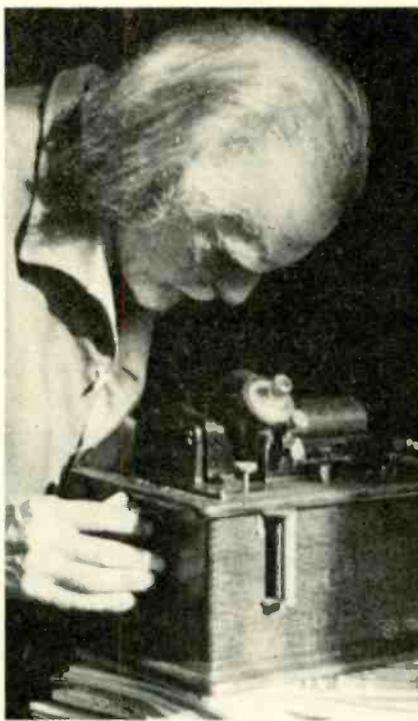
pedagogical system gives the student freedom.

But ultimately we must return to the pairing of composers mentioned above, for Bartók and Kodály cannot escape their longstanding association or their similar beginnings, and Kodály's role and stature become clear only in relation to the work of his lifelong friend and confrere.

Psalmus hungaricus is a remarkable and original composition. The redolent old poetic language of sixteenth-century Hungarian psalmist Mihály Kecskeméti Vég, his pregnant expression and accents, and his shift from plangent lyricism to challenging rhetoric (he wrote during the trying times of the Turkish occupation) are beautifully captured and conveyed by Kodály's music; sorrow and piety, but also determined refusal to acquiesce to fate, emanate from the tenor soloist's flowing parlando-arioso, while the chorus here stammers and wails, there erupts with indignation and protest. The melodic design rests on the inner music of the language; words and music are always in equilibrium, neither trespassing on the other, as the energy of the language is faithfully shared by the music. Such a work should never be sung in translation. The orchestration is well handled, though the composer never descends to tricks.

The *Missa brevis* (1944) is another great work. There is no hesitation here, the language is plain, lean, and clear, everything superficial is honed away, and every section of the Mass is solidly composed. The Kyrie, a fine piece, quietly pleads for mercy. The Gloria has the traditional jubilation—but in the new Hungarian idiom. Significantly, whenever Kodály falls back on the old liturgical practice of letting the priest-precentor intone the opening words before the chorus takes over, he uses not the time-honored Gregorian chant, but folk-song-descended Hungarian parlando—and it fits beautifully! The Sanctus is arresting, the Benedictus a moving choral song. The Agnus Dei starts, quite originally, in the deepest depths of the orchestra; light filters in when the solo tenor enters, and the whole texture brightens wonderfully when the chorus joins the ensemble. There are practically no reminders of the old-fashioned "sacred" style, and no attempts at those *stile antico* turns and phrases once considered de rigueur. It must be admitted, however, that the Introit and the "*Te missa est*" do not measure up to the rest of the work. They are not, of course, parts of the Ordinary of the Mass and are not normally included in its setting anyway, and perhaps they should be omitted in performances of this work to guard its remarkable unity.

The *Te Deum* (1936), considered a chef d'oeuvre in Hungary, is less successful, though it seems to strive for the same tone as the *Psalmus hungaricus*. Here we encounter the first significant difference from Bartók's music: There is a certain his-



Kodály with his Edison recorder, 1955

torical quality in this work, as in some of the later ones; Kodály, amazed and moved by the past, tries to recapture it in a new guise. But while, as a scholar, Bartók was interested in the past and took his point of departure from the same folk elements that inspired Kodály, as a creative artist, he always looked toward the future. The *Te Deum* is a little too rhapsodic, with rather conventional harmonies, somewhat contrived melismatic melody, surprisingly Lisztian instrumental recitatives, and an accompaniment replete with figurations that do not seem germane to the whole. The tessitura of the upper choral parts is consistently high, though they probably do not sound so shrill in performance as in this recording.

The last piece here is Kodály's *Concerto for Orchestra* (1940), which—together with his symphony—is rather puzzling. Aside from the opening part, with its attractive syncopated theme that reappears ritornel-fashion, it is difficult to see why this work should be called a concerto; it seems rather a sort of orchestral fantasy.

KODALY: Choral and Orchestral Works.

Mária Gyurkovics*, Edit Gáncs*, Tímea Cser*, and Irén Szecsódy†, sopranos; Magda Tiszay, alto*†; Endre Rösler*‡ and Tibor Udvardy†, tenors; György Littasy* and András Faragó†, basses; Budapest Chorus*†‡, Hungarian State Orchestra*†‡, Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra**, Zoltán Kodály, cond. [László Beck, prod.] HUNGAROTON SLPX 12410/2, \$29.94 (electronic stereo; three discs, manual sequence) [from various Hungaroton originals, 1956–60].

Missa brevis*; Budavári Te Deum†; Psalmus hungaricus‡; Concerto for Orchestra**; Summer Evening**.

Frankly, by 1940, this was *vieux jeu*, to the point of the almost obligatory fugato, which usually occurs when a composer gets himself into a cul-de-sac and must make a new start, as we see in Liszt's *Faust* Symphony and other late-Romantic works. Neither the harmony nor the orchestral technique goes beyond standards prevailing toward the end of the previous century, and there is some undeniable noodling. Comparison with Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, that warm, witty, brilliant, and virtuosic work composed five years later, is inevitable.

How shall we finally evaluate Kodály's art on the occasion of the centennial of his birth? He had talent, intellect, and integrity, and enough human warmth to match them, as well as a musical mind that could envision, pursue, and grasp a goal to which others, except Bartók, were blind. He cultivated this new, imagination-born world of national music with skill, yet what is new and original in his compositions is not set forth with Bartók's boldness and violent force. After the great works following the first stunning breakthrough, he settled down to a steady but unadventurous existence. His music, though simple, always attractive, and disciplined, often has a conservative, even didactic tinge. It lacks Bartók's darkly glowing dramatic visions; for whenever it threatens to escape beyond the horizon, Kodály bends it back to earth. Even in his late works, he is addicted to sequences and repetitions that simply mount the ladder of keys, and his polyphony is generally of the kind exemplified by the end of the *Meistersinger* Overture—not so long ago considered the acme of latter-day polyphony, but really just a very pleasant game with tame and well-behaved counterpoint. However, there is also in Kodály's music a noble masculinity, and as one contemplates his oeuvre, one finds no loose ends within his purview. He was a distinguished composer who knew his limits and stayed within them with admirable consistency. Most engaging in his songs and other vocal works are the sunniness of village feasts, the amusing wit of the tales about Hány János, that Hungarian-peasant Baron Münchhausen, and above all, the laughter of children.

These recordings disclose good, competent conducting, an activity Kodály took up relatively late in life. Unfortunately, it is not matched by the engineering. The instrumental pieces come across nicely, with the orchestra precise and colorful, but the choral sound, that *bête noire* of recording, is not the best. The good chorus sings enthusiastically, and since Kodály is essentially a vocal composer, it should have sounded brilliant, yet trebles and altos are piercingly shrill in the animated outbursts. Tenor Endre Rösler, who carries the brunt of the solo work, does very well, as do the other solo singers in brief roles that emerge from or alternate with the chorus.

HF

Expanding the Early-Music Frontiers

Electrola's Réflexe series remains a fertile source for important, innovative, and sometimes controversial performances.

Reviewed by Nicholas Kenyon

THE RÉFLEXE SERIES on EMI Electrola has produced the most important corpus of medieval-music recordings in existence—those made by Thomas Binkley's Studio der Frühen Musik at the height of its activity. The range and substance of these discs remain unique; neither Noah Greenberg in this country nor David Munrow in England approached the originality and consistency of Binkley's work. Though each produced outstanding individual albums (Greenberg's classic *Play of Daniel*, MCA 2504; Munrow's magisterial "Music of the Gothic Era," Archiv 2710 019), only Binkley—with the advantages of a small ensemble that rehearsed regularly and players completely committed to its activities—sustained the feat over several years.

Sampling again the Réflexe discs that have been imported by German News, I find the idiosyncrasy and much-criticized improvisatory style of the Binkley group less significant than its absolute conviction and peerless virtuosity. The Machaut chansons (IC 063-30106, -30109) stand up well to anything recorded since, while the brilliant originality of the Moorish-style approach to Iberian music on the Camino de Santiago disc (IC 063-30107) is far more exciting than the more flamboyant versions by the Clemencic Consort and others. Most hypothetical, but most intriguing, is the Studio's disc of Italian instrumental music from the Tuscan manuscript in the British Library (Add. 29987), called "*Estampie*" (IC 063-30122). Here Binkley leads his colleagues in partly controlled improvisation with the student players of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (who include some now familiar names, Paul O'Dette, Hopkinson Smith, and Alice Robbins). The results have a thrilling unanimity and persuasiveness, however much of what goes on both rhythmically and harmonically must necessarily be invention.

Some fine Studio performances have also been reissued recently on Telefunken (26.35519) a two-disc set distributed by Polygram Special Imports that brings together troubadour and trouvère songs, two collections still available separately from domestic sources (6.41126, 6.42175). Countertenor Richard Levitt's declamation of Vidal's "*Baron de mon dan covit*" is



Hilliard Ensemble (from left): Paul Hillier, Paul Elliott, Leigh Nixon, David James

very gripping, as is Andrea von Ramm's long discussion around Comtessa de Dia's "*A chanter m'er*" (with interludes supplied from other sources). The trouvère songs, less characterful, tend to be atmospheric rather than directly expressive of the texts: "*Chanterai por mon courage*" conjures up a wonderful wash of somber, meditative sound, and in the anonymous "*Lasse, pour qu'oi refusai*," a wailing noise gives way to a low, lamenting vocal line from Von Ramm that only gradually becomes more animated. There is plenty of experimentation with instrumental improvisation, spoken texts, and so on; the results, though not fixed or final, are invariably stimulating.

Medieval music presents a particular challenge to the performer because of this lack of certainty. As Thurston Dart once put it, acidly, every singer or player has to "knit his own middle ages"—and the shortage of evidence all too easily becomes an excuse for doing whatever happens to cross a performer's fertile twentieth-century mind. The achievement of Binkley and his circle (though the Studio has ceased operation, Binkley himself is still active, having staged a superb account of the *Carmina burana* Passion play in Indiana and New York last season) has been to develop a rhetorical style for this music that owes nothing to later notions of expressiveness.

Among the younger performers influenced by the Studio are the four—three of

them Americans—who make up *Sequentia*. They gave an electrifying performance at a recent Holland Festival, where I chanced on their concert by accident in a medieval music-circus that included several recitals in small rooms of an atmospheric castle near Amsterdam, and made a considerable impact here, in Boston during the 1981 meeting of the American Musicological Society and in New York in the series "Music Before 1800." Their first record is superbly successful.

"*Spielmann und Kleriker*" explores the interaction of sacred and secular styles of music around the year 1200, with especial attention to the *lai* and to the dramatic sequence. The marvelously evocative French *lais* are sung uncut, and the stories of Hercules and Samson in the two sequences are presented with a cool, hard-edged drama. The simplicity of the actual musical material (small melodic cells, repeated and varied) is belied by its emotional force. Both singers, soprano Barbara Thornton and baritone Benjamin Bagby, take total command of the material and project it vividly; the playing of Margriet Tindemans on fiddle and Crawford Young on lute and gittern is deftly supportive (though they get carried away in the final postludes, which aren't totally convincing: Wouldn't the performances have ended with the voice?). In *Samson dux fortissime*, the intricate rhyming scheme of the verses is used to great effect, with jangling alliter-

ations serving to emphasize Delilah's exultant rejoicing and Samson's plangent lamentation.

This disc was coproduced with WDR, the West German radio station in Cologne, which has one of the most active of all early-music broadcast departments, directed by Klaus Neumann. (In financial resources and time devoted to this repertory, it outstrips even the BBC, and needless to say, leaves anything in this country miles behind.) Significantly, two of the newest batch of Réflexe releases are also WDR coproductions—the Hilliard Ensemble's Power disc and the Ricercare Ensemble's Schein disc.

The Hilliard record is an especially notable achievement, because our understanding of Leonel Power's life and work has only recently been advanced by Roger Bowers. It was he who established connections between Power and the Duke of Clarence, and hence the likelihood that the Old Hall Manuscript—the most important source of English polyphony from the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries—came from the duke's household, for Power is the composer who figures most prominently in the manuscript. The range and development of his style are well represented on this disc, which includes early isolated Mass movements and an *Ave regina* in simple descant style, and the great *Alma Redemptoris mater* Mass, one of the first in which all the movements are linked by the use of a *cantus firmus*.

The Hilliard Ensemble, here using seven male voices, brings a sober yet occasionally too sweet timbre to the music; the sound is mellifluous, but perhaps a touch more incisiveness would have allowed the extraordinary harmonic language to penetrate more effectively. Tuning and ensemble are impeccable, however, and the blending of voices (apart from some slight overprominence of the countertenors) is always musical. In most movements the voices are doubled, two to a part, but I enjoy the final two motets, *Ibo michi* and *Quam pulchra es*, sung one to a part.

The Ricercare recording explores a later period, the early German baroque. Johann Hermann Schein occasionally shows up in brass programs, but a complete disc of his music is rare and welcome: His work combines typical German sturdiness with Italian warmth and elaboration. Here, however, it comes across as rather pallid, because the instrumental playing, though perfectly competent, seems lacking in rhythmic vigor and precision. Perhaps Michel Piguet, the oboist who leads the group, is aiming at a gently expressive style in this repertory; if so, he has not quite succeeded in matching the claims of precision with those of eloquence. In addition, Hilke Helling is a disappointing soloist in the vocal numbers. Though the music is uniformly splendid, this record is for specialists only.

Colin Tilney's two albums in this Réflexe group, however, may be recommended to anyone who cares for sensitive, stylish keyboard playing. The harpsichord disc explores an important and neglected field, better-known to organists than to harpsichordists—Bach's predecessors, discussed in detail last century by Spitta but rarely played. Georg Böhm's three pieces have a strange, jerky, imaginative quality that must surely have captured the young Bach's ears; the combination of French *chaconne*, sober fugue, and sudden, inspirational postlude (in the G minor work) is mirrored in the mixture of national styles in some of Bach's greatest organ works, and perhaps his G minor Fantasia owes a direct debt to this Böhm fantasy. Johann Kuhnau's *Biblical Sonatas* are better-known and have been recorded before, but Tilney (whose style is sometimes rather introverted) plays *Hiskias agonizzante*, with its

Georg Böhm's strange, jerky, imaginative pieces must have captured Bach's ears.

quotation and transformation of the famous Passion chorale *Herzlich tut mich verlangen*, with real pathos.

Oddly, the one unsuccessful performance here is of the Bach piece: his great, neglected (perhaps because not part of any collection) Fantasy and Fugue in A minor, S. 904. The sustained lines of the fantasia need an organ, and Tilney adopts a very deliberate pace, so that the suspensions fade away; the fugue, with its magnificent combination of a second chromatic subject announced in the middle, is also played slowly and stodgily. (Alfred Brendel recorded this work rather awkwardly on the piano, for Philips; I don't know of a really good performance.)

Would that Tilney had tried that piece on the little chamber organ he uses for his "Early English Organ Music" disc, for everything he plays on it here he transmutes to gold. This is a most remarkable recording of repertory that is particularly suited to his qualities of quiet sensitivity and emotional reserve. Playing Gibbons, Tallis, and Bull on a genuine seventeenth-century organ in Knole, Kent, Tilney sounds as if he is meditating spontaneously on the plainchants and hymn melodies that provide the *canti firmi* for the collection. The melodies wend their way slowly and distinctly; the running scales and chiming thirds that elaborate them are precisely articulated and gently phrased. The organ has a delicious sound—mellow in the bass and tenor, suddenly bright at the top of the treble range.

Several of the pieces come from the Mulliner Book; Tilney adds or omits ornamentation from the *Musica Britannica* edition at will—or perhaps he is following different sources. There are delightful natural noises, the release of keys, and even something that sounds like a twittering bird after Thomas Tallis' *Iste confessor*. The most magnificent, restrained, and noble piece is the concluding *In nomine* No. 9 by John Bull; but I like the six different settings *Gloria tibi Trinitas* by William Blitheman and the *Ground* by Thomas Tomkins almost as much. This record proves what the combination of an ideally suited instrument and a sensitive performer can achieve in bringing neglected repertory to life: an outstanding success. **HF**

SPIELMANN UND KLERIKER.

Sequentia. [Thomas Gallia, Klaus L. Neumann, and Paul Dery, prod.] HARMONIA MUNDI GERMANY IC 067-99921, \$10.98 (digital recording) (distributed by German News Co., 220 E. 86th St., New York, N.Y. 10028).

ANON.: Olim sudor Herculis. Lai du Kiev-refuel. Lai Markiol. Lai des amans. Samson dux fortissime.

POWER: Masses and Motets.

Hilliard Ensemble, Paul Hillier, dir. [Gerd Berg and Klaus L. Neumann, prod.] EMI ELECTROLA RÉFLEXE IC 069-46402, \$11.98 (distributed by German News Co.).

Missa Alma Redemptoris mater; Gloria; Credo; Sanctus; Agnus Dei. Ave regina; Salve regina; Beata viscera; Ibo michi ad montem; Quam pulchra es.

SCHEIN: Instrumental and Vocal Works.

Hilke Helling, mezzo-soprano*; Anthony Bailes, lute†; Pere Ros, viola da gamba‡; Basel Ricercare Ensemble for Old Music, Michel Piguet, dir. [Gerd Berg and Klaus L. Neumann, prod.] EMI ELECTROLA RÉFLEXE IC 069-46405, \$11.98.

Banchetto musicale: Suites: No. 6, in A minor; No. 15, in G. Musica boscaregia: Songs (3). *‡ Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam. *† Lobet den Herrn in seinem Heiligtum. Intrada a 5 (2). Canzon a 5. Canzon a 6. Galliarda a 5. Padouana a 4.

COLIN TILNEY: German Harpsichord Music.

Colin Tilney, harpsichord. [Lucy Robinson and Colin Tilney, prod.] EMI ELECTROLA RÉFLEXE IC 069-46406, \$11.98.

BACH: Fantasy and Fugue in A minor, S. 904. BÖHM: Prelude, Fugue, and Postlude, in G minor; Suite No. 6, in E flat; Capriccio in D. KUHNAU: Biblische Historien: Sonata No. 4, in C minor (*Hiskias agonizzante*). PACHELBEL: Hexachordum Apollinis: Aria No. 5, in A minor.

COLIN TILNEY: Early English Organ Music.

Colin Tilney, organ of the Chapel of Knole, Kent, England. [Colin Tilney and Martin Renshaw, prod.] EMI ELECTROLA RÉFLEXE IC 069-46403, \$11.98.

ALWOOD: Voluntary. BLITHEMAN: Gloria tibi Trinitas (6). BULL: In nomine, No. 6; In nomine, No. 9. GIBBONS: Fantasia of Four Parts; Fancy in G. TALLIS: Iste confessor. TOMKINS: Ground. ANON.: Upon La-Mi-Re.

CLASSICAL Reviews



SHEILA RIZZO

Murray Perahia tackles Beethoven—characteristically, in unjustly neglected sonatas.

BACH: Aria and Variations in the Italian Style, S. 989—See page 62.

BEETHOVEN: Sonatas for Piano: No. 4, in E flat, Op. 7; No. 11, in B flat, Op. 22.

Murray Perahia, piano. [Andrew Kazdin, prod.] CBS MASTERWORKS M 36695. Tape: MT 36695 (cassette). [Price at dealer's option.]

BEETHOVEN: Sonatas for Piano: No. 7, in D, Op. 10, No. 3; No. 23, in F minor, Op. 57 (*Appassionata*).

Russell Sherman, piano. [Thomas Frost, prod.] PRO ARTE PAD 108, \$9.98 (digital recording). Tape: PAC 108, \$9.98 (cassette).

Murray Perahia is renowned for his Schumann and Chopin, but also for his Mozart. Now he ventures his first recorded Beethoven—characteristically, for this cultivated musician, in two of the master's most unjustly neglected sonatas. Op. 7—second in length only to the *Hammerklavier*, Op. 106—is perhaps the most profound and successful of Beethoven's early works; Op. 22 combines aspects of the "traditional" Beethoven with a Rossini-like Italianate fancy: The scurrying first movement suggests *La Cenerentola* or *La Scala di seta*—or at the very least, Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* Overture.

One thinks back to other great pianists not born to the Beethoven manner: Rubinstein began by playing him à la Chopin and later "reformed," treating him more like Brahms (which was Backhaus' lifelong approach). Gieseking cultivated a taut classical symmetry and gave even the late Sonatas, Opp. 109 and 110, an almost Mozartian fizz and sparkle. (The flippantly executed turn in the theme of Op. 109's third movement is typical—and objection-

able.) The celebrated Spanish virtuoso Eduardo del Pueyo played the *Hammerklavier* for brilliance and clarity, with flamenco theatricalities (Arrau likewise, albeit less extremely), and Richter treats Beethoven much the way he treats Bach—superpianistically, in the manner of Czerny's *School of Velocity*.

Not too surprisingly, it is the classical aspect of Perahia's artistry that surfaces here: The brightness of tone and acuity of rhythm are somewhat Mozartian, but unlike Gieseking, Perahia takes care to give bite to his sforzandos and weight to his climaxes. He is no shrinking violet; in fact, he becomes even a trifle aggressive in these bright-toned, slightly glaring reproductions. On the whole, he gives Op. 22 a little more nuance and freedom than Op. 7, which is almost constricted. If I have any quibble about these readings, it is that both are just a bit too poker-faced. The pianism is superbly managed, yet I would like just a trace more spring in the step, an infusion of humor and geniality to temper the stringency of part-writing and (relevant) detail. Still, this is an auspicious beginning, and that elusive relaxation will surely come as Perahia eases into his new role as a Beethovenian. The CBS processing and pressing are excellent.

Russell Sherman, who partakes of a Lisztian school of thought (much like his European counterpart, Alfred Brendel), turns in his most successful recording to date. He, too, favors—for all the rhetorical theatricalities—a lean, cutting, classical sonority rather than billowing expanse. If Op. 10, No. 3, sounds a trace febrile and superficial at times (certainly in comparison to Arrau's great interpretation of the *Largo e mesto*, Sherman skims a bit), the *Appas-*

Reviewed by:

John Canarina
Scott Cantrell
Kenneth Cooper
R. D. Darrell
Peter G. Davis
Kenneth Furie
Harris Goldsmith
Matthew Gurewitsch
David Hamilton
Dale S. Harris
R. Derrick Henry
Joseph Horowitz

Nicholas Kenyon
Allan Kozinn
Paul Henry Lang
Irving Lowens
Karen Monson
Robert P. Morgan
James R. Oestreich
Conrad L. Osborne
Andrew Porter
Patrick J. Smith
Paul A. Snook
Susan T. Sommer

sonata is thoroughly engaging in this slashing, forward-moving, and structurally clarified account, which never loses the dramatic thread. (Note how he stresses key details in the chordal first-movement development section, highlighting the essential notes within the overall mass.) The sound is larger and more ambient than on Perahia's record, yet detail is never blurred or lost.

