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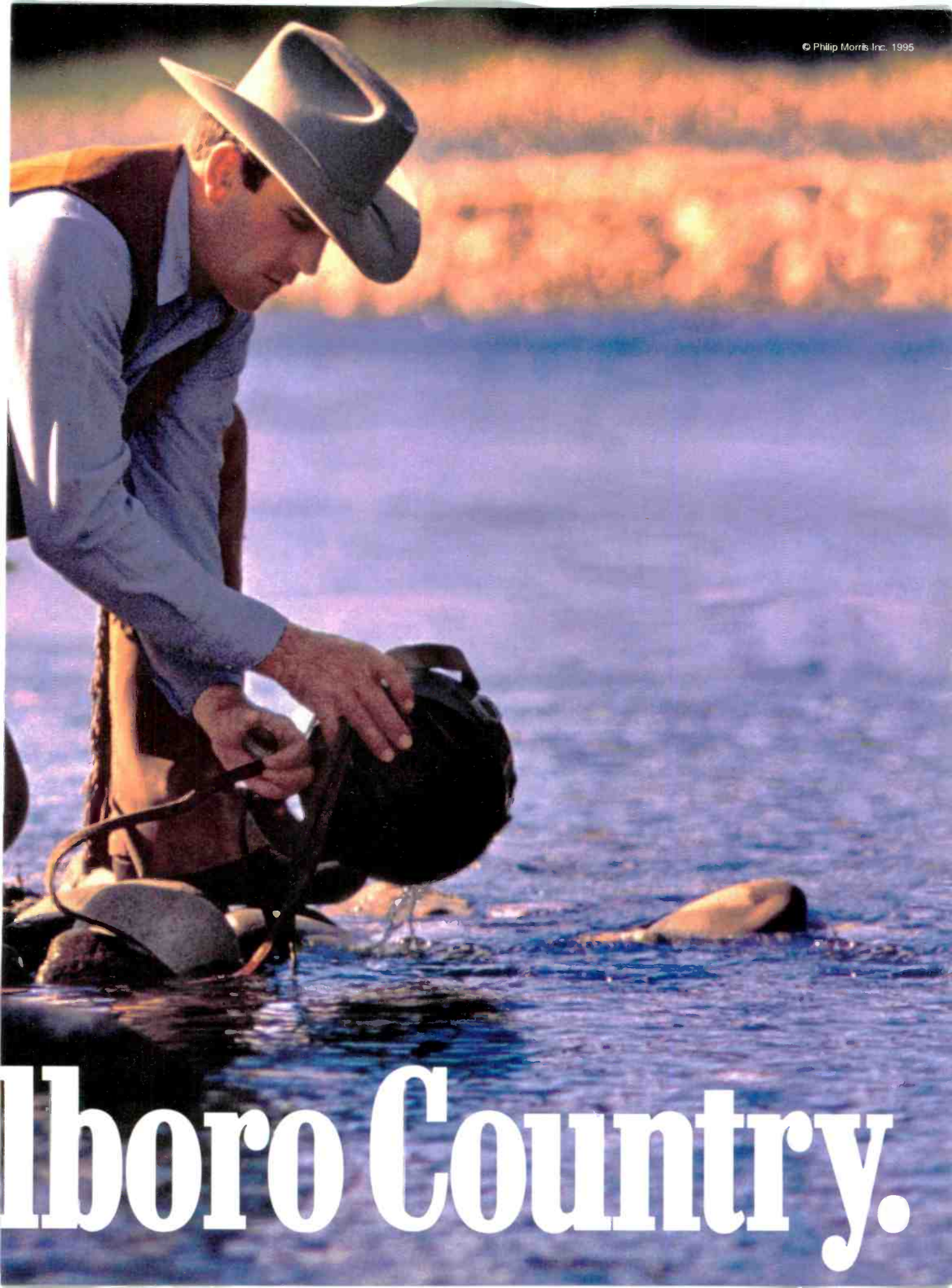


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