Compliments to both companies for the quality of their annotations. Pro Arte, in fact, gives double comment—by Sherman himself and by the eminent Konrad Wolff; and since both are well-read scholars, they also bring in viewpoints of such original thinkers as Rudolf Kolisch, Charles Rosen, and Donald Francis Tovey. H.G.

BEETHOVEN: Sonata for Piano, No. 32, Op. 111—See page 62.

BRAHMS: Variations on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 35—See page 62.

CHOPIN: Piano Works—See page 62.

COURBOIS: Dom Quichotte. **JACQUET DE LA GUERRE:** Samson; Le Sommeil d'Ulisse.

John Ostendorf, bass-baritone; Bronx Arts Ensemble Chamber Orchestra, Johannes Somary, cond. [Marnie Hall, prod.] LEONARDA LPI 109, \$8.98.

The criterion of excellence in a miniature is not size, but compression. The three French cantatas recorded here present the figures of Don Quixote, Samson, and Ulysses briefly (each lasts about a quarter of an hour) and economically (the band, including continuo, ranges from four to eight pieces, with a single singer carrying the entire narrative burden), but by the same token, they do not tell much. In means and in scope—though not, perhaps, in intention—they are not so much concentrated as *small*. Also highly conventional. The prerevolutionary, com-

placent (not to say oblivious) spirit of the early eighteenth century fans every phrase with its airy formality, nowhere more so than in the mandatory little codas that wrap up each cantata with a tidy aphorism.

Yet within narrow limitations, the pieces' charm, variety, and invention cannot be denied. The vocal writing in the airs displays by turns fluent grace, vivacity, and a handsome introspectiveness. The instrumental parts, not driven by contrapuntal ambition, sing along with the voice in melodious, sometimes virtuosic, colloquy. The recitatives, however, even the more grandly conceived, fully accompanied ones, are, by the standards of the great Italians, tame stuff.

Perhaps because Philippe Courbois had the advantage of a satiric and reasonably contemporaneous subject, *Dom Quichotte* seems more roundly imagined than Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's excursions into sacred and classical myth. In one way, the lady attempts more, for, while observing the requirement for emotional contrast from movement to movement, she crowds five airs into each cantata (against Courbois's three, the number also favored by the prolific Rameau). Among her happier inventions are a lilting meditation in 6/8, the meter of the siciliana, on the fragility of willpower when confronted with a pair of sparkling eyes (in *Samson*) and a gallant invocation of *Minerve bienfaisante* (in *Ulysse*). In the end, though, her music, like her unattributed texts, does not seek to reenact an interior drama, but to present her heroes decoratively, from afar, and the effect is only heightened when the anonymous narrator delivers in parting the verse that points the moral. In *Dom Quichotte*, it is Sancho Panza who has the last word. His bumpy drinking song, begun over empty fifths, makes mock of his master's preceding heroics, whose authenticity is not thereby put in doubt, but ironically confirmed. Thus Courbois goes beyond the static tableau to a lifelike double portrait.

The performances by John Ostendorf and the Bronx Arts Ensemble Chamber Orchestra under Johannes Somary have commendable brio and elegance. Without distorting textures or upsetting delicate balances, the instrumentalists in their solos jump at every chance the composers give them to shine (the oboe, bassoon, and violin with particular success: the trumpet perhaps without that last glint of brilliance). Ostendorf's solid technique sees him through florid passages without strain or incident, and his legato is well supported. He interprets the text in straightforward but imaginative fashion, drawing striking effects from the judicious mordent or *subito piano*. His dark, clearly focused, manly tone projects with a force well suited to the language and much of the music but sits uneasily with the scores' tenderer moments, where the ability (which Ostendorf lacks) to color the sound to fit the sense

would count for a great deal.

The readings are marred by a liberal scattering of faulty pronunciations and questionable liaisons that grate disproportionately because the singer's diction is otherwise so polished. There are also numerous departures from the miserably edited French texts in the notes, some in plain violation of the evident meaning. (Nor do the translations always pass muster.) Still, the case for the neglected *cantate française* is made with catching affection. M.G.

DEBUSSY: Images, Books I-II—See page 62.

HAYDN: The Seven Last Words of Christ, H. III: 50-56.

Gidon Kremer and Kathrin Rabus, violins; Gerard Caussé, viola; Ko Iwasaki, cello. PHILIPS 6514 153. \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: 7337 153. \$12.98 (cassette).

Via Nova Quartet. MUSICAL HERITAGE SOCIETY MHS 4507, \$7.75 (\$4.95 to members) (add \$1.60 for shipping; Musical Heritage Society, 14 Park Rd., Tinton Falls, N.J. 07724).

Haydn's string quartets contain some of the master's most inspired and potently expressive writing, and nowhere is his genius more evident than in this problematical and deeply moving sequence of eight slow movements followed by a convulsive Presto finale. In its quartet version (there are also oratorio and orchestral settings), *The Seven Last Words* is a difficult nut to crack, requiring a tremendous concentration span (from audience as well as performers: this is not an item for the casual "music lover"). Diversity and contrast must be generated through the subtlest of means—by way of unobtrusive gear-shifts, textural interplay, and coloristic nuance. Without such incursions of resourceful artistry, this procession of largos, adagios, and graves—many of them employing an insistent ostinato—falls victim to an inherent rigidity and monotony.

Thirty years ago, Alexander Schneider, Isidore Cohen, Karen Tuttle, and Madeline Foley made a magnificent recording of the work for the now defunct Haydn Society. Although a few versions have appeared in the meantime, my contentment with Schneider was so complete that I didn't even have the curiosity to investigate them.

Both new editions do reasonable honor to Haydn's music. They are quite different from Schneider—and from each other. The sonic discrepancies are surprisingly minor, given a time span of thirty years and the inequalities of aging mono, analog, and digital techniques. The Schneider disc, if less realistic, sounds believable enough—and often more delicate and evocative (as in the veiled pizzicatos depicting "I thirst"; by contrast the tangible realism of the two newer versions seems distinctly heavy and prosaically unalluring).

The Philips foursome does not always

sound like an integrated quartet. Gidon Kremer is a soloistic player, with a volatile temperament and a wide dynamic range at his disposal. His three colleagues (whose names appear in smaller type) are more broadly emphatic in phrasing and tone production—even stolid on occasion. In one or two places, as in the passage beginning at bar 51 of the third movement, "Verily I say unto thee . . ." the first-violin line is almost engulfed by the heavy-gaited quarter-note ostinato. The ensemble cooperation is admirable, but the tonal imbalance is unusual in a quartet performance.

On the whole, though, I suspect that Kremer and friends *wanted* this unhomogeneous quality; certainly, they wanted the ostinatos insistently executed, for the angularity and vehement stress—along with a lean and sometimes vibratoless sound—give the interpretation a stylized austerity. Tempos are on the fast, militant side, with few changes of gear, and dynamic contrasts are emphasized sharply. When gear-shifts *do* occur, they sound obtrusively idiosyncratic: Each time the pizzicato motif reappears in "I thirst," the tempo becomes fractionally but perceptibly slower. (Was this an interpretive decision, one wonders, or the inadvertent result of splicing and copying?)

For the most part, this is a performance of decided honesty, commitment, and distinction. The aesthetic is cooler, more theatrical, than Schneider's lyrical and less self-conscious approach. Predictably, the Kremer version excels in the final "Earthquake" section, the deliberate, strongly rhythmic accentuation of the playing stunningly projected by Philips' assertive engineering.

The French Via Nova Quartet (in an Erato-derived recording), with its somber dignity, broadly inflected pacing, and fondness for thick, creamy vibrato, reminds me of those old Beethoven recordings by the Pascal Quartet. Since the portamento is mostly uniform, the playing doesn't sound hysterical or pressured (as, for instance, in some of the Griller and Amadeus performances of classical repertory), but the constant broadness of attack does blunt thrust and impact. After a while, a certain monotony sets in with the side of the brush used even where finely pointed articulation is needed. The "Earthquake" is decidedly anemic and unstressful.

In its undramatic way, however, the Via Nova shows fine musicianship. Its first violinist is the best informed—or in any case, the most consistent—in executing appoggiaturas on the beat in melodic manner. Schneider is steadfastly old-fashioned, taking them all as grace notes before the beat, and Kremer, for no discernible reason, wavers in his approach, playing them long in bars 40 et seq. of "Verily . . ." and in a few other places, short elsewhere. Kremer's account is the only one to observe all the repeats, but his alertness makes the

Critics' Choice

The most noteworthy releases reviewed recently

BACH: Goldberg Variations. Gould. CBS IM 37779, Jan.

BARTÓK: Orchestral Works. Budapest Philharmonic, Budapest Symphony, Joó. SEFEL SEFD 5005/9 (5), Sept.

BERNSTEIN: Dybbuk Suites Nos. 1-2. New York Philharmonic, Bernstein. DG 2531 348, Jan.

BRAHMS: String Sextet No. 1. Les Musiciens. HARMONIA MUNDI FRANCE 1073, Jan.

FAURÉ: Pénélope. Norman, Vanzo, Dutoit. ERATO STU 71386 (3), Dec.

FRANCK: Symphony in D minor. Liège Philharmonic, Bartholomé. RICERCAR RIC 009, Feb.

GRANADOS: Danzas españolas (12). De Larrocha. LONDON CS 7209, Feb.

HANDEL: Messiah (excerpts). U. of Michigan Early Music Ensemble and Ars Musica. Parmentier. SCHOOL OF MUSIC SM 0017, Feb.

HAYDN: Symphonies, Vols. 1, 2. L'Estro Armonico, Solomons. SAGA HAYDN 1 (3), 2 (3), Oct.

JANÁČEK: Cunning Little Vixen. Popp, Jedlička, Mackerras. LONDON LDR 72010 (2), Nov.

MACDOWELL: First Modern Suite; Piano Sonata No. 4. Fierro. NONESUCH H 71399, Nov.

MAHLER: Das Lied von der Erde. Norman, Vickers, C. Davis. PHILIPS 6514 112, Jan.

MENDELSSOHN: Violin Concerto. BRUCH: Concerto No. 1. Mutter; Berlin Philharmonic, Karajan. DG 2532 016, Dec.

MONTEVERDI: Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda. Kwella, Rogers, Thomas; Cologne Musica Antiqua. ARCHIV 2533 460, Jan.

MOZART: Apollo et Hyacinthus. Mathis, Wulkopf, Hager. DG 2707 129 (2), Dec.

PROKOFIEV: Romeo and Juliet Suites (2). Philadelphia, Muti. ANGEL DS 37776, Feb.

SCHUBERT: Piano Sonata, D. 960. Richter. EURODISC 86 222, Feb.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 10. Berlin Philharmonic, Karajan. DG 2532 030, Nov.

TCHAIKOVSKY: Piano Concerto No. 1. Cliburn, Kondrashin. RCA ATL 1-4099, Dec.

TCHAIKOVSKY: Piano Concerto No. 2. Cherkassky. Susskind. VOX CUM LAUDE VCL 9011, Jan.

VERDI: Aida. Ricciarelli, Domingo, Abbado. DG 2741 014 (3), Feb.

WAGNER: Tristan und Isolde. Price, Kollo, Kleiber. DG 2741 006 (5), Feb.

BERLIN PHILHARMONIC: 100 YEARS. EMI ELECTROLA IC 137-54095/9 (5), Dec.

BERLIN PHILHARMONIC: 100 YEARS, VOL. 2. Furtwängler. DG 2740 260 (6), Dec.

HEINRICH STROBEL: Verehrter Meister, lieber Freund. Southwest German Radio. SCHWANN/DG 0629 027/31 (5), Oct.

performance seem shorter than Via Nova's and no longer than Schneider's (which nevertheless flows with an easier curve and more supple expression).

Both new recordings have tiny blemishes that should have been remedied: The Via Nova second violin and viola fall momentarily out of sync in the pizzicatos at bar 11 of "I thirst"; and in bar 94 of the same movement, someone in the Philips group accidentally plops a finger on an alien string, creating an unseemly dissonance. H.G.

D'INDY: Symphony No. 2, in B flat, Op. 57.

Orchestra of the Théâtre du Capitole (Toulouse), Michel Plasson, cond. [Eric Macleod, prod.] EMI FRANCE 2C 069-73100, \$12.98 (distributed by International Book and Record Distributors, 40-11 24th St., Long Island City, N.Y. 11101).

"Everybody" knows the Saint-Saëns Third and Franck D minor Symphonies, and the Chausson B flat turns up at least occasionally in concert and on records. But who knows, nowadays, the fourth cornerstone of the great late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century French symphonic tetralogy: the Second (1902-3) by Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931)? Only a small band of fanatical aficionados, who have been fervently praying for years for a modern successor to the first—and until now, only—recording, Pierre Monteux's with the San Francisco Symphony for RCA Victor away back in 1943.

It's hard, especially for an aficionado like me, to understand why a work so widely ranked as a masterpiece should have been so long ignored. To be sure, the piece is difficult to perform, and to follow intelligently on only one or a few hearings. But that certainly doesn't warrant its—and its composer's—reputation as being austere cerebral. It may not be as immediately appealing as the bracingly outdoorsy Sym-

phony on a French Mountain Air or as gorgeously exotic as the Istar Variations (not to mention the franker melodic and harmonic attractions of the Saint-Saëns, Franck, and Chausson works). Yet D'Indy's Second by no means lacks haunting if less obvious melodism, fascinating contrapuntal intricacies, even anticipations of Scriabinish mysticism, and above all, architectural grandeur and dramatic power.

Perhaps it's because we've needed and eagerly anticipated a technologically outstanding version for so long that the one we now get turns out to be relatively disappointing—not so much for its 1981 Pathé-Marconi audio engineering as for its conductor's apparently uncertain, patently unconvincing reading. Michel Plasson has been doing creditable work in building his provincial orchestra into one to be reckoned with; and some of his earlier recordings, especially of operas and operettas, have been well received. (I haven't yet heard his c. 1977 Chausson symphony, on Seraphim S 60310.) But this work's problems baffle him: Too many slow passages are dragged, too many quick ones rushed, too many light ones labored. And my immediate sense of a general lack of assurance and passionate conviction was confirmed when I rechecked my not entirely faded memories of the wartime Monteux version via a helpful audiophile neighbor's tape dubbing of DM 943. The 78s' mono sound was far from ideal even by 1943 standards, yet it never hid Monteux's charismatic authority, eloquence, and infectious relish of this magnificent music.

So we still lack a fully satisfactory D'Indy Second—or any recording at all of his unpublished First of 1870-72 or his *Sinfonia brevis (de bello gallico)* of 1916-18. The sole consolation is that at least we've been getting some D'Indy lately—occasional samplings of chamber music as well as Pierre Dervaux's batch of mostly unfamiliar tone poems (Arabesque 8097-2,

November 1981). And now that the symphonic ice finally has been broken, perhaps Plasson's brave if unsuccessful example will inspire others. In any case, this partisan has had to cope with D'Indy disappointments before: I began my concertgoing life (Boston Symphony Friday afternoon rush lines) just a few weeks too late to catch the *maitre's* guest-conducting appearance in December 1921! On the other hand, I was lucky enough to first hear, the next season, D'Indy's Second as played by the Bostonians under Monteux. R.D.D.

KODÁLY: Choral and Orchestral Works—See page 44.

LOEWE: Ballads (11).

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone; Jörg Demus, piano [Cord Garben, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2531 376, \$10.98.

Edward, Op. 1, No. 1; Erikönig, Op. 1, No. 3; Herr Oluf, Op. 2, No. 2; Der Schatzgräber, Op. 59, No. 3; Süßes Begräbnis, Op. 62, No. 4; Hinkende Jamben, Op. 62, No. 5; Kleiner Haushalt, Op. 71; Der Mohrenfürst auf der Messe, Op. 97, No. 3; Archibald Douglas, Op. 128; Tom der Reimer, Op. 135a; Meeresleuchten, Op. 145, No. 1.

Loewe had slipped out of SCHWANN entirely until this disc resurrected him, and he deserves representation. Even if no one is likely to mistake him for a great song composer, he knew how to tell a story—or rather to provide promising materials for an imaginative singing storyteller.

Fischer-Dieskau went on a Loewe binge in the late Sixties, producing in relatively short order a single Electrola disc with Gerald Moore, cryptically billed as "1. Folge," and two DG discs with Jörg Demus. No repertoire was duplicated on the DG discs (now repackaged as 2726 056), putting them at something of a disadvantage in that the Electrola disc had skimmed off most of Loewe's Greatest Hits. This belated sequel is essentially a remake of the Elec-

trola, with two bonus tunes, "Hinkende Janben" and "Meeresleuchten."

Contrary to expectation, this material doesn't seem to stimulate the ham in Fischer-Dieskau. On the whole, he contents himself with making the more obvious vocal effects (e.g., the tinkling bell in the refrain of "Tom der Reimer"), which isn't my idea of gripping storytelling but is at least fairly easy on the ear. (The midrange sounds reasonably solid here, while the now precarious upper range is handled with seemly discretion.) More importantly, these ballads do come to life in Demus' accompaniments (e.g., note the rhythmic definition and zest of the very long "Archibald Douglas"), which contain perhaps the liveliest and most colorful playing I've heard him do.

For the Basic Loewe, then, this disc should serve adequately. For Loewe compulsives, there's a slew of imports in addition to the Fischer-Dieskau set, including Philips, Acanta, and Electrola discs by Hermann Prey (the last formerly available here on Vox) and a Preiser anthology of 1923-39 performances by twelve mostly distinguished artists (LV 200). **K.F.**

MAHLER: Symphony No. 1, in D.

Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Claudio Abbado, cond. [Rainer Brock and Wolfgang Stengel, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2532 020, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: 3302 020, \$12.98 (cassette).

St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Leonard Slatkin, cond. [Robert Woods, prod.] TELARC DG 10066, \$17.95 (digital recording).

MAHLER: Symphony No. 2, in C minor (Resurrection).

Edith Mathis, soprano; Doris Soffel, mezzo-soprano; London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra, Klaus Tennstedt, cond. [John Willan, prod.] ANGEL DSB 3916, \$25.96 (digital recording; two discs, manual sequence). Tape: 4X2S 3916, \$19.96 (two cassettes).

Gabriela Beňáčková-Čápková, soprano; Eva Randová, alto; Prague Philharmonic Chorus, Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Václav Neumann, cond. [Pavel Kühn, prod.] PRO ARTE 2PAL 2011, \$19.96 (two discs, manual sequence). Tape: 2PAC 2011, \$19.96 (two cassettes).

MAHLER: Symphony No. 5, in C sharp minor; Rückert-Lieder (5)*.

Hanna Schwarz, mezzo-soprano*; Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Claudio Abbado, cond. [Rainer Brock, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2707 128, \$21.96 (digital recording*; two discs, manual sequence). Tape: 3370 040, \$21.96 (two cassettes).

MAHLER: Symphony No. 7, in E minor.

Chicago Symphony Orchestra, James Levine, cond. [Thomas Z. Shepard and Jay David Saks, prod.] RCA RED SEAL ATC 2-4245, \$31.98 (digital recording; two discs, manual sequence). Tape: ATK 2-4245, \$31.98 (two cassettes).

London Philharmonic Orchestra, Klaus Tennstedt, cond. [John Willan, prod.] ANGEL DSB 3908, \$25.96 (digital recording; two discs, manual sequence). Tape: 4X2S 3908, \$19.96

(two cassettes).

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Václav Neumann, cond. [Pavel Kühn, prod.] PRO ARTE 2PAL 2003, \$19.96 (two discs, manual sequence). Tape: 2PAC 2003, \$19.96 (two cassettes).

And still they come! The latest Mahler offerings run the now usual gamut from excellent to routinely competent.

My first acquaintance with Mahler's flawed but wonderful Seventh Symphony came in 1962 concerts by the late William Steinberg and the New York Philharmonic. His subsequent performances with the Boston Symphony only deepened my regret that he never had the opportunity to record the work—or any other Mahler symphony, save the First—for he brought to Mahler a unique combination of authority, tradition, sanity, and his own personal brand of Steinbergian feistiness, which made for thoroughly illuminating experiences.

"Illuminating" describes James Le-

The Chicagoans' playing in the Seventh is truly awesome.

vine's clear-headed Seventh as well. Whereas Klaus Tennstedt's admirable account conveys the opening movement's feeling of strain, Levine seems more concerned with crystallizing its symphonic architecture; in fact, his is the most successful unification of this gigantic movement I've heard. (In any case, so effortless is the Chicagoans' playing that they can't even pretend to be straining; of course, as with all great ensembles and artists, it is an effortlessness not achieved without considerable effort—the art that conceals art.)

Levine and Tennstedt offer similar views of the first *Nachtmusik*, with a delightful swagger to the march episodes. Levine is brisker in the *Schattenhaft* Scherzo, Tennstedt more attentive to the underlined admonition *nicht schnell*. (Steinberg was slower than anyone in this movement.) Still, Levine makes it flow, again, effortlessly.

In the second *Nachtmusik* he comes perilously close to Václav Neumann's unusually slow tempo but is saved by a suppleness and flexibility not supplied by the Czech conductor. Levine is really *amoroso*. The Rondo-Finale opens with a wonderfully brilliant flourish, setting the stage for a superb rendition of this problematic movement, again conceived with an eye to architecture; the elements carried over from the first movement fit like a glove.

The Chicago Symphony's playing is truly awesome (to appropriate a word currently in vogue in the sports world). For all I

know, the whole work may have been recorded in one take; this kind of performance is the orchestra's norm. The naturally balanced recording presents everything in proper perspective. Like most conductors these days, Levine faithfully follows the score's markings and details, but unlike most, he does not call undue attention to them; not—equally rare—in the engineers.

With its fortuitous combination of superb conducting, playing, and recording, this has quickly become my favorite Mahler Seventh, though the highly touted German Teldec pressings are not entirely silent. Jack Diether's always knowledgeable and authoritative notes further enhance the set's value.

Tennstedt's Seventh completes his traversal of the odd-numbered symphonies with the distinction we have come to expect from him. He succeeds as well as anyone in overcoming the work's obstacles, abetted by magnificent playing from the London Philharmonic, surely now among the world's great Mahler orchestras. The horns, especially, play beautifully throughout, as does the first movement's powerful "tenor horn" soloist.

Tennstedt takes the first-movement introduction (and its recurrences) faster than usual, without detriment, and paces the lengthy main *Allegro risoluto* excellently. The first *Nachtmusik* goes somewhat deliberately, but the alternating macabre and bucolic moods are given fine contrast. The horns' melody, however, is sometimes obscured by the overly prominent accompanying cellos, while the cowbells are a little *too* distant at their first appearance, barely audible. The digital recording depicts the Scherzo's "shadowy" aspect too brightly, often negating its element of mystery. The second *Nachtmusik* is suitably *amoroso* without descending into sentimentality or rising to passionate heights. Parts of the Finale do sound a bit frantic, though basically the *maestoso* and *grazioso* sections have a good feel. Never have I heard the cowbells rattled so loudly in the coda—perhaps to atone for their earlier reticence. All told, an excellent performance, interpretation, and recording, albeit with slightly hissy and occasionally clicky surfaces. Must we have digital surface noise as well?

And now it's on to the even numbers for Tennstedt. It took me several hearings to come to terms with his Second. (More often than not, repeated hearings only confirm one's first impression.) I have always admired his grasp of structure, his sincerity and integrity, evident in everything he does, as well as his ability to sustain and make sense of an unusually slow tempo, as in the Mahler Ninth finale (Angel SZB 3899, October 1980). Initially, I felt he had gone too far in that direction with his extremely deliberate pacing through most of the Second, but increased familiarity has

Ofra Harnoy: The Burgeoning Artistry of a Natural Musician

Reviewed by Harris Goldsmith



Israeli cellist Ofra Harnoy: abundant precocity, musicality, facility—and charisma.

IT IS ALWAYS GRATIFYING to discover authentic new talent—all the more so just now, with some of the titans of a previous epoch passing from the scene. While it is too early to make any long-range predictions about young cellist Ofra Harnoy (born in Israel in 1965, now resident in Toronto), these three discs and a couple of year-end New York appearances show uncommon promise; her playing has abundant precocity, musicality, facility—and charisma.

Any one of these recordings would suffice as an introduction to Harnoy's burgeoning artistry, but the three together add up to an even more fascinating whole, enabling one to chart her progress year by year. (The Franck recording, with its over-side encore pieces, was made at age fifteen, the "Arioso" collection a year later, and the MMG anthology last July.)

Harnoy imbues the Franck sonata with lovely lyrical expression and sensitive nuance, though compared with her more concentrated and purposeful New York recital performance, the recording is a bit skittery and tentative, lacking cumulative direction and tonal weight. The short companion pieces, however, provide some of

her most affecting moments: Ben Haim's *Song Without Words*, a cellistic counterpart of Bloch's *Nigun*, is given lustrous, pure tone and shows a feeling for color, line, and passionate expression. The etudes—Sarasate's *Zapateado* and Popper's fearsome upper-register workout, *Dance of the Elves*—are played with untrammelled humor and lightness, at breakneck (but flexible) speed. Two arrangements from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* are freely inflected and pure in sound. (A third *Porgy* excerpt appears on the MMG record.) Chopin's C sharp minor Nocturne is played so hauntingly that I was tempted to rehear the incredible recording of this same piece (in the violin arrangement, of course) made by Ginette Neveu at age eighteen. While Harnoy cannot quite sustain that comparison, she comes within range and suggests that, by the time *she* is eighteen, she will indeed be able to mold phrases with equal intensity and focused authority.

The second Discopaedia anthology, with very tasteful accompaniments by twenty-year-old Canadian organist Michael Bloss (excepting a bit of "switched-on-Bach" registration in the Vitali chaconne),

already evidences increased tonal amplitude and somewhat more decisive attacks and releases. Again, it is Harnoy's natural warmth and grace that command attention. These melodic largos and adagios, requiring little prestidigitation, keep her lyrical expression very much in the limelight. Its combination of sonic and musical values makes this record the most uniformly excellent of the three. The Bach excerpts are touching, the Casals *Song of the Birds* and Bruch *Kol nidrei* magical.

The first thing one notices about the final record is the change in recording perspective, from a spacious ambience to a close, pop-style, "knock-'em-dead" sound. Both cello and accompaniment, though certainly more impactful here, are somewhat coarsened by the proximity; Harnoy's cello takes on a slightly grainy tinge, and William Aide's piano becomes somewhat clattery. (Aide, like Helena Bowkun in the first-disc encores, is a responsive and artistic accompanist.) While MMG's sound is acceptable, Discopaedia's produces a more artistic effect.

Again, some of the playing is noteworthy: Rimsky's *Bumblebee* once more demonstrates fleet fingers and excellent intonation in the higher register. (About the only place where Harnoy disappoints on the latter score is in the Paganini Twenty-Fourth Caprice; admirable for its attempt to infuse an etude with musicality, it nevertheless sounds rather labored at times.) Stravinsky's "Russian Maiden's Song" has a distinctive nasality that gives point to the tempo, slightly slower than usual. The two Falla arrangements are robustly delivered and if the central part of the "Ritual Fire Dance" sounds for all the world like *Hava nagillah*, well, why not? The Chopin polonaise is full of dash and spontaneity. The Popper serenade's fiorituras unfold gracefully, and the Piatti Caprice is well proportioned, with noteworthy delineation of melody, counter-melody, and arpeggiated background rustle; again, one applauds the attempt (here successful) to make music out of drudgery. Tchaikovsky's "Autumn Song" and Gershwin's "Summertime" add little to the similar materials on the first record, though in the Gershwin, Harnoy's use of an authentic blues device, pitch fluctuation for expressive effect, is instructive.

Harnoy's natural musicianship is both a blessing and a potential danger: That she does what she does largely by intuition of course adds expressive conviction to her music-making. And it takes brains as well as heart to play the cello this well, even by instinct. But naturalness is a two-sided coin, and already one critic—in extolling her New York recital—has stated that "to talk of 'technique' would be irrelevant." I heartily disagree. Harnoy may be playing naturally and effortlessly at the moment,

but there will inevitably come a time when she will have to take a more analytical approach to both music and instrument. Just as a singer, even a plentifully gifted one, must pay heed to support and production (not to mention the demands of various roles) so as not to burn out the voice, an instrumentalist must pay heed to—and be prepared for—certain muscular changes that come with age. For all her virtuosity (really quite remarkable for one of such tender age and experience; the cumbersome cello, after all, is considerably harder to master than the violin or piano), there are chinks, and potential chinks, in her technique that should be tended to before they take their toll.

For one thing, the Discopaedia series

This genuine gift should be allowed to develop fully.

title "Masters of the Bow" is something of a misnomer here, since Harnoy's playing is decidedly left-hand-oriented. ("Masters of the Fingerboard" might be more appropriate.) Such an approach enhances speed, grace, and agility but leaves the sound without much weight or core. I happen to like the violinistic, "tuck-it-under-your-chin" type of cello-playing better than the heavy-treading Mack-Truck style favored by so many cellists, yet Harnoy's sonority—particularly in the treacherous upper reaches—is exceedingly light and small, and often deficient in carrying power. She can hold her own with piano or organ accompaniment, but against an orchestra, she would undoubtedly be overwhelmed.

OFRA HARNOY: Debut Recital.

Ofra Harnoy, cello; William Aide* and Helena Bowkun, piano. [James Creighton, prod.] DISCOPAEDIA MBS 2011. \$8.98 (distributed by Recordings Archive, Edward Johnson Music Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont., Canada M5S 1A1).

FRANCK: Sonata for Cello and Piano, in A. * BEN HAIM: Song Without Words (Sephardic Melody). CHOPIN (arr. Piatigorsky): Nocturne in C sharp minor, Op. posth. GERSHWIN: Porgy and Bess: Bess, You Is My Woman Now; It Ain't Necessarily So. POPPER: Dance of the Elves, Op. 39. SARASATE: Zapateado, Op. 23, No. 2. TCHAIKOVSKY: Nocturne, Op. 19, No. 4.

OFRA HARNOY: Arioso.

Ofra Harnoy, cello; Michael Bloss, organ. [James Creighton, prod.] DISCOPAEDIA MBS 2013. \$8.98.

BACH: Cantata No. 156: Arioso (arr. Isaac). Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue, in C, S. 564: Adagio (arr. Siloti and Casals). Violin Concerto, in E, S. 1042: Adagio (arr. J. Harnoy). BRUCH: Kol nidrei. Op. 47. CASALS: El Cant

Moreover, Harnoy's right and left hands are not always ideally coordinated: Often the vibrato stops with a change of bow; at other times it surges belatedly, producing little "hairpin" bulges in the musical line that are compounded by problems of articulation and an overreliance on one kind of shifting (the "anticipated" variety). The parlando middle part of the Tchaikovsky nocturne, for instance, takes on a slightly ungainly portamento, making the line bumpy. While I do not oppose the use of portamento or anticipated shifting on some occasions, they should be supplemented by other modes of note connection to form a truly resourceful *interpretive* vocabulary.

None of these defects is serious—yet. Harnoy is in her muscular prime now, and she possesses basic agility and patrician grace. But as her reflexes begin to slow, her vibrato is bound to spread into a wobble; and as she seeks a larger, more powerful sound in the interest of greater scope and intensity, tension and forcing may intrude. If, on the other hand, these incipient problems are corrected now, she will have a technical foundation able to adjust to, and assimilate, the aging process.

I stress this because well-meaning benefactors seem to be pushing the youngster a bit prematurely into a strenuous performing career. It is to be hoped that she will be able to withstand the pressure and—now that she has established her credentials—will take time to appraise her capabilities, to study further, and to gain greater insight into her long-range goals. She has a genuine gift, which should be allowed to develop fully, without undue haste or exploitation. Her evolution will be watched here with interest—and affection, for this is a young musician who deserves to succeed. **HF**

dels ocells. A. CORELLI: Sonata in D, Op. 5, No. 8 (arr. Salmon and Lindner). Sonata, Op. 5, No. 5: Adagio (arr. Schuster). MOZART (arr. Goltermann): Ave verum corpus, K. 618. T.A. VITALI (attrib.): Chaconne in G minor.

OFRA HARNOY: Cello Encores.

Ofra Harnoy, cello; William Aide, piano*. [Anton Kwiatkowski and Jacob Harnoy, prod.] MMG 1137, \$7.98. Tape: CMG 1137, \$7.98 (cassette).

CHOPIN (arr. Feuermann): Introduction and Polonaise, Op. 3. * FALLA: El Amor brujo: Ritual Fire Dance (arr. Piatigorsky). * La Vida breve: Spanish Dance (arr. Gendron). * GERSHWIN: Porgy and Bess: Summertime. * J.P.A. MARTINI: Plaisir d'amour. * PAGANINI (arr. Silva): Caprice, Op. 1, No. 24. PIATTI: Caprice, Op. 25, No. 7. POPPER: Serenade, Op. 54, No. 2. * RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (arr. Rose): Flight of the Bumblebee. * STRAVINSKY: Mavra: Russian Maiden's Song. * TCHAIKOVSKY: Chant d'automne, Op. 37a, No. 10. * TSINTSADZE: Chonguri. ZUCKERT: N'ilah.*

convinced me of the rightness of his vision (for the most part), to the point that other versions now sound superficial.

Tennstedt brings great weight and gravity to the mighty opening movement; more than anyone else I've heard, he heeds Mahler's admonition to play "with serious and solemn expression throughout." Not only is the basic pulse unusually slow, but there are further extensions of the tempo, such as in the *pesante* section between cues 5 and 6. By the same token, the passage marked *vorwärts* at cue 12 is extremely fast, making for an unusually striking contrast. In its tempo extremes, this reading reminds me of Leonard Bernstein's New York Philharmonic account (CBS M2S 695), yet more than Bernstein or almost anyone else except Bruno Walter (Odyssey Y2 30848), Tennstedt presents this sectional movement as a unified whole.

The second movement, also a bit deliberate, but appropriately not heavy, lacks Walter's buoyancy and charm, though I suspect that Tennstedt was not striving for those qualities. Instead of a slow *Ländler*, the main theme has the quality of a hushed cradle song. While the scherzo shows a proper appreciation of its irony, the *vorwärts* section really is too fast, unrelated to the main tempo; the horns can barely keep up in their acrobatic passage beginning five bars after cue 50. *Vorwärts* does not mean a new tempo per se, but rather a moving ahead within the existing tempo.

"*Urlicht*" is the one failure in this performance, and no amount of repetition can convince me that it should proceed (barely) at this snail's pace. Mezzo-soprano Doris Soffel makes hardly any impression at all in this context and is, in fact, unable to sing the final phrase ("selig Leben!") in one breath, unlike five other mezzos I heard for comparison.

As he did in the first movement, Tennstedt achieves extraordinary unity in the massive finale, again at fairly deliberate tempos—save for the extremely brisk march episode, whose shallowness is thereby emphasized. The soloists perform well, and the chorus is exemplary—beautifully hushed in its first entrances, wonderfully fervent later on—though it slightly anticipates two of its climactic moments, at cues 47 and 48.

Other versions of this score offer greater excitement, and I shall listen to them when that is what I crave. When I'm in the mood for a profound experience, I shall turn to Tennstedt.

With its spectacular 1970 performances and recording of the Fifth, the Chicago Symphony could be said officially to have entered the Solti era, and Sir Georg's exciting account (London CSA 2228) remains one of the most compelling on discs. Claudio Abbado's version brings the orchestra another step closer to becoming the first to record the complete cycle twice,

with various conductors.

Abbado presents a thoughtful rather than an aggressive interpretation, well calculated, with scrupulous observance of every score marking. The opening *Trauermarsch* moves at a measured tread, yet a sense of flow prevents any static feeling from intruding. The same applies to the next two movements, a rather deliberate second, not as stormy as some but with many warmly surging passages, and a moderate though lilting Scherzo. The famous *Adagietto*, though stretched to the very limits of slowness, somehow does not seem excessive. It's a feeling of serene suspension of time that Abbado achieves here—quite an accomplishment. (It should be noted that *Adagietto* is the movement's title, not its tempo marking, which is *sehr langsam*, or *molto adagio*.) The Finale moves without haste, at a perfectly natural tempo. Abbado, unlike Dimitri Mitropoulos (New York Philharmonic 881/2, November 1981), does not slow down for the *grazioso* episodes, yet the proper feeling is there all the same.

As in his previous Mahler recordings, Abbado displays a real feeling for the structure and idiom of the work, for its many changing moods and emotions. I have but two mild reservations: First, the rushing codas of both Scherzo and Finale seem too precipitate, isolated events rather than outgrowths of what has come before. Second, the calculation mentioned above does at times entail a lack of spontaneity. One could argue that a truly spontaneous performance would miss the many felicitous details found here; the trick is, of course, to calculate everything and still sound spontaneous—no easy task, to be sure.

Nevertheless, this is a distinguished account of a great symphony, with the Chicagoans, who really have this score in their blood, playing magnificently. Special praise must go to Dale Clevenger, principal horn, and Adolph Herseth, principal trumpet, who are superb; it's a pity they aren't mentioned anywhere in the booklet or on the labels. The recorded sound is wonderfully rich and natural.

The *Rückert-Lieder* are not heard so frequently as the *Kindertotenlieder* or *Songs of a Wayfarer*. Contemporaneous with the Fifth Symphony, they are, of course, glorious songs, and the central "*Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*" is obviously related to the *Adagietto*. Hanna Schwarz sings them beautifully, with utmost conviction and sensitivity, aided by extremely sympathetic support from Abbado's orchestra. The songs are recorded digitally, the symphony isn't (!)—a discovery I made only after hearing the two and then reading the fine print.

Abbado takes the Chicagoans yet another step with a superb traversal of the First. Several factors distinguish this version at the very outset: One is at last made aware that the sustained string harmonics

are supported by a low A in the double basses—generally audible only with difficulty if at all; its firm presence here is most appropriate to Mahler's picture of nature, emanating from the ground, as it were. The tempo of the introduction, which Mahler has marked to be slow and dragging, is of the utmost "slowness" (if I may use such a word to denote the creepy, crawling atmosphere thus created). Rarely have I heard such a depiction of stillness and mystery in this section, with the trumpet calls so far away as to be barely—yet sufficiently—perceptible.

Save for the unusual and effective slow opening and its later recurrences, Abbado's tempos are quite normal throughout. In the first movement he builds to a tremendous climax six bars before cue 26, after the long passage of three repeated descending notes in the lower strings. If one is taken aback by how softly he begins this

Abbado's First achieves an inevitable feeling of rightness.

section, a look at the score shows the dynamic marking *ppp*, a nicety seldom observed by others.

The scherzo is suitably lusty, with a straightforward trio section, and the funeral march, heeding Mahler's indication "solemn and measured, without dragging," has the weight and somberness needed to avoid the feeling of superficiality sometimes imparted to it. The finale, alternately stormy, tender, and majestic, never goes to pieces.

What sets this performance apart from all recent ones, and many not so recent, is its inevitable feeling of rightness—an indefinable quality achieved partly by following the score scrupulously (though, as noted, many conductors do that), partly by maintaining an inner vision of what the score's notes and markings mean in and of themselves and in relationship to each other, partly by wielding the ability to transmit that vision to the players and listener. Having access to a great orchestra steeped in the tradition doesn't hurt either. This is a Mahler First to live with; I do not hesitate to recommend it over all others of recent vintage and to place it in the august company of earlier accounts by Walter, Jascha Horenstein, Bernstein, Rafael Kubelik, and . . . name your favorite.

Listeners should be forewarned of this recording's extremely wide dynamic range. A normal setting for the quiet opening will virtually blast you out of your seat at fortissimo climaxes and perhaps rain bits of the

ceiling on your head. Some of these extremes seem electronically fabricated, for no orchestra—not even the Chicago—sounds like that. The approach is similar to that adopted for many of Karajan's DG recordings—seemingly closely miked fortissimos, distant pianissimos.

Leonard Slatkin offers a restrained view of the work, somewhat akin to Lorin Maazel's recent version (CBS M 35886). No eccentricities will be found here—nor much excitement, either, I'm afraid. It is a scrupulously straightforward, extremely well-played performance, the St. Louis Symphony demonstrating once again what a really fine orchestra it is. But it doesn't add up to a very personal statement about the work. Slatkin favors brisk tempos, for the most part—even in the funeral march, which, though it shouldn't drag, should have a bit more weight; here it sounds merely flippant, albeit with a nice lilt to the satiric passages. The finale's "Hallelujah" theme sounds quite perfunctory, and the movement lacks the magnificent rhetoric of Bernstein's account.

Diether's excellent and authoritative notes enhance this release, too, as does the natural-sounding recording. In neither version (nor in any other I've heard) is there audible difference between passages for trumpets muted and "stopped" (presumably with the hand, in the manner of a French horn; when so played, the effect can be truly chilling).

Neumann's Second, like his recent Sixth (Supraphon 1410 3141/2, November 1981) and Slatkin's First, is a direct, briskly paced, no-nonsense account that presents the score plain but with little sense of commitment. The second movement in particular is utterly charmless. Eva Randová, however, is a very affecting soloist in "*Urlicht*" and elsewhere. The entrance of the chorus, which should be magical, is merely prosaic, so unatmospheric and lacking in mystery was the music preceding it and so forwardly is the chorus recorded at that point. It *does* sound as though the trumpets are "stopped" in the passage shortly after cue 14 in the finale. However, Neumann ignores, as do many other conductors, Mahler's instruction to hold back slightly the tempo of the horn triplets at cue 6. It's hard to understand how anyone could fail to observe this instruction, written out verbally in the score. There is even a little hand pointing to it—the kind one sees in public places showing the way to rest rooms.

Hissy surfaces and rather constricted sound inhibit whatever impact this performance might otherwise have had.

It's difficult to write about Neumann's work, so unexceptional is it usually. His Seventh is certainly a letdown after Levine and Tennstedt, though there is more to enjoy here than his previous efforts would lead one to expect. The first movement displays more feeling for the music than does anything else I've heard from him. But

whereas Tennstedt was deliberate in the second, Neumann goes at quite a trot, making it seem trivial. The Scherzo is heavy-handed, with no lilt at all in the waltz episodes. Neumann does at least become exceptional in the second *Nachmusik*—but in the wrong way; no one serenaded at his dirgelike tempo would have the patience to endure it. He simply ignores indications to broaden or ritard, anyway impossible in the context of his perverse tempo; this might be acceptable were there any compensating sensitivity or tenderness in the playing. Alas, it is all most prosaic and decidedly not *andante amoroso*. The Finale also suffers from too deliberate a pace—basically a good rehearsal tempo for a student orchestra learning the notes.

The estimable Czech Philharmonic plays earnestly throughout, with a certain grimness not inappropriate to portions of the score, but again, with a complete lack of charm in the many pages requiring it. As before, the recording, favoring the brass, well matches the performance.

Much has been written in recent years about the so-called "Mahler boom." This may be partially a myth. Granted, Mahler is recorded and performed with a frequency undreamed of even twenty years ago, and presumably all the recordings sell well enough to justify their existence. Yet I submit that the idea of a Mahler boom in performance and attendance is confined to the

major metropolitan areas of this country and Europe.

I live and work in a midwestern American community of moderate size, near which an even smaller university community regularly presents festivals involving the greatest international orchestras. People come from hundreds of miles around to hear these concerts. In recent years, performances of Mahler symphonies have drawn the smallest attendance ever. When the Philadelphia Orchestra plays the Second and the Concertgebouw Orchestra the Seventh before audiences of 800 or 900 in an auditorium seating 2,700, usually sold out for other concerts, it's hard to believe that a Mahler boom really does exist throughout the country—certainly not in portions of the hinterlands. When Mahler draws as well as Beethoven in Ames, Iowa, then I'll believe in the boom. J.C.

MOZART: Thamos, König in Ägypten, K. 345.

Rosina Latschbacher, soprano; Agathe Kania, alto; Reinhard Salamonsberger, tenor; Robert Holl and William Hackett, basses; Salzburg Chamber Chorus, Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra, Leopold Hager, cond. [Gottfried Kraus, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2537 060, \$10.98.

This is more like it. Unlike the dismal Telefunken (6.42702, May 1982) and Turnabout (QTV 34679) recordings, this one

makes these forty minutes of incidental music for Baron von Gebler's *Thamos* (grand choruses to open Acts I and V, four entr'actes, and a stirring choral finale with bass solo) sound like major Mozart. Hager's phrasing has continuity and shape; the singing outclasses even that of Philips' deleted East Berlin recording, especially as regards the quartet of chorus soloists and the High Priest in the finale (Holl); the sound is first-rate; and the notes helpfully place each number in the context of the play. Consider this catalog gap—finally—well filled. K.F.

MUSSORGSKY: Boris Godunov (excerpts; ed. Rimsky-Korsakov).

CAST:

Xenia Nadia Dobrianova (s)
Feodor Neli Bozhkova (ms)
Prince Shuisky Milen Paounov (t)
Boris Godunov Nicolai Ghiaurov (bs)

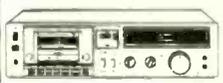
"Svetoslav Obretenov" Bulgarian National Chorus, Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra, Emil Tchakarov, cond. TURNABOUT TV 34781, \$5.98. Tape: CT 4781, \$5.98 (cassette).

Here, in the Rimsky edition, are four well-chosen excerpts (in the ten-to-twelve-minute range), covering most of the title role: the Coronation Scene, complete; two chunks from the scene in the imperial apartments, the first running from Boris' entrance to the end of the monologue, the second running from Shuisky's entrance

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through the clock scene; and Boris' Farewell, Prayer, and Death.

No date is specified for this Balkanton-licensed recording, but whenever it was made, Ghiaurov had his voice quite reasonably pulled together. No longer commanding his former vocal brilliance, as heard in his early recital excerpts and then the complete *Boris* with Karajan (London OSA 1439), he sings with rather more care, especially on top. The role's upper reaches are in fact often more smoothly integrated than in the complete recording. The interpretation is accordingly shifted to a prevailing quiet-spoken dignity, a plausible if limited view of the role, quite pleasant to hear.

Both women are excellent in their brief appearances. Milen Paounov, however, is vocally overextended as Shuisky. (He has recorded the lighter role of Missail with both Cluytens and Karajan.) The choral and orchestral work also sounds a bit pinched, and the subdued conducting is unrecognizable as the work of the man who led such a dashing *Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Met this season. Turnabout furnishes transliterated texts and translations.

For what it is, this is an attractive disc, but remember, if you're shopping for *Boris* excerpts, that London lists a disc from the excellent Ghiaurov/Karajan set (OS 26300) and that Quintessence lists a disc drawn from Melodiya's fine Bolshoi performance conducted by Melik-Pashayev, with Ivan Petrov's vocally and dramatically more pointed Boris (PMC 7192). K.F.

POWER: Masses and Motets—See page 46.

PROKOFIEV: Sonata for Piano, No. 6, Op. 82—See page 62.

RACHMANINOFF: Symphony No. 2, in E minor, Op. 27.

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Yuri Temirkanov, cond. [John Willan, prod.] MOBILE FIDELITY MFSL 521 (half-speed remastering from ANGEL S 37520, 1978) [price at dealer's option].

Concertgebouw Orchestra, Vladimir Ashkenazy, cond. [Andrew Cornall, prod.] LONDON LDR 71063, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: LDR5 71063, \$12.98 (cassette).

Scottish National Orchestra, Alexander Gibson, cond. [Brian Couzens, prod.] CHANDOS ABRD 1021, \$13.98 (digital recording). Tape: ABTD 1021, \$13.98 (cassette). (Distributed by Harmonia Mundi U.S.A., 2351 Westwood Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90064.)

One of the more salutary by-products of the Bruckner/Mahler overkill of recent years has been to make the world safe for the likes of Rachmaninoff. As recently as 1973, André Previn felt compelled to apologize for his uncut recording of the Second (Angel S 36954): "It makes the symphony undeniably long [just under an hour], but I feel that its honesty, its power, its heartfelt

lyricism can stand it." Now, scarcely a decade later, the complete version has become standard—so much so that London doesn't see need even to mention its probity (though anomalously, neither did EMI way back in 1974 with regard to James Loughran's reading, CFP 40065, formerly available on Sine Qua Non). Next thing, someone will quietly slip in the first-movement exposition repeat. Thus has the Second come of age under the ministrations of Previn, Loughran, and others.

Especially Yuri Temirkanov. In a review elsewhere of his original Angel release, I noted Temirkanov's ability to distinguish dynamic foothills from peaks. More's the wonder, considering the way the topography has been ravaged over the years (albeit perhaps less so at Temirkanov's base of operations, Leningrad, where Previn claims to have found religion; cf. Sanderling's recording, Everest, deleted). The coherence of Temirkanov's conception makes all those cuts one has so painstakingly marked in one's score seem utterly inexplicable and reprehensible. Following a series of climactic surges near the end of the first-movement development, a deceptive "recapitulation" enters, hushed and unstable, over a dominant pedal, with the movement's biggest climax still to come, twenty-six measures later; of course, the traditional cuts dispense with the first sixteen of those measures (the entire dominant pedal), running the earlier surges right into the *fff* peroration. Temirkanov makes perfect sense of the original progression, with a tense, ominous opening, a superheated climax, and a spent, languid subsidiary theme, proving, here as elsewhere, that restoration of the cuts doesn't just make for a longer string of nice melodies; it provides a framework that can actually support the full weight of symphonic argument. And this from Rachmaninoff!

Mobile Fidelity, therefore, has chosen well. Though my Angel copy has seen better days, I recall having found its sound and surfaces superior to the label's then prevailing standards. Specifically in relation to the Previn, the perspective is truer, the dynamic range wider; indeed, without the latter, many of Temirkanov's exquisite gradations would have gone for naught. Predictably, Mobile Fidelity preserves these virtues and to some extent enhances them. The climaxes now have even greater transparency without any loss of weight. The low strings project more clearly, allowing more individual pitches to be discerned in the sometimes murky scoring and giving bass pedals greater solidity and steadiness. The only unwelcome addition is a slight pre-echo before the *sf* fugato opening in the second movement.

No sooner does the Temirkanov reappear than London poses the worthiest alternative—another superb account, by Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. Ashkenazy is swifter in the fast

movements, slower and warmer in the Adagio. He uses rubato and tempo fluctuation more sparingly and forgoes portamento. (Temirkanov applies all three more liberally than I recalled, so impressed had I been by his logic.) The interpretation is equally well thought out and equally convincing, with proper restraint in the lesser outbursts. If Ashkenazy doesn't ever quite attain Temirkanov's heights of steamy passion, one can safely assume that he's not striving for them, since the orchestra hops eagerly to his every exhortatory grunt; the playing is simply magnificent. The principal clarinet, presumably George Pieteron, takes the second-movement solo firmly and proprietarily in hand, as though it had been written just for him. London provides a good, resonant acoustic, lacking only an occasional bit of strength in the bass—a quality that London used to supply in superabundance but that often proves deficient in its newer Dutch pressings.

While Ashkenazy hasn't shaken my fondness for the Temirkanov, even stronger now than at first acquaintance, I can recommend the London recording unqualifiedly. What has become increasingly apparent through numerous solo and collaborative performances is now perfectly clear: Ashkenazy is Rachmaninoff's most gifted, sympathetic, and versatile exponent since Rachmaninoff.

The other new recording, from Chandos, rivals (and indeed, surpasses) the London only in price. Alexander Gibson's exhortation takes the form of podium-thumping, and the playing he elicits is not such as to sweep aside even minor distractions. The strings, often lacking purity of tone and unanimity, are strained and scrawny. In the first-movement recapitulation, a flute fluff in the subsidiary theme sounds like a flippant appoggiatura; though one doesn't advocate sterile, note-perfect studio performances, neither can one condone errors that inject inappropriate elements of expression. The interpretation, generally brisk in tempo, is nevertheless episodic and momentum flags. The sound, diffuse overall, has graver defects as well—not least, an odd clanking thud at cue 42 in the second movement. In a strong, now almost crowded field of complete Seconds, this one is superfluous. J.R.O.

SAINT-SAËNS: Symphony No. 3, in C minor, Op. 78 (Organ).

Frederick Minger, organ; Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Sergiu Comissiona, cond. [Seymour Solomon, prod.] VANGUARD AUDIO-PHILE VA 25008, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: CVA 25008, \$12.98 (cassette).

Pierre Cochereau, organ; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Herbert von Karajan, cond. [Günther Breest and Michel Glotz, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2532 045, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: 3302 045, \$12.98 (cassette).

Noel Rawsthorne, organ; Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Loris Tjeknavorian,

József Gregor: A Lesson Well Learned

Reviewed by Kenneth Furie

"IN THE SECOND YEAR of my career," József Gregor writes in the "Soliloquy About My Friends" that accompanies this delightful recital, "I was given the part of Dulcamara in the second cast of the Szeged [*L'Elisir*] production in 1965. I did it terribly badly and got a slating from the critics. The role was taken away from me, and [conductor Viktor] Vaszy said, 'You did very badly in this, so learn your lesson!' I've been learning it ever since."

On the present evidence, that lesson has been learned extremely well. Gregor starts with the advantage of a sturdy legitimate singing bass: a dark and weighty bottom and midrange thinning into a lighter, more baritone top. You're not apt to hear "La vendetta" more completely vocalized this side of Kipnis' recording. But he brings to this repertory qualities perhaps rarer still: respect and affection. The way he puts it is that he "can only breathe life into a character if I feel I could accept him as my friend."

The way I would put it is that Gregor insists on finding real people where most performers settle for silly caricatures. He understands, for example, that Dulcamara's livelihood depends on earning his potential customers' trust, and his "Udite" consequently has a warmth and largeness of scale that rival Corena's. Interestingly, he cites Corena as his "other great ideal," after Mihály Székely: "He's quite different from me, yet I've learned a great deal from him." Indeed he has, and in the best way—not by imitation, but by absorption into his own performing personality. Not the least satisfaction of this recording is the shrewd and self-knowing commentary, which goes a long way toward rendering any review superfluous, and also reminds us that very

little truly creative activity depends on waiting around for some sort of mysterious inspiration.

It's a special pleasure to have the *Cenerentola* arias, finally giving us an alternative to the hamming of Montarsolo in the London and DG complete recordings. Is there any chance of getting a complete Magnifico from Gregor? For that matter, I'd enjoy hearing more of all these roles. Alternatively or additionally, there should be enough comic-bass repertory for a sequel disc. Three roles in particular spring to mind that we ought to be hearing him in, both on disc and in the flesh: Mozart's Figaro and Leporello, and above all—given the humanity and vocal richness displayed here—Verdi's Falstaff (which he indicates he has sung).

István Gáti, an uncommonly interesting lyric baritone in his own right, makes a lively and bright-toned contribution to the *Don Pasquale* duet, and Tamás Pál's warm-spirited and singing accompaniments are consistently winning. To complete the package, full texts are printed with Hungarian and English translations. **HF**

JÓZSEF GREGOR: The Great Buffo Scenes.

József Gregor, bass; Savaria Symphony Orchestra, Tamás Pál, cond. [András Székely, prod.] HUNGAROTON SPLX 12359, \$9.98.

DONIZETTI: *L'Elisir d'amore*: Udite, udite, o rustici (with Hungarian State Opera Chorus). *Don Pasquale*: Ah! un foco insolito; Cheti, cheti (with István Gáti, baritone). MOZART: *Zaide*, K. 344: Wer hungrig bei der Tafel sitzt. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, K. 384: Solche hergelauf'ne Laffen; Ha! wie will ich triumphieren. *Le Nozze di Figaro*, K. 492: *La vendetta*. ROSSINI: *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: A un dottor. *La Cenerentola*: Miei rampolli; Sia qualunque delle figlie.



József Gregor at a recording session

COURTESY QUALITON RECORDS

cond. [Brian J. Culverhouse, prod.] CHALFONT SDG 312, \$15 (digital recording).

COMPARISONS:

Gavoty, Martinon Ang. S 37122
Zamkochian, Munch RCA ATL 1-4039

Much the way every new war is first fought just like its predecessor, initial explorations of new audio technologies obstinately cling to musical materials that worked best earlier. Witness digital recording's preoccupation, so far, with the sonic-spectacular showpieces that so brilliantly sold audiophiles on the powers of "high-fidelity" monophonic and, later, stereophonic recording.

But in audio (and still more in art) newest is not necessarily best. There may

be a salutary lesson in the failure of no fewer than four digital attempts at one showpiece to match two analog triumphs. Like the first digital Saint-Saëns Third, Ormandy's with the Philadelphia (Telarc 10051, August 1980), the present three are impressive for sheerly sonic qualities but fall far short of conveying the music's essential Gallic grace and nobility.

Comissiona's entry is scarcely in the running, for although Sony digitalism provides strong testimony that the Baltimoreans are being brought up to full symphonic caliber, they aren't yet entirely competitive in warhorse repertory. Moreover, Minger's (Aeolian-Skinner) organ swells too Romanically in the *Poco adagio* and blares harsh-

ly in the finale, while the overall reading is unimaginatively routine.

Karajan's first (to my knowledge) tackling of the *Organ* Symphony is of course characteristically packed with personality, and a superb example of the Berliners' orchestral playing. But DG's digital system, for all its magnificence, permits moments of tonal harshness at climaxes, in both orchestra and (Notre-Dame Cathedral) organ. And the decisive negative factor for me is the indulgent arbitrariness of Karajan's reading, which veers from languid schmaltz to brutal vehemence.

Tjeknavorian's Chalfont version (Soundstream digital, like Ormandy's) stars an exciting, even higher-voltage per-

sonality, though the bravura is not always tautly controlled. This is the fastest performance I've ever encountered: 32:48 (in contrast to Karajan's slowest: 37:55). But Rawthorne's (Willis and Sons) organ part is movingly poetic and the Liverpool Cathedral's long reverberation period enhances the impressiveness of the big moments without—thanks to digital lucidity—seriously hazing the sonics themselves.

To hear this music at its best, one still has to go back to older versions that differ almost more in kind than in degree from all four digital examples. Not only is Martignon's quintessential French reading more vitally dramatic and idiomatically "right," first bar to last, but its c. 1975 sound is still incomparably impactful and expansive. And the memorably grand 1960 Munch version, especially in its recent 0.5-series deluxe disc reissue, remains steadfast as a towering monument of the early stereo era. (Yet unlike the DG and Vanguard cassette editions, near identical counterparts of the corresponding discs, the new chromium tape of the Munch version differs, perhaps insignificantly, from both the half-speed-remastered disc and the original mastering—as I noted in the January 1982 "Tape Deck"—with a slightly tilted spectrum balance.)

R.D.D.

SCHEIN: Instrumental and Vocal Works—See page 46.

SCHUBERT: Symphonies: No. 5, in B flat, D. 485*; No. 8, in B minor, D. 759 (Unfinished)†.

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Böhm, cond. [Werner Mayer* and Michael Horwath†, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2531 373, \$10.98. Tape: 3301 373, \$10.98 (cassette). [*From DG 2531 279, 1980; †recorded in performance, June 19, 1977.]

SCHUBERT: Symphony No. 9, in C, D. 944.

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Georg Solti, cond. [James Mallinson, prod.] LONDON LDR 71057, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: LDR5 71057, \$12.98 (cassette).

During his long career, Karl Böhm recorded the Schubert *Unfinished* three times in the studio—twice with the Vienna Philharmonic, once with the Berlin. The present version, a 1977 Vienna concert performance, provides a posthumous memento to set alongside the recent "live" account of the "Great" C major with the Dresden Staatskapelle (DG 2531 352, January).

Once again, whether because of greater "maturity" or simply conditions of actual performance, the concert taping is slower in pacing, more improvisational and freely inflected than either of the studio LP versions. (I haven't heard the HMV 78 set.) This is a dark-colored, solemnly introspective account—roughly analogous to those of Fricsay, Furtwängler, and Casals, albeit with the granite tempered by a vein of gentle lyricism.

There are few surprises here—no first-movement repeat; no iconoclastic "Ur-text" dissonance in that controversial spot in the first movement—but there's lots of mellow affection. Though I used to regard Böhm as something of a phlegmatic *Kapellmeister*, here he is all heart. The orchestra, aside from a ragged chord or two and a few pizzicatos not quite together, plays with finesse and personality (the peculiarities of microphoning sometimes make it seem as if only the first stand of cellos were playing in cantabile passages, giving a rarefied, chamber-music effect), and the audience is mostly unobtrusive. The sound is rich and creamy.

The overside Fifth Symphony was issued previously, coupled with the Schumann Fourth. Böhm here secures more detailed phrasing and finely sculpted playing from the Vienna Philharmonic than he did from the Berlin in his older DG record-

Solti's Ninth shows an interesting amalgam of cross-purposes.

ing (139 162, with the Berlin Eighth)—or for that matter, from the Vienna in the still-older London account. In its orthodox *gemütlich* manner, this affectionate reading gives considerable pleasure despite its overstuffed strings, a few bothersome concessions to "tradition" (feminine phrase endings in the first movement and a pause between Minuet and Trio in the third), and an infusion of lethargy throughout.

The Vienna Philharmonic, of course, is noted for its proprietorial attitude toward Schubert. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, about a young conductor who had programmed the "Great" C major with the august orchestra. Since rehearsal time was limited, one experienced instrumentalist suggested to the maestro that he specify which interpretation he wanted, Furtwängler's or Walter's. Solti, one surmises from the new recording, is a man of compromise; his interpretation—with some of his pet notions and some of the "traditional" ones blended in unholy alliance—suggests something of a trade-off, an interesting amalgam of cross-purposes. In fact, one can almost follow the performance as one would a baseball game: In the top of the first, the conductor scores a point for his approach (which also happens to be Schubert's) by admirably holding the players to a steady tempo at the consummation of the introduction instead of losing his cool as most conductors still do. But in the bottom of the first, the orchestra ties things up. (Literally: The movement's final chords fall

like water bombs and sound even more listless than in the usual *echt-deutsch* presentation.) Conflicting ideals also show up in the treatment of rhythm and sentiment, with the orchestra's inbred manner thwarted by Solti's "objective" lack of spring and flexibility, and conversely, his ostensible dynamism "tempered" by an inherent rhythmic mushiness. The Andante, for example, begins at a suitable *alla marcia* but soon degenerates into a trudge. And the tonal coloration manifests a basic heartiness and ingratiating warmth (typical of the Vienna) along with a decided lack of subtle nuance (typical of Solti's approach: "Ormandy for snobs").

A few unusual details must be mentioned: Solti observes the seldom heard fourth-movement repeat, with its interesting flare-up in the first ending. (Happily, he forgoes most of the earlier repeats.) In addition, he applies an enormous diminuendo to the work's very last note, just as Klaus Tennstedt did last season with the New York Philharmonic. I know all about the controversy but—with head held high—still contend that the sudden diminuendo sounds ridiculous (particularly in the context of a basically gung-ho performance) and that Schubert surely intended an emphatic stress mark instead.

In the main, though, my basic complaint is that Solti's reading just doesn't lead coherently from one detail or section to the next: While each of his tempo choices is at least defensible, their interrelationship is tenuous: thus, the jaunty tempo of the first movement's dotted-note theme seems to be grafted onto the massive introduction instead of growing out of it (as in Toscanini's great Philadelphia recording). To the casual listener, Solti and the Vienna Philharmonic might seem sleek and earnest Schubert champions, but on a deeper level, they disappoint. London's digital sound is euphonious and crisply etched. H.G.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphonies: No. 2, in B, Op. 14 (To October); No. 3, in E flat, Op. 20 (The First of May).

London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra, Bernard Haitink, cond. [Andrew Cornall, prod.] LONDON LDR 71035, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: LDR5 71035, \$12.98 (cassette).

Had Charles Ives lived in the Soviet Union, he might well have written music resembling the first section of Shostakovich's Second Symphony—which is to say, the same kind of music he wrote in the U.S. It's doubtful that Shostakovich, in the 1920s, knew the works of Ives, yet here is the same type of opening Ives wrote so often—a seemingly formless pianissimo weaving of many instrumental strands, as though emerging from a void. After several minutes, a distant trumpet intones a melody (not a hymn tune!). More vigorous and martial music ensues, establishing that the composer is indeed Shostakovich, though at times Mussorgsky and Janáček peer over

his shoulder, just as Shostakovich seems about to peer over the shoulder of Rodion Shchedrin. An exciting fugato section culminates in music again of Ivesian complexity, replete with trombone glissandos.

The Second and Third Symphonies are among Shostakovich's least-known works. In spite of the First's success, he apparently had difficulty finding himself; although each contains thrillingly colorful and striking passages as well as beautifully lyric moments, neither adds up to a convincing whole. Perhaps accounting for their infrequency of performance in the West, each extols a significant event in Soviet history. The Second commemorates the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. Strictly speaking, it's not really a symphony at all, and the composer designated it a "symphonic dedication." A single movement of about twenty minutes' duration, it comprises a series of orchestral episodes culminating in a majestic choral finale, to a text by Alexander Bezymensky. The longer Third (1929) is similarly structured (albeit without an Ivesian beginning), the finale this time setting a poem by Semyon Kirsanov commemorating the annual Soviet May Day celebration.

It's fascinating to imagine what kind of composer Shostakovich might have become if allowed to develop along the lines of these two works, especially the

Second. This is by no means to denigrate the composer he *did* become—one who produced some of our century's most enduring masterpieces. His genius was such that masterworks would have resulted whatever the circumstances, though perhaps of a different style and character.

The pioneering recording of both symphonies, from the late 1960s, was by none other than Morton Gould, with the Royal Philharmonic (RCA, deleted). The present release brings Bernard Haitink closer to becoming the first conductor to record the complete Shostakovich symphonies; only six of the fifteen remain. As previously, he and the London Philharmonic (which has joined him in eight of his nine outings) deliver the goods handsomely, with exciting, virtuosic performances. The only possible drawback is the London Philharmonic Choir, which sings well enough but hardly begins to suggest the proletarian masses praising the glories of Lenin and the first day of May. I do miss the blast of the factory whistle in No. 2; Haitink uses the alternative scoring for horns and trombones.

As with so many recent releases from various companies, the first side of my review copy has a beautifully quiet surface, the second a somewhat grittily noisy one. Why can't both surfaces be equally silent—or is this beyond the limits of contemporary technology?

J.C.

SCHUMANN: Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13; Toccata, Op. 7—See page 62.

WALTON: Symphony No. 1, in B flat minor.

Philharmonia Orchestra, Bernard Haitink, cond. [Suvi Raj Grubb, prod.] EMI ASD 4091, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: EMI TCC ASD 4091, \$12.98 (cassette). (Distributed by International Book and Record Distributors, 40-11 24th St., Long Island City, N.Y. 11101.)

WALTON CONDUCTS WALTON.

Donald Bell, baritone*; Philharmonia Chorus* and Orchestra, William Walton, cond. [Walter Legge, prod.] EMI SLS 5246, \$26.94 (mono†, stereo, three discs, manual sequence). Tape: EMI TC SLS 5246, \$26.94 (three cassettes). [From various EMI originals, 1951-63.] (Distributed by International Book and Record.)

Symphony No. 1.† Belshazzar's Feast.* Façade: Suite.† Partita. Crown Imperial.† Orb and Sceptre.† Johannesburg Festival Overture. Portsmouth Point.† The First of the Few: Spitfire Prelude and Fugue. Henry V: Suite. Richard III: Prelude.

Walton's First Symphony will surely survive as his finest orchestral achievement. In its first movement, in particular, it captures a mood of turbulence and disillusionment that aptly reflects the confused emotions of England between the wars. The symphony made a powerful impact when first heard in full in 1935; along with Vaughan Williams'

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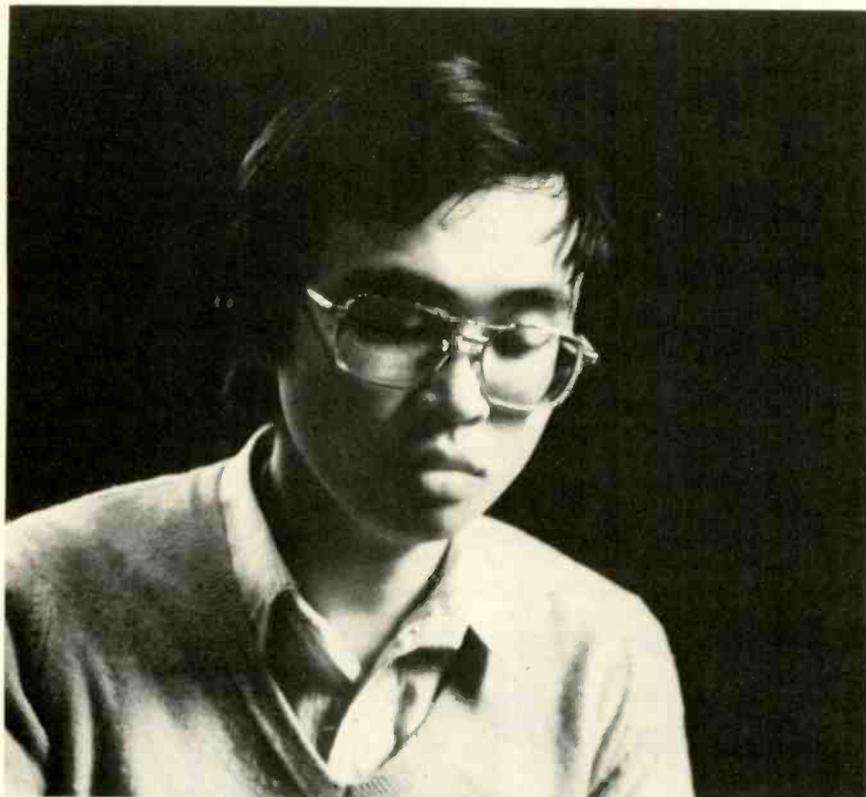
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From the Competitions, More Young Pianists— Most of Them Worthy

Reviewed by Harris Goldsmith



WERNER NEUMEISTER

Prizewinner Dang Thai Son: seemingly incapable of producing an ungracious sound

THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION route remains a launching pad for talented young instrumentalists, as this group of piano recordings, most of them debuts, bears out.

Three of these recitals, interestingly, involve participants in the 1980 Chopin Competition held in Warsaw: First prize went to Dang Thai Son (born in Hanoi, 1958), and one of the runners-up was Ewa Poblocka (born in Gdansk, 1957). Ivo Pogorelich, of course, never made it to the finals, but—thanks to the *scandale* involving a walkout by Martha Argerich and other notable members of the jury—the young Yugoslav seems to have clinched the biggest prize of all, at least in terms of publicity.

One could hardly imagine three more diverse types. A certain pristine innocence pervades the limpid pianism of Dang Thai Son, whose fingers seem incapable of producing an ugly or ungraceful sound. At first his Chopin recital seems a mite bland and insipid, but before long this gifted young

artist's ideas begin to crystallize; particularly arresting are moments in the F minor Ballade and B flat minor Scherzo. His patrician style has much to recommend it, and DG's studio sound falls graciously on the ear. My copy, however, has a small skip at the end of the scherzo.

Poblocka's sober account of Chopin's B minor Scherzo is a trifle stolid in temperament, but her Bach and Debussy have real character. Especially affecting is her inward, unflashy account of Bach's lovely *Variations in the Italian Style*. The contrapuntal lines are scrupulously etched, and her selfless (yet actually very personal) playing has an altogether touching seriousness. In Debussy's *Images*, she stresses structural values and sobriety without losing sight of possibilities for tone painting. I look forward to hearing more from this earnestly unassuming artist; in its quietly introspective way, her pianism has strength and character.

Pogorelich alternately fascinates and annoys with his sometimes riveting, some-

times distorted playing in Beethoven's Op. 111 and Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes* (done without the five extra variations). He can take one's breath away with ultrasoft playing, magnificently voiced, and there is undeniable "presence" and magnetism in his timing. At the other end of the spectrum are his hard, jangly tone in some of the passages marked *f* or *ff*, his deadpan rattling-off of some of the filigree in the Beethoven first movement, his predilection for rumination to the point of stagnation (and often beyond). He is an immensely gifted artist, but one with much maturation ahead of him. His brilliant rendition of Schumann's toccata, happily, is free of the problems encountered in the larger pieces: The pyrotechnical *tour de force* moves with an almost insolent confidence, the fingers always striking dead center, the voicing full of unusual weight shifts, the articulation clear and bristling. This is a reading to put alongside those of Richter and Lhevinne (and a stylistic kin to that of the young Horowitz, albeit more adroit technically). If only for this performance, DG's interest in Pogorelich is justified.

Mikhail Faerman is a Soviet pianist who won first prize at the 1975 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, when he was twenty years old. This *Concours* album, recorded at a Munich recital five years later, presents a thoroughly mature artist. Faerman's album portrait shows a broad-shouldered young man, and I expected a bull-like virtuoso, full of bravura and short of subtlety. How misleading physical appearance can be! Faerman, in fact, is an exceptionally finished, elegant player: His Brahms *Paganini* set has to be one of the finest ever recorded, with prismatic transparency of texture, and superb nuance, detail, and rhythmic acumen. In place of the thick, blotchy, overpedaled sonorities so often encountered in this frankly virtuosic writing, Faerman energizes the music by *musical* detail alone—clarifying voice-leading, orchestrating the layers of sound, paying careful heed to relationships and note values. At times, he tapers the sound almost violinistically, so free from strain is his amazing command of difficulties. There are too many felicities to enumerate, but particularly striking is the variation with the glissandos, which Faerman takes rather *slowly*, with the slides carefully measured out. There are many other such instances of remarkable control here and in the overside Prokofiev sonata—which comes close to equaling Richter's fabulous 1960 Carnegie Hall concert recording. The bright, delicate, incisive fingerwork, and the vibrant, translucent colors are splendidly caught by DG. (All of DG's live-performance tapings here, in fact, represent a striking advance over the first *Concours* releases.) Faerman, incidentally, does not repeat the Paganini theme before Book II of the Brahms.

Alexander Lonquich was only nineteen when he taped his Schoenberg Op. 11 Pieces and Schubert D. 845 Sonata in a Munich recital—a fact belied by the impressive poise and maturity of his performances. Winner of the Casagrande Competition in Terni, Italy, this pupil of Paul Badura-Skoda has his mentor's penchant for lyricism and color but already seems to command a more incisive rhythmic backbone and a wider range of dramatic expression. These very winning performances draw just the right balance between subjective license and stringent discipline. And again, the engineering is splendid.

At the 1981 International Liszt-Bartók Competition held in Budapest, the judges apparently found no one worthy of first prize. Hungaroton's disc bears out their reservations, for while both twenty-six-year-old second-prize-winner Muza Rubackyte and twenty-three-year-old third-prize-winner Hortense Cartier-Bresson are indeed competent pianists and responsible interpreters, neither shows the enkindling spark, the personal nuance, the command of time-in-space that mark a great solo personality, no matter how inexperienced. And I would also agree with the decision that placed the Soviet-born Rubackyte ahead of the Parisian Cartier-Bresson (related to the photographer?), who is currently studying with György Székely at Indiana University. In fairness, though, Rubackyte's more nuanced performances of the Bartók *Elegies*, the Scriabin G sharp minor Etude, and Liszt's Tenth *Transcendental* Etude were taped under studio conditions, while Cartier-Bresson's Liszt sonata comes from an actual recital. The latter, incidentally, plays the sonata in an edition by Hungarian pianist Zoltán Kocsis, but in truth, I don't detect any notable divergencies from the usual text.

Peter Orth, winner of the 1979 Naumburg International Piano Competition, proves perplexing in his solo debut recording of Chopin. To be sure, the young American produces an uncommonly lush, lovely kind of piano sonority (beautifully reproduced in this spacious, full-bodied acoustical frame), and despite certain manifestations of rhythmic flaccidity, his genial account of the elusive *Polonaise-Fantaisie* holds together pretty well, realizing much of the poetry along the way. But in the Op. 25 Etudes, he is grotesquely self-indulgent; though the C sharp minor "cello" study is effectively expansive, the rest are beset with miserable affectations of phrasing and rhythmic scansion. Orth seems to have an ingrained mannerism that he uses—and reuses—to the hilt: He begins nearly every piece below basic tempo and lurches to his ultimate—and usually still too deliberate—pace. And while some pieces are solidly set forth (e.g., the D flat study in double sixths), others suffer from overpedaled,

smeary fingerwork. The E major Scherzo has its convincing moments but on the whole also suffers from Orth's lack of hair-trigger rhythmic control. Again and again, this undeniably talented pianist seems to be swooning over the music, responding to Chopin's poetry much the way an allergic person responds to ragweed. Long before the first side of this generous recording ended, I took a strong dislike to Orth's overbearing sophistry. He makes everything so unbearably "beautiful" that one almost begins to believe that unkind appraisal of Chopin as a "sickroom talent." **HF**

CHOPIN: Piano Works.

Dang Thai Son, piano. [Hanno Rinke, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2531 359, \$10.98.

Nocturnes: in F sharp, Op. 15, No. 2; in C sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 1. Mazurkas: in C, Op. 24, No. 2; in G minor, Op. 67, No. 2. Waltz in A minor, Op. 34, No. 2. Ballade No. 4, in F minor, Op. 52. Scherzo No. 2, in B flat minor, Op. 31. Andante spianato and Grande polonaise brillante, Op. 22.

BACH: Aria and Variations in the Italian Style, in A minor, S. 989. CHOPIN: Scherzo No. 1, in B minor, Op. 20. DEBUSSY: Images, Books I-II.

Ewa Poblocka, piano. [Hanno Rinke, prod.] DG CONCOURS 2535 015, \$6.98 [recorded in concert].

BEETHOVEN: Sonata for Piano, No. 32, in C minor, Op. 111. SCHUMANN: Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13; Toccata, Op. 7.

Ivo Pogorelich, piano. [Hanno Rinke, prod.] DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2532 036, \$12.98 (digital recording). Tape: 3302 036, \$12.98 (cassette).

BRAHMS: Variations on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 35. PROKOFIEV: Sonata for Piano, No. 6, in A, Op. 82.

Mikhail Faerman, piano. [Hanno Rinke, prod.] DG CONCOURS 2535 013, \$6.98 [recorded in concert].

SCHOENBERG: Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11. SCHUBERT: Sonata for Piano, in A minor, D. 845.

Alexander Lonquich, piano. [Hanno Rinke, prod.] DG CONCOURS 2535 014, \$6.98 [recorded in concert].

INTERNATIONAL LISZT-BARTÓK PIANO COMPETITION, BUDAPEST, 1981.

Muza Rubackyte* and Hortense Cartier-Bresson†, piano. [Ibolya Toth* and Tibor Erkel†, prod.] HUNGAROTON SLPX 12425, \$9.98 [recorded in concert].

BARTÓK: Two Elegies, Op. 8.* LISZT: Sonata for Piano, in B minor†; Transcendental Etude No. 10, in F minor*. SCRIBABIN: Etude in G sharp minor, Op. 8, No. 9.*

CHOPIN: Etudes (12), Op. 25; Polonaise No. 7, in A flat, Op. 61 (Polonaise-Fantaisie); Scherzo No. 4, in E, Op. 54.

Peter Orth, piano. [David Hancock, prod.] MUSICMASTERS MM 20038, \$8.98. Tape: MMC 40038, \$8.98 (cassette).

Fourth, premiered in 1934, it was performed and broadcast repeatedly before and during the war.

Bernard Haitink's new account, for all the brilliance of its recorded sound (vivid and immediate, though not necessarily because it's digital; other EMI digitals I've heard recently have been very uninvolved), is fundamentally too cool. He paces the first movement deliberately, allowing all the details to tell, and the grinding ostinatos do build firmly to a climax—and yet it seems to be treated in an abstract, distanced manner, without the passionate involvement one hears in the best performances. Haitink's architectural skill (like that of a great interpreter of this symphony, Adrian Boult) is always in evidence; but it needs balancing with passion.

Similarly, the scherzo seems more gentle than malicious, the slow movement more ruminative than melancholic. The playing is superb here, however, with lovely wind solos and long-drawn-out lines in the strings.

The finale is the symphony's problem movement. Walton had great trouble writing it and even allowed the unfinished work to be performed in 1934 without it. The details of his difficulties were discussed by Hugh Ottaway in two *Musical Times* articles (March 1972, October 1973); in his liner note for the new release Alan Frank, formerly of Oxford University Press, adds the amusing extra detail that he remembers "seeing an open postcard from [Walton] to his publisher with the fugue subject scribbled on it and, below, the question 'Will this do?'" Well, Haitink's account of the finished movement won't quite do. I'm afraid. Simply too bland, it comes to a confident final conclusion without hinting at the music's ambiguity and unresolved tension.

Perhaps I am blinkered and refuse to see that Haitink offers a fresh view of the work. But in almost every respect the composer's own version, included in the "Walton Conducts Walton" box, is superior—the exception being the sound quality, more than a little foggy. Still, what one hears of the playing of the Philharmonia (in its vintage, early Walter Legge days) is magnificent, and the interpretation is cogent and arresting.

I don't accept the statement of Walton's future biographer Gillian Widdicombe, in her note in this box, that the composer was "the most distinguished and effective conductor of his own works . . . for many years"; surely Boult had that honor. But Walton was a perfectly good conductor, as this enjoyable collection demonstrates. It's good to have the biting, hard-hitting *Belshazzar's Feast* (a stereo recording) with Donald Bell, and a spiffy poised *Façade Suite*. I can't get so excited about either the film music or the marches, though undeniably, Walton conducts them as well as they're likely to be conducted.

(The *Johannesburg Festival Overture* is a first stereo release, but the piece is distressingly negligible.)

I would have preferred inclusion of more major works, and one unaccountable omission is the fine recording of the viola concerto by the late William Primrose, one of the very early Legge/Walton collaborations with the Philharmonia (1946, 78-rpm numbers HMV DB 6309/11). Nevertheless, the box is an apt tribute to the composer on his eightieth birthday (1982)—

more valuable than additional bits of discarded *Façades*. N.K.

The 1946 recording of Walton's viola concerto to which Mr. Kenyon refers was recently issued, along with Vaughan Williams' Flos campi (also 1946, Boult conducting), on Cambridge IMP 6 in tribute to William Primrose, who died last May 1. The record (\$9.98 list) is distributed by Discocorp, Inc., P.O. Box 771, Berkeley, Calif. 94701.—Ed.

further each time around (eventually yielding the pattern: a; a+b; a+b+c; a+b+c+d; etc.), culminating in a veritable sonic maelstrom.

As in many other electronic productions, the spatial placement of the sound is treated as an important compositional element here; and although it is sometimes given a bit *too* much emphasis (ping-pong-style movement for the sake of movement, without a textural or musical context, can sound contrived), it is for the most part employed tastefully.

The group, obviously, does its own recording and production work, and its musical and engineering efforts on this intriguing debut LP are well served by a clean, quiet pressing. A.K.

Recitals and Miscellany

SOFIA COSMA: Piano Recital.

Sofia Cosma, piano. [Lincoln Mayorga, prod.] TOWNHALL S 29, \$9.98 (TownHall Records, P.O. Box 5332, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93108).

BEETHOVEN: Thirty-Two Variations on an Original Theme, in C minor, WoO. 80. BRAHMS: Capriccios: in F sharp minor, Op. 76, No. 1; in C sharp minor, Op. 76, No. 5. Intermezzos: in A minor, Op. 118, No. 1; in A, Op. 118, No. 2. CHOPIN: Mazurkas: in B flat, Op. 7, No. 1; in F minor, Op. 63, No. 2; in C sharp minor, Op. 63, No. 3; in A minor, Op. 67, No. 4. Waltz in A flat, Op. 34, No. 1.

Sofia Cosma is a Romanian pianist of Russian Jewish descent, who came to America in 1978 to visit her daughter and son-in-law and returned two years later to stay. Now in her late fifties or early sixties (to judge from photographs), she plays in a recognizably mature, Central-European Romantic style, with a warm, freewheeling sonority and plenty of intelligent rubato. Her pianism, surprisingly, works even better in the Beethoven than in the Brahms. Her account of the C minor Variations (actually a chaconne) is hot-blooded and emotional, a truly stirring, spiritual rendering as impressive as any I have heard. She also distinguishes herself in the F sharp minor Capriccio; the remaining Brahms items, however, for all their tasteful intelligence, are slightly at arm's length, and the Chopin lacks tonal variety and rhythmic spice (and in the Op. 34 Waltz, a touch of the specified brilliance). Yet by any standards, this artist (a potential major roughly comparable in stature to Bella Davidovich and Annie Fischer) should be far better-known than she is, and perhaps this superbly reproduced recording will help rectify the situation. H.G.

ELECTRONIC ART ENSEMBLE: Inquietude.

Electronic Art Ensemble, Gregory Kramer, dir. GRAMAVISION GR 7003, \$8.98.

Cauldron; Hudson; Inquietude; Inquietude 2; Sentences; Three Bursts Set Out.

The Electronic Art Ensemble is a foursome dedicated to the creation of electronic works that can be reproduced in the concert hall without the aid of prerecorded tape but that retain the structural and textural complexity composers of taped music have tra-

ditionally aimed for. It includes two synthesists—Stephen Horelick and the ensemble's director, Gregory Kramer—who double on other keyboards, percussion, a drum computer, and voice (used simply as another electronically processed sound source rather than in the conventional sense of "singing"). The third member, Clive Smith, plays electric guitar, bass, and trumpet, and the fourth, Russel Dorwart, serves as engineer and sound mixer, in the style of the Philip Glass Ensemble's Kurt Munkacsi.

As its instrumentation suggests, the group draws on a broad combination of aesthetics and vocabularies. Alongside the kind of gently tactile sounds one finds in the music of Morton Subotnick and the more explosive sound bursts and modulation effects familiar from the works of other "serious" electronic composers, there are traces of what used to be called "art rock"—sections reminiscent of the metrical gyrations of mid-Seventies King Crimson, and touches of feedback/sustain-pedal guitar sound that call to mind the likes of Jimi Hendrix, Steve Hillage, and Robert Fripp.

But to put too fine a point on the derivative aspects of the ensemble's music would be unfair, for there is much originality and variety in these six works. Perhaps the most facile yet most attractive of the set is *Hudson*, an evocation of the majestic river painted in soft, sustained hues, which give way to shifting sunrise-over-the-water chordal masses. By contrast, the aptly titled *Cauldron*, which might make an effective dance piece, seems to bubble over threateningly, and *Inquietude* creates a sinister atmosphere.

Each work, in fact, seems a study of textures, moods, or structures. In the first, *Three Bursts Set Out*, cacophonous chord clusters with guitar feedback and altered voices resolve into mellow, pointillistic effects: *Inquietude 2* takes the opposite tack, developing from pure pitches to strained chordal textures. It's difficult to tell what role improvisation plays in these scores, but *Sentences*, the most transparently structured, seems to grow, like a chain letter, out of a single riff that is embellished

JÓZSEF GREGOR: The Great Buffo Scenes—See page 59.

OFRA HARNOY: Debut Recital; Arioso; Cello Encores—See page 54.

INTERNATIONAL LISZT-BARTÓK PIANO COMPETITION, 1981—See page 62.

EGON PETRI IN RECITAL.

Egon Petri, piano. Dell'Arte DA 9009, \$10.98 (distributed by German News Co., 220 E. 86th St., New York, N.Y. 10028).

BUSONI: *Indianisches Tagebuch*, Op. 47. FRANCK: *Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue*. LISZT: *Tre Sonetti del Petrarca*. MEDTNER: *Two Fairy Tales*, Op. 20; *Danza festiva*, Op. 38, No. 3.

This is a handsome addition to the legacy of Egon Petri, who died in 1962—the same year as Alfred Cortot, his chief competitor in the Franck in 78-rpm days. (Rubinstein's first recording came later.)

All of the performances presented here were recorded for Swiss radio (DRS) in 1957 and 1958, about the time Petri began recording for Westminster (in his heyday, he was a Columbia artist), and all are not only splendid in sound, but also remarkable in documenting this onetime Busoni pupil at his incorruptible best. The Franck is just as powerfully sculpted and virtuosic as the 78 version. True, none of these works is particularly noteworthy from a coloristic standpoint, but Petri was always something of a sober, intellectual sort—less a Gieseking-style lapidary than a pianistic Sir Jacob Epstein, forging noble, rough-hewn edifices out of bronze.

Dell'Arte promises more live Petri, including the last four Beethoven sonatas. It's high time someone did something to honor this undervalued keyboard giant. H.G.

SPIELMAN UND KLERIKER—See page 46.

COLIN TILNEY: German Harpsichord Music; Early English Organ Music—See page 46.

The Tape Deck

Critiques of new cassette and open-reel releases by R.D. Darrell

Vox humana (and Imports)

The latest unpredictably shifting release tides have brought me more vocal programs than for any month since last July. Also more foreign-made musicassettes than usual—topped by three exceptionally varied and rewarding sets distributed here by enterprising small firms: Tioch Productions, Qualiton Records, and Euroclass Record Distributors.

Tioch has the blockbuster: Wagner's *Die Walküre* (Eurodisc Prestige Box 501 143, \$59.90), second in the digital Dresden *Ring* series. Again, Marek Janowski's reading is conservative, but the music-drama itself is far more gripping than *Das Rheingold* ("Tape Deck," May 1982), while digitalism and ferrichrome tape markedly enhance such fresh voices as those of Siegfried Jerusalem, Jessye Norman, and Jeanine Altmeyer. Qualiton has the paprika'd novelty: Kodály's picaresque *Singspiel*-adventures of *Háry János* (Hungaroton Prestige Box MK 12187/9, \$29.94). Unlike Kertész's deleted 1969 London version, this one is all-Hungarian, complete with the extensive dialogue. Yet every role is so dramatically enacted, if only competently sung, that one doesn't have to know the language to be consistently amused and even—if one can follow the microscopic print in the multilingual libretto—spellbound. The kaleidoscopic scoring is vividly realized with the same verve and authority conductor János Ferencsik demonstrated in his 1976 version of the orchestral suite ("Tape Deck," December 1978).

Even more precious is the "Fenby Legacy" of mostly late Delius works that Eric Fenby copied for the blind composer; now—along with British vocal and orchestral forces—he also proves their ideal interpreter. The music, detailed in John Canarina's disc review (February 1982 HF), includes rarely heard as well as more familiar works, all so persuasively presented that even long-lapsed Delians will be mesmerized anew (Unicorn-Kanchana Prestige Box, digital/real-time, RT 9008/9, \$28; via Euroclass, 548 Warren St., Hudson, N.Y. 12534).

Omnivorous importers furnishing review samples from their extensive multilabel catalogs include International Book and Record Distributors, 40-11 24th St., Long Island City, N.Y. 11101, and Brilly

Imports, 155 N. San Vicente Blvd., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90211.

IBR's appetizingly varied imports include two notable Prestige-Box sets. One is the first new recording in a decade of Handel's most dramatically operatic oratorio, *Saul* (EMI analog/chrome TCC SLS 5200, \$38.94). There are a few small cuts, the solo singing is uneven, and conductor Philip Ledger is no match for Mackerras in Deutsche Grammophon's c. 1973 disc version. But the gleamingly recorded English Chamber Orchestra does full justice at last to Handel's extraordinarily imaginative scoring.

The other set is an invaluable documentary: "Walton Conducts Walton" (EMI TC SLS 5246, \$26.94), 1951-63 recordings reissued to commemorate the composer's eightieth birthday. Even the monos (First Symphony, two *Coronation Marches*) wear remarkably well, and the *Johannesburg Festival Overture* appears for the first time in 1957 stereo. There is also a generous representation of the popular film scores. The whole set is a must for Walton aficionados, obviously, but non-specialists may well prefer an updated *Belshazzar's Feast* and First Symphony—the latter preferably in the new, distinctive Haitink/Philharmonia version, another EMI import (digital/chrome, TCC ASD 4091, \$12.98).

From earlier Brilly shipments I have only some very oddball leftovers. The most widely appealing is the recital of Finnish folksong settings by the Helsinki University Men's Choir, some with solos by the great bass Martti Talvela—surely the finest a cappella male sonorities since the palmy years of the Russian Symphonic Choir! (Calig MC 595, \$11.98.) From across the ocean comes a lusty miscellany of Argentine and other South American folk dances and songs, realistically recorded by the piquantly idiomatic Cochabamba vocal and instrumental ensemble (Pierre Verany 19791, \$11.98). No notes or texts for these, but the Koto Ensemble's sixteen transcriptions of Beatles hits are not only annotated in Japanese and English, but more handsomely packaged than any cassette single I've seen (Yupiteru C20 343, \$11.98).

Domestic processings of overseas choral recordings proffer liturgical-music extremes: Janáček's powerful primitive-Christian *Glagolitic Mass* in a spectacular first digital recording (Angel 4XS 37847, \$9.98, no notes or texts); Schubert's six Latin Masses (Vox Cum Laude Prestige Box 3VCS 9016X, \$29.98). The former is

less intensely and idiomatically sung and played by Simon Rattle's British forces than in Kubelik's memorable 1965 DG version, but that is no longer available on tape and now seems unnaturally spotlighted sonically. The latter set is rather coarsely recorded and only passably performed by North German forces under Martin Behrman—but the music itself soars from delectable teenage Schubertiana to the empyrean sublimities of his last year.

Major all-American productions co-feature the first digital Handel *Messiah* and first complete Thomson *Four Saints in Three Acts*, also digital. Richard Westenburg's *Musica Sacra Messiah* (RCA Red Seal Prestige Box ARE 3-4352, \$38.94) is admirable for its small-scaled forces, mostly spirited readings, and near ideal digital/superchrome lucidity and vividness. But for me, Judith Blegen and the other vocal soloists remain victims of the now senile British-oratorio stylistic tradition.

In any case, the long-awaited recording of the American masterpiece is much more needed (Nonesuch 79035-4, \$23.96; libretto on request). It's a joy to hear both Gertrude Stein's words and Virgil Thomson's sui-generis music with such gleaming transparency. It must be only my unfaded delight in the composer's own sadly abridged 1947 mono RCA version that makes this Joel Thome performance seem lacking in zestful savor.

Maximalism is the word for In Sync Labs' state-of-the-art real-time cassette transmogrifications of relatively recent orchestral master tapes produced by Marc J. Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz for Moss Music Group. Fine as the original Vox ferris were, the new superchromes demonstrate even greater breadth, weight, and impact—for insatiably perfectionist audiophiles only (\$17.98 each; choice of Dolby B or C; notes on request).

For me, sonic attractions outweigh strictly musical ones in Robert Shaw's Bernstein and Tchaikovsky (C 4105), Stanislaw Skrowaczewski's Wagner (C 4108), and Walter Susskind's Holst *Planets* (C 4103). Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony offer better-balanced, more potent appeals in un-Bennetted Gershwin (*Catfish Row*, etc.; C 4106) and ultrasumptuous Rachmaninoff (Second Symphony; C 4107), as does Skrowaczewski in Ravel favorites (*Bolero*, *La Valse*, etc.; C 4104)—one of the extraordinary first recordings made in Minneapolis' then new Orchestra Hall. **HF**

BACKBEAT[®]

A New School of Jazz Piano

Probing the outer limits of keyboard improvisation
Reviewed by Don Heckman



Stein and Walder: Jarrett-esque repetition brightened by harmonic changes of gear

THREE NEW RECORDINGS typify a growing number of entries in what has become a virtually separate genre of jazz activity. It is a methodology that suggests that what we have come to call jazz improvisation need not necessarily be defined by either the dialect of the blues or the tyranny of the beat. Of its proponents, Keith Jarrett has been the most visible. His performances fill volumes of recordings, and his large concert audiences range from rock-oriented teenagers to academically trained aesthetes. His influence has been felt widely, particularly among younger performers.

Pianist Ira Stein is one of them. The six pieces of "Elements" are dominated by a Jarrett-esque pattern of repetition, repetition, repetition, sudden surprise. Having tossed his lot in with that composer, Stein and oboist Russel Walder are plagued with the same problems as their model's. The long (over eleven minutes) title track, for example, spends most of its time and energy exploring one rhythmic motif. The few introspective moments of surcease would be far more appealing if they were not dominated by a floating, nondynamic, immobile harmonic expression.

When Stein decides to brighten his palette, he generally does so by using unprepared harmonic changes of gear (*The Epic*) and chromatic and whole-tone back-and-forth cycles (*Rice Fields* and *Eden*). Walder is generally restricted to providing long-limbed, floating melodies and background textures. The exceptions are some extremely effective uses of overdubbing in the pastoral-sounding *Rice Fields* and a marvelous cadenza near the end of *Caravan*.

Sharon Davis, in what she has the good humor to call a "recital of jazzy classical music" chooses a more conservative role on "Cool Cookin'." A classically trained pianist with mechanical skills galore, she performs her own *Cocktail Etudes* and four works written for her: Boris Pillin's *Tune in C Minor*, Rayner Brown's *Sonata Breve*, and William Schmidt and



BETH CUMMINS

Moorman: a highly evocative imagination, a strong sense of communicability



Davis: technical prowess, uneven results

William Pillin's *The Beast* and *The Bulldozed Promenade*, with narration by Valeria Vlazinskaya.

The results are uneven. *The Beast* and *The Bulldozed Promenade*, despite pretensions to the contrary, have about as much to do with jazz as *West Side Story* has to do with salsa. Under any circumstances, they are lightweight entertainments reminiscent, here and there, of Virgil Thomson's *Portraits*. Brown's *Sonata Breve* is much more interesting. Its central organizing motif is a wide-leaping melody that echoes Thelonious Monk, especially in the *Allegro*. The *Adagio's* major sevenths and ninths bring Gershwin to mind, and the *Prelude and Fugue* is tinged with a Russian coloration. Davis' technique is extraordinary, especially in the *Prelude*, as is her exceptional ability to liven it with jazzlike articulation. *Tune in C Minor* sounds promising when it opens on a percussion-accented, fanfarelike figure. But it soon diminishes to little more than a compositional exercise. Davis' capacity to coordinate the many fleet sixteenth- and thirty-second-note figures with

Ira Stein & Russel Walder: Elements

William Ackerman, producer
Windham Hill C 1020 (P.O. Box 9388,
Stanford, Calif. 94305)

Dennis Moorman: Circles of Destiny

Bob Cummins, producer
India Navigation IN 1055 (60 Hudson St.,
Rm. 205, New York, N.Y. 10013)

Sharon Davis: Cool Cookin'

Wim Records WIMR 16 (2859 Holt Ave.,
Los Angeles, Calif. 90034)

Barry Silverman's percussion is impressive, to be sure, but the whole thing is too studied, too lacking in spontaneity.

The album's highlight is *Cocktail Etudes*. Its four sections range across an impressive array of influences: Gershwin-like blues harmonies in *Apéritif*; a gloriously airy melody in *On the Rocks* that transforms itself, strangely (and sadly), into almost pure cocktail jazz; a curious piece of Bartók-ian boogie-woogie in *Night Cap*—played with breathtakingly fast fingers; and, in *Chaser*, a two-handed octave study that tosses in a few thematic recapitulations and another taste or two of boogie.

Presumably, most of "Cool Cookin'" was composed rather than improvised. But Davis interprets the written notes with the subtle accents of jazz. Like many classically trained performers, she has difficulty with the unevenly emphasized eighth notes common to much jazz phrasing. (For jazz players, the accent lies in a variable territory somewhere between dotted eighths and tied triplets; classical players seem to need to have it one way or the other.) But she clearly is a gifted performer whose heart and spirit are in the right place. I'd like to hear more from her.

Dennis Moorman, unlike Davis, starts from a very traditional jazz base. Most of his works on "Circles of Destiny" assume the sectionalizations of song or blues form. A technically adroit piano player with a highly evocative imagination, he uses the familiar jazz method of stating his theme, playing his variations, and then closing with a thematic cap. But these are only part of the story. Pieces like *One Lady*, *Two Sides* and *For the Peace Within* are brimming over with rich Ellingtonian harmonies, replete with deceptive cadences, flattened ninths, and major sevenths. Moorman improvises in the style of, say, Cecil Taylor or Ornette Coleman—in other words, on the feeling and imagery rather than on the specific harmonic and rhythmic content. And he does it very well. It is no disparagement to either Taylor or Moorman to say that in some instances the latter manages to bring a strong sense of communicability to the thick bombastics of the former's style.

Like Taylor, Moorman's rhythmic patterns deal with the movement of great, surging chunks of sound. Listen to, for example, *Three To Go* and *Me 'n' . . .*. Pieces that demand more traditional jazz methods, such as *Explorations of Earth Light*, are not as effective, perhaps because Moorman seems less comfortable with straight-ahead jazz articulation.

The evidence in all of these albums is heartening: A growing cadre of players is probing the outer limits of improvisation and, in so doing, finding never-before-imagined connections between jazz, classical music, ethnic music, and more. For the adventurous listener, that is good news, indeed.

HF

Look Ma, No Sticks!

Electronic drum machines have come of age.

Have you heard?

by J.B. Moore

INPUT OUTPUT

BACK IN THE SIXTIES, every bar mitzvah band and Holiday Inn lounge act had a similar-sounding rhythm section, thanks to an insidious little device called a Rhythm Ace. Fortunately, drum machines have come a long way since. In fact, about the only aspect they have in common with their forebear is the ability to keep perfect time and, in the case of the variety we're discussing here, you don't need sticks to get sounds out of them.

Drum machines, digital drums, or drum synthesizers are popping up everywhere. You can hear them on records by such artists as Steve Winwood, Marvin Gaye, Toto, Steely Dan, Donald Fagen, Michael Jackson, Roxy Music, Quincy Jones, ABC, and Phil Collins, among others. For some, like the group Human League, the machine (a Linn drum in this case) is almost an end in itself, the basis of an intentionally synthetic sound. For others, it is a means to an end. Liner notes on Fagen's "The Nightfly," for instance, mention "sequencing, percussion, and special effects: Roger Nichols and Wendel 2." There is no way of hearing the exact extent of Wendel 2's contribution, because for Fagen the point is not so much to create a conspicuously synthetic sound as to use the machine as one element in a total pop-jazz production sound.

Somewhere between the Human League's Linn drum and Fagen's Wendel 2 lies a wide variety of rhythm machines—at least fifteen that I know of—some requiring sticks (e.g. Syndrums), others not. Those listed on the chart are fairly representative of the price and feature range of the stickless variety.

Arguing in favor of these silicon-chip miracle boxes is easy. First, they are not subject to the limitations of the human con-



DRAWING BY MICHAEL J. COLEMAN

Clockwise from bottom left: Roland TR-808, Roland DR-55, Korg KPR-77, Linn Drum, Oberheim DMX. Marvin Gaye used the TR-808 on Sexual Healing; Human League favors the Linn drum. Most musicians use them in combination with real drums.

dition. Suppose a drummer is playing a sixteenth-note pulse on the hi-hat and needs to do a tom-tom fill. He must leave the hi-hat and lose the pulse for as long as the fill takes. The drum machine can handle both and never lose a beat. For that matter, it could play all three tom-toms, a snare, and a crash cymbal, and *still* maintain the sixteenth-note pulse on the hi-hat. Played on real drums, that part would require three

takes in the studio or three drummers onstage.

Which brings us to the business of expense. A digital drum represents a high initial investment, as much as almost \$3,000 for the Linn or the Oberheim. But a good drum kit costs only about \$500 less, and you still need someone to play it. Machines don't charge for their time, they'll play for as long as you can stay

Five Different Drummers

Unit	Linn Drum	Oberheim DMX	Roland TR-808	Korg KPR-77	Roland DR-55
Suggested List Price	\$2,995	\$2,895	\$1,095	\$695	\$195

INSTRUMENTS

Snare Drum	1 3L T	1 3L T	1 T TC	1	1
Bass Drum	1 2L	1 3L T	1 TC D	1	1
Tom-Toms	3 T	6 T	3 T	2	—
Hi-Hat	2 2L D	2 2L	1 D	1	1
Cymbals	2 D	2 2L	1 TC D	1	—
Claps	YES	YES	YES	YES	—
Congas	2 T	—	3 T	—	—
Tambourine	YES	YES	—	—	—
Cowbell	YES	—	YES	—	—
Kabasa	YES	YES	—	—	—
Maracas	—	—	YES	—	—
Rim Shot	—	YES	YES	—	YES
Side Shot	YES	—	—	—	—

HARDWARE

Levels	15 S	8 S	1 R	1 S	—
Master Out	Stereo R	Stereo S	Mono Hi & Low	Stereo R	Mono
Trigger In	5	8	—	—	—
Trigger Out	1	—	1	2	1
Tempo LED	YES	YES	—	—	—
Sync Pulse	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Changeable Chips	YES	YES	—	—	—
Footswitch	2	2	1	1	1

PROGRAMMING

Note Divisions	64ths down	64ths down	32nds down	32nds down	16ths down
No. of Songs	49	50	—	3	—
No. of Patterns	99 2-bar	255 2-bar	768 bars	256 bars	8 2-bar
No. of Instruments	15	15	9	6	4
Cassette Offload	YES	YES	—	YES	—
Real Time	YES	YES	YES	YES	—
Step Mode	—	YES	YES	YES	YES

KEY

D	Decay control
L	Level
R	Rotary fader
S	Slide fader
T	Tunable
TC	Tone control

HARDWARE

Levels: number of individual levels

Master Out: stereo or mono

Trigger In: can an instrument on the machine be triggered by an external source and if so, how many instruments can be triggered at one time

Trigger Out: can the machine send a trigger pulse to another machine (e.g., a synthesizer) and if so, how many

Tempo LED: an LED display of the tempo

Synch Pulse: an electronic signal that either can be put on

tape or sent to another instrument to synchronize it to the machine or vice versa

Changeable Chips: are additional chips with new or different sounds available from the manufacturer

Footswitch: a pedal to start and stop the machine; a second footswitch can activate preprogrammed fills or change the program to another in memory

PROGRAMMING

No. of Songs: how many songs can be stored in memory

No. of Patterns: how many patterns in each song

Cassette Offload: can the programming information in the machine go on a cassette to allow for more programming

Real Time: the ability to "play" the machine as if it were an instrument—i.e., by hitting the appropriate buttons in time with the music

Step Mode: programming the machine by telling it what instrument to play on what beat through a keypad of some kind

awake to listen, and they never need so much as a coffee break.

For further information, circle the following numbers on the Reader-Service Card:

Korg KPR-77	84
Linn Drum	85
Oberheim DMX	86
Roland DR-55	87
Roland TR-808	88

I am currently working on a record with my partner, Jimmy Bralower, using a Linn drum and my Tascam Portastudio [See BACKBEAT, November 1982] to demo the songs. Preproduction work like this with musicians, even in a low-priced rehearsal room, already would have cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars. Furthermore, we wouldn't have come up with all the pat-

terns, fills, etc., that we've gotten just trying out ideas on the Linn. By the time we go into the studio, we'll be spending most of our time recording instead of experimenting at \$190 an hour. Also, it takes longer to get a good drum sound in the studio than it does to get the right sound for the rest of the band instruments put together. In a good studio, (Continued on page 81)

Reviews



Jackson: confidence and competence beneath the sleek image

EBET ROBERTS

on *The Girl Is Mine* and *P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing)*, a James Ingram-Quincy Jones composition notable only for the electronically produced vocal imitation on the chorus. Rod Temperton, the author of some of the best songs on "Off the Wall," pitches in with *The Lady in My Life*, the appealingly seductive *Baby Be Mine* (the melody of the verse sounds like a perfume commercial), and the title track, which makes a clever mid-song switch from the horrific thrills on the screen to thrills of a more intimate variety. The song is capped off by a Vincent Price narration that recalls Price's most laughable self-parodies in the Roger Corman-Edgar Allan Poe movies.

The LP's calculation is part of the fun: the inner-sanctum sound effects on *Thriller*, the cameo appearance by Van Halen, the synthesizers and horns that mesh together throughout the album, Jackson's bitter but playful vocal on *Billie Jean*. It's rare to hear commercial pop music makers who have such a definite sense of what they're up to, who don't just touch all the bases, but breeze around them with flair, tipping their hats to the bleachers as they go. Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones are genuine crowd-pleasers.

MITCHELL COHEN

Michel Berger: Dreams in Stone
Michel Berger & Philippe Rault,
producers. Atlantic 80029-1

Arranger/composer Michel Berger is unknown on these shores, but he obviously exerts considerable clout at home: For this conceptual album, his French record company has picked up the tab both for U. S. studio time and for a dauntingly long and familiar list of musicians. A valentine to New York City created by a Frenchman and realized by a group of largely West Coast-based performers, "Dreams in Stone" seems an improbable concept. Yet it is nonetheless charming in execution. With its occasional injections of crisp L.A. pop and country rock, Berger's music achieves big-city glamour through vivid orchestrations that variously recall the '60s pop symphonics of Burt Bacharach and Jimmy Webb and the portentous widescreen string settings of Paul Buckmaster and George Martin.

The approach seems almost quaint in its scope, which harks back to pop's pre-recession grandeur with nary a hint of the flinty cynicism now common to the genre. If the songs allude to the perils of life in the Big Apple, their net effect is still celebratory. Bringing winning zest to sometimes hackneyed texts, Berger's large cast of vocalists balances gritty, blue-eyed soul (Bill Champlin, Lynn Carey, and Max Gronenthal), lambent, country-tinged bal-

A Thriller with a Difference

Michael Jackson: Thriller
Quincy Jones, producer
Epic QE 38112

"Thriller" is a sleek and sharp machine, a work of amazing confidence and pacing that follows the programming strategy of 1979's "Off the Wall," the first Michael Jackson-Quincy Jones collaboration. It's not a record that takes many risks—it is conservative in ways that a number of Jackson's contemporaries are breaking away from—but almost every turn it takes is one that pays off. On the surface, the LP just zips along like a variety show, complete with guest stars, production numbers, dance tunes, a curtain-raising sizzler (the smashingly effective *Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'*), and a ballad for a coda (the sentimental *The Lady in My Life*). "Thriller," however, is a lot tougher than it looks, and Jackson isn't all technical agility.

Take the somewhat ominous note struck by the opener . . . *Startin' Some-*

thin', a Jackson song that raises some troubling aspects of fame and offers sage advice about pride and responsibility, all atop a track that winds up quoting one of the earliest disco hits, *Soul Makossa*. The singer here makes passing reference to a mendacious motor mouth who, on Side 2, gets a song of her own, *Billie Jean*. That track's scene seems typical enough—a dance floor, a proposition—until it turns out that Billie Jean is accusing Jackson (who wrote the song) of fathering her child. Over and over he sings, "Billie Jean is not my lover/She says I am the one, but the kid is not my son," as the music matches his escalating insistence.

Those two songs and one other by Jackson, *Beat It*—a hard rocker that counsels restraint in times of crisis, while contradicting that message with a bristling Eddie van Halen guitar solo—are the most persuasively dramatic moments on "Thriller." The rest is more predictable, including a lightweight duet with Paul McCartney

lad inflections (Jennifer Warnes and Rosanne Cash), and salty black pop (Bill Withers). The gumbo of different vocal styles succeeds in adding spice rather than detracting from the composer's master plan.

Berger's suite isn't revelatory in the least, but his melodies are simple, sturdy, and attractive enough that we can forgive the forced melodrama of the lyrics (written by a rotating crew that includes several of the singers). This is lush, craftsmanlike pop suitable for listeners who still have problems taking gurgling synthesizers seriously, and who privately favor time-tested romanticism over brainier topics.

SAM SUTHERLAND

Paul Brady: Hard Station

Hugh Murphy & Paul Brady, producers
21 Records T 1-1-9001 (Polygram
Special Imports, 137 W. 55th St.,
New York, N.Y. 10019)

Each year brings its share of sleepers, albums that slip past critical and public notice but come to exert a special magnetism for the lucky few who've managed to find them. Paul Brady's "Hard Station" is a rich collection of story songs that easily fits that description, even after several months on my turntable.

The reasons for Brady's obscurity aren't hard to fathom. An Irish singer/song-

writer, his only significant American exposure came nearly a decade ago as a member of the Johnstons, a failed folk trio whose gentle style fared poorly against the glitter-rock, Southern-fried boogie, and narcissistic confessional pop of the day. Brady himself returned to traditional Irish music, and this putative solo debut, while tapping undeniably muscular rock instrumentation and sophisticated production values, is still out of step with much modern rock.

Which by no means suggests that "Hard Station" sounds dated. These are passionate, often tough vignettes paced by Brady's urgent and melodic singing and a satisfying mix of ringing guitars and hammering rhythm sections. His characters present themselves with the directness and detail of traditional balladry, evoking time and place yet touching timeless themes: On the opening *Busted Loose*, a young loser betrayed by friend and lover risks everything to escape prison. Brady makes this old and familiar tale riveting through a string of haunting images and a ferocious vocal performance.

Hard luck fables are Brady's stock in trade. His skill at making them ring with the authenticity of an overheard conversation rather than the calculation of a pop song is what renders much of this album indelible. An atmospheric foray into modern folk-rock, "Hard Station" echoes the much better-known work of players like Jackson

Browne, Warren Zevon, and their peers, yet never falls neatly into any of their footprints.

SAM SUTHERLAND

Merle Haggard/Willie Nelson: Poncho and Lefty

Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, & Chips Moman, producers. Epic FE 37958

Those who consider country music lyrics strained and maudlin might turn to the song *Half a Man* to back up their position. "If I only had one arm to hold you," it begins, "then I would more closely resemble the half a man you made of me." That is not, I'm sad to report, the only such moment on Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson's "Poncho and Lefty." On two separate songs, *Reasons to Quit* and *No Reason to Quit*, Haggard and/or Nelson twist themselves into rueful knots about whether to abandon their nasty habits (booze and tobacco, mostly). And *All the Soft Places to Fall* finds the two self-proclaimed outlaws ready for "a home life and clean-smelling sheets." The only thing standing in the way of said situation is that the women they've known (many, they boast) just don't understand them.

The album's pokiness, its reliance on hoary country music pronouncements, isn't so damaging as to smudge the reputations of these two singers, but it does represent a missed opportunity. Teaming them up

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DEBORAH FEINGOLD

guitarist Fred Frith. The rest of the players are equally inspired, enabling Beinhorn, Laswell, and Bisi to shape a rich gumbo of timbres into some irresistibly danceable music that ultimately reveals some daunting goals.

SAM SUTHERLAND

**Kate and Anna McGarrigle:
Love Over and Over**

Kate, Anna, & Jane McGarrigle,
producers. Polydor 422-810

"Love Over and Over" is a vinyl rarity. Initially released in Canada late last year, it is a beguiling collection of songs about family life, love, and romance by Kate and Anna McGarrigle. It's ironic that this, their fifth and finest LP, had to prove itself in another country before being released here.

Like that other gang of songwriting siblings, the Roches, the McGarrigles make music that is eccentric and personal and deceptively blithe. But whereas the Roches teeter on cuteness, Kate and Anna cut a straighter, emotionally keener piece of cloth. On "Love Over and Over," Anna (who penned the Linda Ronstadt hit *Heart like a Wheel*) offers *Sun, Son (Shining on the Water)*, a wonderful, waltzy portrait of a father and his son. On the title track, which shuffles along on the bouyant, bluesy guitar of Mark Knopfler, the two sing in harmony—Anna high and clear, Kate low and goofy—about the dizzying, stultifying effects of romantic love. With a wry reference to another batch of sisters, the Brontes, the pair describes the utter befuddlement that love spawns, turning them "Over and over and over . . . till my tongue spirals out of my head."

Along with Dire Straits' frontman Knopfler, the McGarrigles are backed by a top-flight group of musicians: Guitarists Alun Davies and Andrew Cowan, bassist Pat Donaldson, and drummer Gerry Conway, who infuses even the oddest numbers—Kate's *The Work Song* and *Midnight Flight*—with a steady, determined back-beat.

The sisters' last disc was sung entirely in French. Here, they perform a loosely translated version of Bob Seger's *You'll Accompany Me called Tu Vas M'Accompagner*. Like the "French Record," it doesn't matter whether you know the language or not. The song is a winsome piece of pop that demonstrates both the sense of playful fun and breadth of pop music knowledge that the McGarrigles have at their command.

STEVEN X. REA

Randy Newman: Trouble in Paradise

Lenny Waronker & Russ Titelman,
producers.
Warner Bros. 23755

Since cracking through his longstanding cult status with 1977's "Little Criminals," Randy Newman has added a livelier if more

seems more of a corporate decision than a creative one, and the small number of true duets doesn't give Haggard and Nelson much of a chance to play their strengths off each other. Imagining an LP that crosses Haggard's fondness for Dixieland swing with the freewheeling sound that Nelson captured on "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" only makes "Poncho and Lefty" that much more disappointing. These are vocalists whose phrasing abilities have been justly heralded. Why are they wasting their time on *Reasons to Quit* ("laughing at the price tag that we pay . . . roaring down the fast lane")? They should be singing Lefty Frizzell, Hoagy Carmichael, Rodney Crowell, Johnny Mercer. . . .

On the antique-sounding *My Mary*, a simple memory song with sweet country fiddling, Haggard sounds as tenderly reflective as the song demands. *Poncho and Lefty*, a ballad by Townes van Zandt about bandits and betrayal, has a graceful melody and a weighty narrative. But the best you could say about the rest of the album is that as country crooners Haggard and Nelson are as unruffled and relaxed as a rustic Crosby and Como.

MITCHELL COHEN

Material: One Down

Material, producers
Elektra 60206

Characterizing Material's work as "new music" could be somewhat misleading, since synthetic pop proponents have recently begun to use the term in lieu of "new wave." But its earlier definition described an odd coalition among elements of avant-

garde jazz, classicism, and points between and beyond, and Material stacks up as an example of how far this freewheeling movement has traveled.

The very nature of the group's format and the musical vision on its second album are illustrative: Principals Michael Beinhorn (keyboards, vocals, percussion, "tapes"), Bill Laswell (bass, "effects"), and Martin Bisi (engineer) have assembled a rotating crew of funk, jazz, and rock musicians to create dance music at once immediate in its rhythmic impulse and abstract in its sonic palette. "One Down" initially implies a compromise when compared to its essentially instrumental predecessor. Yet the texture of these more straightforward, vocally oriented songs is deceptive, the mix intermittently burying the vocals in the instrumentation. Kinetic percussion, bass, and electronic effects compete with the singers to draw the listener in, giving the somewhat prosaic lyrics an odd grandeur. Taken literally, the messages carried here are simply variations on the old equations of sex, romance, and dancing, cut to lines and riffs found on any number of venerable r&b workouts. Yet the playing is too hypnotic to lump these performances in with assembly-line funk.

In that respect, Material is reminiscent of Detroit's Was (Not Was), even if the texts never reach for the dense poetry of that duo. Here, the studio crew variously employs funk and disco veterans like vocalist Nona Hendryx and Chic's Nile Rodgers on guitar, credentialed jazz mavericks like saxophonists Oliver Lake and Archie Shepp, and bona fide rock eccentrics like

conventional pop-rock sweep to his music. He has also shifted his topical focus to include privileged hipsters and high-rollers as well as the losers, oddballs, and historical figures that once dominated his work. Those threads are knitted even more closely on "Trouble in Paradise," a quasi-conceptual collection that its author has already hinted is a travelog.

Inevitably, Newman's practiced and jaundiced eye is drawn to the darker details in his landscape, which here traces a path from Southern California (the giddy yet grim *I Love L. A.*) to South Africa, with stops in Miami, New England, and less specific middle class stopping grounds. Apart from two delicate ballads (*Same Girl* and *Real Emotional Girl*) that share the subdued melancholy and solo piano focus of Newman's late '60s works, the album employs a rich palette of rock and pop instrumentation and sly production effects.

As always, it's the characters themselves who set much of the tone, dramatizing the disparity between their implicit material comfort and the shadows plaguing their Good Life. And if Newman reflects his own upscale circumstances through his fascination with the denizens of Bel-Air, he's no less fearless in creating decidedly unsympathetic personae. *My Life Is Good* is a smug hymn of self-love intoned by a Beverly Hills Babbitt who brags about his lively in Mexican housekeeper, his kids being in

private schools, and his licentious designs on a friend's wife. He even claims Bruce Springsteen as a close personal friend. In one of the record's silliest, most delicious moments, he recounts how a weary Springsteen has asked his pal "Rand" to take over as Boss. Newman's delighted agreement, backlit by synthesized choirs, is pure Disney, while the chorus is pure Spike Jones.

His comedic skills also shine on *Take Me Back*, the perky reggae lament of a hard-working middle class boy whose Stanford diploma is cold comfort for a ruinous love life. But Newman is at his best when the laughs he inspires ultimately curdle in the light of more menacing themes. *Party at My House* runs through a series of sock-hop clichés to twist into an unnerving hint of sexual bondage for a hapless guest. *Mikey* unexpectedly leaps into the mechanistic rhythms and grating electronic textures of technopop as its aging everyman narrator watches the world around him change beyond recognition. In its strikingly brief set of lines, Newman manages to compress romantic despair, racism, and even a dollop of musical criticism: "Didn't used to be this ugly music playin' all the time," he complains against the squealing electronic din.

That song is one of several where Newman acts more than sings his part, underlining the conversational acuity of the

lyrics. On *Christmas in Capetown*, he does sing an edgy melody, but the message has the directness of a dispiriting, overheard conversation. Even in his incongruous drawl, this glimpse into the embittered world of a white South African is sobering.

Production on "Trouble in Paradise" is lavish and the auxiliary crew of rock and pop singers impressive: Paul Simon, Linda Ronstadt, Lindsey Buckingham, Christine McVie, Don Henley, Bob Seger, and other luminaries. But while their presence will doubtless add commercial allure, this is still Newman's show. Its scale may be larger than the close-focus miniatures that gave his early work such emotional force, but the music justifies these larger frames.

SAM SUTHERLAND

Ray Parker Jr.: Greatest Hits

Ray Parker Jr., producer
Arista AL 9612

I don't know Ray Parker Jr.'s marital status, but if anybody deserves to be *Cosmopolitan's* Bachelor of the Month, he does. Through five albums, first with his group Raydio and more recently as a sumptuous one-man-band, he has spun out stylishly sultry love songs notable for their crisp execution and new-man attitude. Parker may be dazzled by his own bedroom eyes, but he's also looking for pleasure for two. In

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The late, great Television: Billy Ficca, Richard Lloyd, Tom Verlaine, Fred Smith

the soulful pop groove *A Woman Needs Love*, he explains that "a woman needs love, just like you do," and reminds the fellas that she can also cheat, just like they do.

A multi-instrumentalist who cut his teeth playing guitar on Motown sessions and later with Boz Scaggs and Herbie Hancock, Parker arranges his tunes as smoothly as his seductions. Though irresistible finger-poppers, his uptempo songs are best characterized as soft funk, with the beat swaddled in squiggly synthesizer lines and backed by a full-bodied, bouncing bass. *For Those Who Like to Groove* is an insinuating instrumental that conjures up Chic, while *Bad Boy* cuts a rockier beat with Parker promising to do the dishes if his baby will let her wayward man come home. Flipping the coin, on the lush ballad *Let Me Go*—which, like much of the album, makes liberal use of background voices—he tells his love to walk unless she's ready to make a commitment.

Parker is so old-fashioned that he seems almost modern. Instead of being an old-style breather like Barry White or a new wave outrage like Prince, he wears his sensuality like a silk shirt. A longterm romantic who hasn't soured, he's the guy on *That Old Song* who remembers an old flame through a lyric and a melody. More than a few lovers will find some of their favorites on "Greatest Hits"; for others, it's a fine album with which to begin an affair.

JOHN MILWARD

Party Party Soundtrack

Various producers
A&M SP 3212

On the soundtrack of the not-yet-released movie *Party Party*, Dave Edmunds gets

another chance to indulge his Chuck Berry hero-worship, the Police's Sting bashes out a '50s rocker and takes a stab at r&b emoting, David Bowie and Bob Marley are paid sincere homage, and a rant by the Sex Pistols is turned almost chipper by the female group Bananarama. The score travels all over the map, zigzags back and forth in time, and is alternately giddy and doggedly earnest. From the stills on the LP cover and the description in the press kit, *Party Party* looks like one more youth-targeted sex-and-music comedy—this one takes place on a rowdy New Year's Eve—but its companion LP is of more than routine interest, if only for what it reveals about the influences on modern British rock.

Elvis Costello has written the title song that makes the party sound somewhat grim, Madness does its own *Driving in My Car*, and Bad Manners performs an original *Elizabethan Reggae* with all the verve of Booker T. & the M.G.s after too many bottles of Red Stripe beer. But the premise behind most of the score is having some of England's top artists interpret songs not associated with them, and the combinations are at times witty and revealing. Altered Images, led by the always-chirpy Clare Grogan, is more purposefully sprightly on Del Shannon's *Little Town Flirt* (which takes on a new angle as a girl warning a boy, rather than one male tipping off another) than on most of the band's own too-ephemeral material. Another gender-transferral, by Modern Romance, takes the Dunbar-Wayne hit *Band of Gold* (with a touch of *Also sprach Zarathustra* interpolated) and shifts the blame for the honeymoon night fiasco, thus making the song less psychologically intriguing.

Not all of the cover versions are successful. Bad Manners' *Yakety Yak* is sloppy

revivalism on the level of Showaddywaddy or Sha Na Na, and much as he tries to inject his vocal with the appropriate spirit, Sting lacks the roaring abandon essential to *Tutti Frutti*. He makes a better showing on the Little Willie John ballad, *Need Your Love So Bad*, with producer/lead guitarist Edmunds playing straight blues licks as he hasn't since his tenure with Love Sculpture. Edmunds also does a faithful-to-the-source *Run Rudolph Run*, a Berry Christmas song he first approached a decade ago.

While Edmunds bows to the rock & roll of the U.S., younger musicians from England look not as far afield, and not as far back, for their inspiration, with Midge Ure (of Ultravox) doing Bowie, and Bananarama bringing back *No Feelings* from the Johnny Rotten songbook. If nothing else, by encompassing Little Willie John and the Sex Pistols, "Party Party" makes a curious case for the continuity of the rock experience.

MITCHELL COHEN

Singles: The Great New York Singles Scene

Tom Goodkind, executive producer
Reachout International Records A 116
Television: The Blow Up
Steve Rolbovsky, executive producer
Reachout International Records A 114
(611 Broadway, Suite 214, New York, N.Y. 10012) [cassettes only]

"I've got something to hide here called desire," snaps Patti Smith on her 1974 debut single *Piss Factory*, spitting out her New Jersey-accented words over a vamping blues piano. "I'm going to get on that train and go to New York City and I'm going to be somebody." Not just anybody. "I'm gonna be a big star and I will never return." This is her first record, cut at Jimi Hendrix' Electric Lady studios; she ends it by saying, "Watch me now."

Smith, who has since dropped out of the pop life to become a Michigan mom, leads off "Singles: The Great New York Singles Scene," a cassette-only collection of songs that were considered hits in the late-'70s in punk/new wave dives like CBGB's. Most of the numbers aren't very good, as conveniently hinted at by the packaging. Patti, Television, and Richard Hell and the Voidoids are headlined in huge type; the other eleven acts' names are half their size. But stars need a scene in which to flourish, and that's what this recording is about—the scene.

In addition to *Piss Factory*, Side 1 contains Television's *Little Johnny Jewel*, in its original skeletal form, and Hell's punk anthem *Blank Generation*, which had more ferocity on his Sire debut. Though there are some hidden (and altogether subjective) charms in the other tracks, there's also a lot of bad singing by groups notable only in name (the Erasers, the Mumps, the Speedies). It's no accident that the three "stars" are contained within Side 1 and the

group Marble starts off the flip with the bouncy *Red Lights*. Part of Reachout International Records' rationale for marketing cassettes is consumer convenience: If you get sick of the prerecorded material, you can always record over it. Still, much of what these bands were scratching at evolved into slicker movements of the moment, from power pop to commercialized new wave. The cassette comes complete with liner notes, band histories, and a special guarantee: "All Bands 100% Certified Split Up," which is to say that some of them only a mother could miss.

I'd recommend punching out the safety tabs on Television's "The Blow Up." Here is eighty-five-minutes' worth of incendiary guitar rock that builds a bridge between stone-gray Manhattan and psychedelic San Francisco that's decidedly worth preserving. One of punk's principles was that anybody could be creative (except, maybe, fat old rock stars). Solos were suspect; guitars played loud, all right, but it was the cacophonous rhythms, not the individual lines that caught people's fancy. Television broke that rule: Tom Verlaine's songs were often spun from cascading lead lines that emphasized the different tones employed by his and Richard Lloyd's guitars. Where Lloyd rounded his attack with reverb and sustain, Verlaine more often screeched raw and rough, a razor blade fracturing his fretboard. His rhythm would establish a pattern, and then his solos would skirt off the edge only to return and leave again. Verlaine's guitar playing is closest to, of all unpunk people, Neil Young. Both men defy nonemotional standards of virtuosity.

Television released two albums on Elektra, and most of the material on its debut, "Marquee Moon," is performed live on "The Blow Up." Side 1 sticks to studio arrangements for the most part, and consequently adds few new twists to the group's recorded repertoire; Verlaine's wafer-thin voice even suffers by comparison. Later in the set, however, beginning with *Foxhole* and kicking in with a cover of Dylan's *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*, the cassette captures a looser side of Television not found on its albums. *Heaven's Door* sounds like New Mexico in a lightning storm and underscores Verlaine's absorption of Dylan's style of cryptic poetry and Jim Morrison's fondness for atmospheric bravura. Still another version of *Little Johnny Jewel*, in which the protagonist "had no decision, he's just tryin' to tell a vision," applies those same dark visions to more urban terrain.

"The Blow Up" is close-your-eyes music, where your mind follows guitars up a blind alley and out through a hole in the wall. The goal is nothing more or less than to evoke the moment—a sweaty club, no sleep, rhythm, spilled beers, electricity coursing through the amplifiers and out into the thick air. Punk/new wave was about art



Squeeze's Chris Difford and Glenn Tilbrook: *Leiber and Stoller of the '80s*

and fun for the here and now, and you can practically taste the New York scene in the sweep of Side 2, listening to one of the era's most vital bands find some exhilarating sense in it all.

JOHN MILWARD

Dusty Springfield: *White Heat*

Howard Steele & Dusty Springfield, producers. Casablanca NBLP 7271

This is a real surprise: Dusty Springfield singing some top-notch tunes with the same class and breathy verve that marked her string of '60s hits—*Stay Awhile, You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, and *I Only Want to Be with You* (the last having been recently botched up by Nicolette Larson). With material from the likes of Elvis Costello, Sting, and keyboardist/composer Jean-Alain Rousset, "White Heat" is easily her best album in over a decade.

Perhaps unavoidably, commercial concessions have been made. Guitarists Caleb Quaye and Steve Sykes, pianist Nicky Hopkins, and a revolving team of rhythm sessionists fashion a crackling, modern sound whose beat-heavy, glossy electronic mix recalls the slick pop of Kim Carnes. But nine times out of ten, Springfield bests the gravelly voiced Carnes. The arrangements may be similar, but Springfield's singing is seductive and cool, not abrasive and affected.

And she brings something different to each song. She is both sexy and sardonic on *Donnez Moi (Give It to Me)*, a punchy, sultry dance track that virtually sheens with bright keyboard embellishments. Her wavering vocals on Costello's *Losing You* are spiked with a tough, taut edged. In a way, Springfield's version is harder than Costello's, less sentimental. The charged-up funk romp *I Don't Think We Could Ever Be*

Friends, which the Police's String had a hand in writing, finds her singing like she was in the mood for a big party.

A few tunes—notably *I Am Curious* and *Blind Sheep*, with its heavy-handed metaphors—don't quite make the grade, but they're quickly swallowed up by the smart, soulful pop that surrounds them. Though "White Heat" is nowhere near the masterpiece that "Dusty in Memphis" is, it's certainly as sharp and assured as anything Springfield has done since that 1969 classic.

STEVEN X. REA

Squeeze: *Singles—45s and Under*

Various producers
A&M SP 4922

In retrospect, the breakup of the British band Squeeze was inevitable. It was bad enough that the group, formed in the mid-'70s by guitarist/lyricist Chris Difford and guitarist/vocalist/composer Glenn Tilbrook, was likened to the Beatles at every turn. Worse still was the hoopla accorded this undeniably great songwriting partnership: the comparisons not only to Lennon and McCartney, but to Gilbert and Sullivan, Leiber and Stoller, and Rodgers and Hart. To read some of the critics, Difford and Tilbrook were the biggest thing to happen to music since the piano.

In addition, Squeeze always operated in a state of flux. Difford, Tilbrook, and drummer Gilson Lavis stuck it out from the beginning. But there were three keyboardists—including quirky blues buff Jools Holland and Paul Carrack (who sang lead on *Tempted*, Squeeze's one certified American hit)—a couple of bassists, producers as diverse as John Cale and Elvis Costello, and to put it mildly, a lot of managerial

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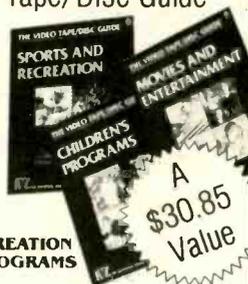
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BACKBEAT Reviews

hassles. So, after six years of roaring success in its homeland and modest commercial inroads in the States, it's hardly surprising that Squeeze threw in the proverbial towel at the end of last year.

As a farewell present to its U.S. fans, the quintet left "Singles—45s and Under," a twelve-tune collection that includes a string of the band's peppy, pugnacious U.K. chart-toppers (*Goodbye Girl*, *Cool for Cats*, *Up the Junction*) and a hefty dose of would-be American greatest hits from the last two studio albums, "East Side Story" and "Sweets from a Stranger." There's also the heretofore unreleased *Annie Get Your Gun*, one of the last tracks the group recorded. Like the best of Difford and Tilbrook's compositions, it is a heady, exuberant affair marked by a lot of deft double-entendres and a melody that clangs merrily along on the buoyant rhythms of the duo's guitars. The rousing chorus is cheerful, sly, and endearingly funny.

The other material here—the skipping-record rhymes of *If I Didn't Love You*, the wistful, Beatle-ish *Is That Love*, *Another Nail in My Heart*, *Pulling Mussels (from the Shell)*, and the pop r&b of *Tempted* and *Black Coffee in Bed*—provides apt testament to Squeeze's achievements. A wacky brand of romanticism pervades Difford's portraits of working-class characters who spend most of their time drinking themselves under the table and falling head over heels in love. These short-storylike vignettes are invariably framed in a spry, boppy flurry of harmonies and hooks. The songs have all the right ingredients: wit, intelligence, and melodies that just won't quit.

Though Squeeze has disbanded, Difford and Tilbrook, by all reports, are intent on continuing their collaboration. This is good news, indeed. Until more is heard from them, "Singles—45s and Under" is an eminently listenable legacy.

STEVEN X. REA

mentioned in the same breath with Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Glenn Miller, or Tommy Dorsey, the Barnet band was equally interesting and much more fun. When it got going, it had an exultant drive, spurred along by Barnet's crisp, barking, highly individualistic saxophone, Billy May's and Bobby Burnet's rough-toned, cutting trumpet work, and the brilliant drumming of Cliff Leeman.

Vols. 5 and 6 show the band on the loose in its own wildly swinging world on *Murder at Peyton Hall* and *Wild Mab of the Fish Pond*. Barnet's love affair with Duke Ellington's music is documented in the best non-Ellington performances ever of such pieces as *The Sergeant Was Shy*, *Birmingham Breakdown*, *Merry-Go-Round*, *Harlem Speaks*, and *Ring Dem Bells*. (A sixteen-year-old Barnet rang the bells on Duke's original 1930 recording.) Also here are some unusual interpretations of such established tunes as *I'm Comin' Virginia* and *Blues in the Night*. Like every '30s and '40s big band, Barnet had his share of pop horrors of the moment. But by 1940 and '41 he had managed to put some interest into them, primarily through his warm, full-bodied tenor and soprano saxophones.

Barnet's RCA career unfortunately wound up with two dismal sessions, one including a then-fashionable violin section, the other consisting of three dreary songs sung by one Al Lane. Still, the series finishes on a high note with two unissued, exhilarating performances from 1939: *Knockin' on the Famous Door* and *Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie*.

Barnet was one of the bright spots of the Swing Era. He never got the red carpet treatment that RCA gave his peers, but his records, bridging the chasm between black and white bands, had a unique quality that still sets them apart.

JOHN S. WILSON

Doc Cheatham & Sammy Price: Black Beauty

John Norris & Bill Smith, producers
 Sackville 3029

Jazz

The Complete Charlie Barnet:

Vol. 5, 1940-41;

Vol. 6, 1941-42

Frank Driggs, producer
 RCA-Bluebird AXM 2-5587; AXM 2-5590
 (two discs per set)

These two sets represent the final installments in RCA-Bluebird's "Complete Charlie Barnet" series. Initiated five years ago, the finished collection covers the bandleader's RCA years from 1935 to 1942, providing an overview of a significant Swing Era band in the process of growth and development. Although never

Trumpeter Doc Cheatham was born in 1905 and pianist Sammy Price in 1908. Both men are almost as old as jazz itself, both have been active in it throughout their long lives. They have known first-hand the paths black musicians had to follow to get an opportunity to play. Now in their seventies, they are vital, vigorous, and highly expressive musicians who serve as a living link with an earlier era. When they play the songs of black American songwriters on "Black Beauty," they are not reaching toward a dim past, they are passing along the music with which they grew up.

The writers represented here include Eubie Blake, James P. Johnson, J.C. Johnson, Fats Waller, W.C. Handy, Louis Armstrong, Shelton Brooks, Will Marion Cook, and the team of Creamer and Layton. The

songs are all recognized American classics—*Some of These Days*, *After You've Gone*, *Old Fashioned Love*, *I'm Coming Virginia*, *Squeeze Me*, *Memphis Blues*, and *I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling*, among others.

Doc's approach on trumpet is muted, warm-toned, and singing. The exception is *I'm Coming Virginia*, usually a subdued number, on which he blows a strong, open horn. The unquenchable Sammy comes on strong on everything—swinging, taking breaks, rolling his boogie figures. He's the blues man, Doc the melodist. Between them they give these classic tunes a warm, bluesy, emotional appeal. They are completely at home in this idiom and they convey it beautifully. JOHN S. WILSON

Meredith d'Ambrosio: Little Jazz Bird
Herb Wong, producer
Palo Alto PA 8019 (755 Mill Page Rd., Palo Alto, Calif. 94304)

Meredith d'Ambrosio is not a singer who catches your attention immediately. She is too low-keyed and seemingly unprepossessing. What does catch your attention on "Little Jazz Bird" is her choice of material. Basically, it is less appropriate for a jazz audience than for a supper-club audience—the kind that appreciated Mabel Mercer, Lee Wiley, Teddi King, and Mildred Bailey.

The songs come from a fascinatingly wide variety of sources. *Little Jazz Bird* is 1920s George and Ira Gershwin. The charming *The Wine of May* and the sensitive *Songbird* (a tribute inspired by King) are Loonis McGlohon's; if he wrote nothing else, they alone would put him in the song-writing pantheon. There is a funny lyric by Gene Lees, *Self Defense Waltz*, and an even wittier piece, *Clichés*, by a trio of writers that includes pianist Harold Danko. Dave Frishberg's somewhat obscure *Our Love Rolls On* is balanced by *Springs in Manhattan*, a Blossom Dearie standard. The teams of Mack Gordon and Harry Revel and Sammy Cahn and Jimmy van Heusen contribute one number each from the pop music mills, and an interesting new songwriter, Deborah Henson-Conant, adds two more.

What does D'Ambrosio's performance have to do with jazz? Like Wiley, Bailey, and King, she wisely surrounds herself with great jazz musicians. The basic accompaniment is Phil Woods's quartet, with Hank Jones sitting in on piano. Woods is the strongest and most pliable instrumental voice; bassist Steve Gilmore and drummer Bill Goodwin are close seconds. With this kind of support, D'Ambrosio does not have to worry about stretching her limited vocal range and can concentrate instead on phrasing and interpretation.

A few pieces with string quartet, rhythm, and Woods on clarinet show her to great advantage. And when she accompa-

nies herself on piano, the close relationship between her playing and singing parallels the homespun quality of Hoagy Carmichael's blend. JOHN S. WILSON

David Lahm: Real Jazz for the Folks Who Feel Jazz

Barry Rogers, Bernard Fox, & David Lahm, producers. Palo Alto PA 8027

Being the son of lyricist Dorothy Fields (*I Can't Give You Anything But Love*, *On the Sunny Side of the Street*, *Exactly like You*) may have opened some doors for pianist-composer David Lahm, but it may also have created suspicions of trading on her reputation. Lahm has been soloing, accompanying, and playing with various groups around New York for several years without breaking through from the musical fringes. "Real Jazz for the Folks Who Feel Jazz," his first album, may change that.

He uses his own compositions or lyrics (set to tunes by Chick Corea and Richie Cole), a dangerous programming ploy for a recording debutant. But his writing is communicative and varied, an attribute that also applies to his performing context: Rather than working with a single group, he uses a revolving cast of refreshing and individualistic instrumentalists and one very distinctive vocalist, Janet Lawson. Gary Valente and Barry Rogers are both huge-toned, exultant trombonists; Bob Moses and Joe LaBarbera are sensitive and explosive drummers; Roger Rosenberg is a marvelously rugged baritone saxophonist who also plays flute and soprano sax with flair; John D'earth is a crisply electrifying trumpet player.

With all these elements, Lahm creates a kaleidoscope of sounds and themes that range from the clear, easy, Basie-like swing of *I'm Taking the Day Off* to the exploratory *Indianapolis Blues*. He plays two numbers with vibraharpist David Friedman, one of which, *Half Moon Bay*, is a beautifully woven pairing that manages to be both insistent and hesitant, creating a tantalizing tension.

Lahm presents his compositions in the best possible light. There are no self-serving, long-winded piano solos to distract from the merits of his writing; when he does solo, it is in context. "Real Jazz . . ." is an extremely well thought-out album that announces the arrival of an important and interesting jazz musician. JOHN S. WILSON

Arnie Lawrence: Renewal
Arnie Lawrence, producer
Palo Alto PA 8033

Composer-saxophonist Arnie Lawrence is one of life's constant learners. His curiosity and responsiveness have taken him from Dixieland to free jazz, with stops at almost every genre along the way. This album provides an overview of his varied career. He

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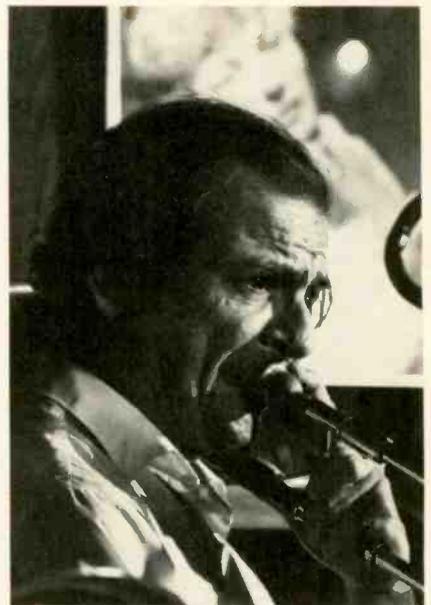
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Murray: an ambitious attempt that has its share of problems



Resnick: one of a kind

himself calls "Renewal" "an accumulation of my musical life up till now . . . perhaps a doorway to the future."

The tunes include *Treat Style* by Jimmy Garrison, a bassist with whom Lawrence played after John Coltrane's death; *Poinciana*, which he used as a theme for a radio show in Kentucky; and *A Secret Love*, from his days with Clark Terry's band. *Lover Man*, one of his personal favorites, features its composer Ram Ramirez at the piano. Drummer Chico Hamilton provides the rhythmic foundation for *Liza Is Her Name*, a piece that reflects Arnie's interest in Latin bands.

All of the above relates to various phases of his life. In addition Lawrence leads a quartet of individuals—Hilton Ruiz on piano, Mike Richmond on bass, Billy Hart on drums—who can meld their distinctive personalities into a cohesive whole. His own alto and soprano saxophone playing never imitates anyone else's and never reaches for clichés. For Lawrence is himself in whatever form the moment suggests, pouring more than a quarter of a century of learning into each of his self-styled and varied settings. His music has always been an adventure, and never more rewardingly so than on "Renewal." JOHN S. WILSON

David Murray Octet: Home

David Murray, producer
Black Saint BSR 0055 (Polygram Special Imports, 137 W. 55 St., New York, N.Y. 10019)

The last several months have seen the release of at least three large-group recordings in the contemporary jazz vein: "When Was That?" (About Time) by the Henry Threadgill Sextet, "Blues Forever" (Black Saint) by Muhal Richard Abrams' big band, and now "Home" by the David Murray

octet. Though the small group is a fairly well-established and flexible context for the avant-garde, the large ensemble is not. Part of the reason is pure economics: Club owners just won't book more than four or five pieces anymore, preventing the bigger groups from working out their musical problems on a nightly basis. As a result, many composers/bandleaders have given up on large-scale projects. While "Home" has its share of problems, it would be a shame to fault as gifted a writer as Murray for his ambitious attempts.

Murray's range as a soloist is quite broad—from the lyricism of Ornette Coleman to the raunchiness of Earl Bostic and the playful humor of Sonny Rollins. His writing has similar scope and, like Threadgill (who appears as a sideman here), he uses such devices as contrasting section work and uninhibited atonal riffs to exhibit his soloists to great advantage. Unlike Threadgill, he tends to use more contrapuntal lines and long improvised sections than scored tutti passages. At times, the interplay of soloist and section develops into a swing so remorseless I'm reminded of Johnny Griffin's Big Soul Band of years ago. This is particularly true of *3-D Family*, an apt title in view of the multidimensionality of Murray's writing. In fact, most of the tunes are accurately described by their titles—*Blues Choctaw*, *Home*, *Last of the Hipmen*.

"Home" is full of what reviewers like to call "raw energy" and lacking in subtlety and tonal shading. No amount of great soloing by George Lewis, Olu Dara, or anyone else can compensate. Still, Murray is only twenty-seven years old, and although he has appeared on umpteen different records as sideman and leader, this is only his second octet album. He is to be commended for a ground-breaking effort.

JOE BLUM

Ephie Resnick & Marty Grosz: The End of Innocence

Ephie Resnick, producer
Mark Records (c/o Ephie Resnick, 31-27 82nd St., Jackson Heights, N.Y. 11370)

This is a most unusual album. Ephie Resnick is a trombonist with a stirringly broad, lusty attack and a musical sensitivity befitting a Juilliard graduate. He started a promising jazz career in the early '50s with Wild Bill Davison, but financial need led him to the Broadway pit orchestras, where he remained until a severe accident incapacitated him. During his convalescence, he decided he had paid enough dues: It was time to get back into jazz.

To make that reentry, he would need an audition tape. His bank book dictated that it would have to be inexpensive, so the band for the occasion was reduced to the smallest possible number—two: Resnick on trombone and Marty Grosz on guitar. With the former calling the tunes as they went along, they taped duets of such old jazz and pop standards as *Runnin' Wild*, *Dixieland One-Step*, *Don't Blame Me*, and *Avalon*. The result—this record—is, to put it bluntly, absolutely wonderful.

Trombone and guitar may seem a rather awkward pairing, but not in the hands of Resnick and Grosz. Resnick is so fluent, his phrasing so propulsive, his shading so sensitive, his tone so warmly burry and idiomatically trombonistic that the instrument takes on new or unexplored qualities. Grosz's light, delicate, and rhythmic backing lends a soft coloring to the trombone's sometimes-gruff sound, and his own unaccompanied guitar solos swing beautifully.

"The End of Innocence" was intended for audition purposes, but it is also available (by mail) to those interested in sheer listening pleasure. JOHN S. WILSON

(Continued on page 82)

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INPUT OUTPUT

(Continued from page 69)

the sound you finally get will probably be good. In a not so good studio, not so good. With a drum machine, the studio itself becomes less important.

Will drum machines make their human counterparts an endangered species? Yes and no. A good drummer is hard to come by; for those bandleaders frustrated with their current, less-than-adequate one, a machine may be a viable alternative. On the other hand, these machines, like computers, are only as good as their programmers. And both producers and artists are finding that the best programmers are drummers—the people who have spent many years learning the subtleties of integrating percussion sounds with other instruments. Before Bralower and I formed a partnership, I did my preproduction work solo, using a Roland DR-55 and a TR-808. That worked fairly well, but I'm no drummer. Bralower is, and the difference in time saved and creative ideas generated is, well, astounding. I also feel that electronic drums are most effective when used in combination with real drums. We did this on Kurtis Blow's EP "Tough," using just the bass drum from a TR-808. Judging from most of the records out today, this appears to be the most popular application.

Each of the machines has its own distinct signature. As mentioned earlier, Human League's albums are pure Linn drum. The strangely overechoed claps and tinny hi-hat at the beginning of Marvin Gaye's *Sexual Healing* are a dead giveaway: Roland TR-808. That company's first and most basic box, Dr. Rhythm (DR-55), is pretty unrealistic sounding but still vastly more pleasant to listen to than (and is often used instead of) a studio's click track. You can also get some incredible syncopations from it. In fact I'd highly recommend it if you're in the market for a reasonably priced, basic unit. The TR-808 and Korg KRP-77 still have a somewhat synthetic sound, but the former is nevertheless used on many records (including my own), as will undoubtedly be true of the brand new, slightly less complicated Korg. (Space has prevented including the Roland TR-606 Drumatrix on the chart, but anyone interested in a medium-priced—\$395—machine shouldn't overlook it.)

As for the high-priced spread, the Linn and the Oberheim DMX both have absolutely mind-boggling capabilities. The Linn sounds more like the real thing, but Oberheim has said it will be providing new chips for a more natural sound in the near future. If you're thinking that drum machines will go the way of the Hula Hoop, you're wrong. For the drummer and the nondrumming artist, writer, or producer, they're both a godsend and good fun. But they're serious business too: Just listen to them on Michael Jackson's "Thriller," and then watch the record shoot up the charts. **HF**

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Coltrane: soprano sax debut



Cornetist Don Cherry

The Cutting Edge Revisited

John Coltrane & Don Cherry: The Avant-Garde

Nesuhi Ertegün, producer
Atlantic Jazzlore 90041-1

At the time this recording was made, 1960, its title was quite accurate. John Coltrane had left the Miles Davis band to become the primary influence on the tenor saxophone scene; cornetist Don Cherry was a very active partner in Ornette Coleman's trend-setting new group.

Despite both players' credentials as leaders of the burgeoning avant-garde, together they represented a curious amalgam of styles. Coltrane's roots clearly were in harmony-based improvisation. As he matured, his point of view expanded to include modes and scales as the basis for his playing. Cherry, on the other hand, was first heard nationally in the free-blowing Coleman group. Although he clearly had a Davis-based sound and style, his improvisations tended to slip and slide through a variety of chromatically oriented points of view.

Surprisingly, the two styles worked quite well together. Three Coleman tunes on "The Avant-Garde"—*Focus on Sanity*, *The Blessing*, and *The Invisible*—help provide Cherry with a familiar starting point. Thelonious Monk's *Bemsha Swing* was familiar to both players. And surprisingly, Cherry's quite traditional *Cherryco* seemed to stimulate one of Coltrane's better solos. Listening to it today, one is impressed with how easily Coltrane adapted to the "free" improvisational style. About halfway through he is quite literally all over the instrument, probing some of its "noise" devices in a way that few players will risk, even today. Yet he does so in the context of order. Throughout, he continually refers to a recurring B flat (C on the tenor). This focus point easily and simply holds the entire improvisation together.

Recorded a few months before the more celebrated *My Favorite Things*, *The Blessing* marks Coltrane's vinyl debut on soprano sax. In 1960, the instrument was generally viewed as an antiquarian survivor from New Orleans jazz; only Steve Lacy was effectively using it in a contemporary style. Coltrane dramatically pulled it into the vanguard of jazz. His solo here is more in the style of his tenor playing than would be true somewhat later. He soars up and down the instrument's two registers, building a solo out of an accretion of repetitions, scales, modes, etc., that gradually take shape. The method is not dissimilar from that employed by Indian classical musicians.

Cherry's improvising survives far less well than Coltrane's. Clearly he feels most comfortable in the unrestricted confines of the Coleman pieces. On *Focus on Sanity*, for example, one gets a sense of many spurted-out phrases, usually played in the same middle register. Yet, in the first half, the phrases never come together into a larger whole. Toward the end, however, he does open up his line, alternating the repeated eighth notes with long phrases, high-reaching squeals, etc. On *The Blessing* Cherry's Harmon-muted solo is an articulate Davis clone. On *The Invisible* he loosens up more and tries to break out of his self-imposed prison of repeated eighth notes.

Coltrane and Cherry are backed extremely well by the rhythm team of Charlie Haden and Ed Blackwell on *Cherryco* and *The Blessing*; Haden's replacement by Percy Heath on the balance of the tracks is less successful. Twenty-some years later, the real value of this reissue lies in the playing of Coltrane. Challenged by a newly emerging avant-garde of young players, he placed himself in a position of leadership. "The Avant-Garde" provides a very clear picture of how he did it.

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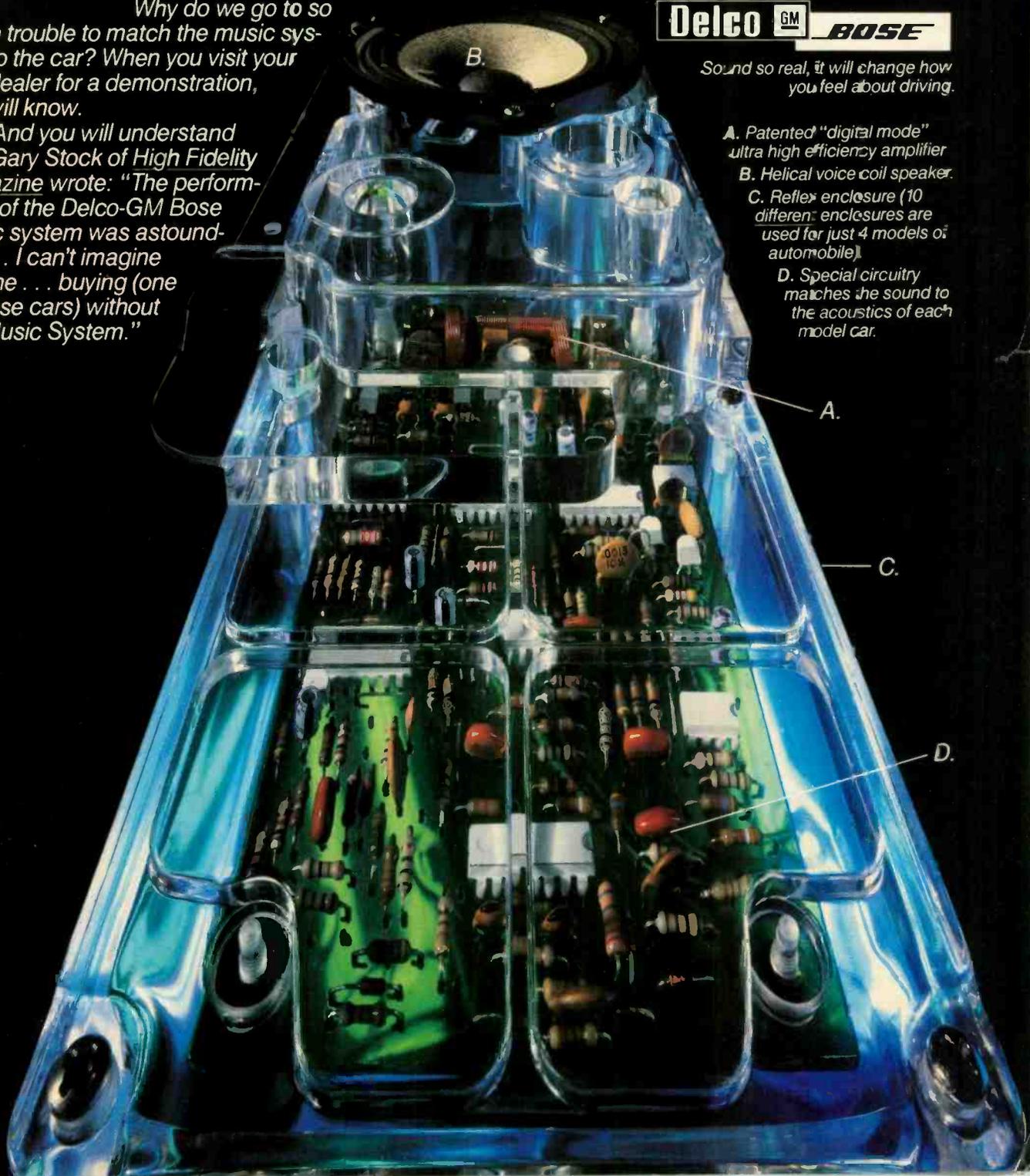
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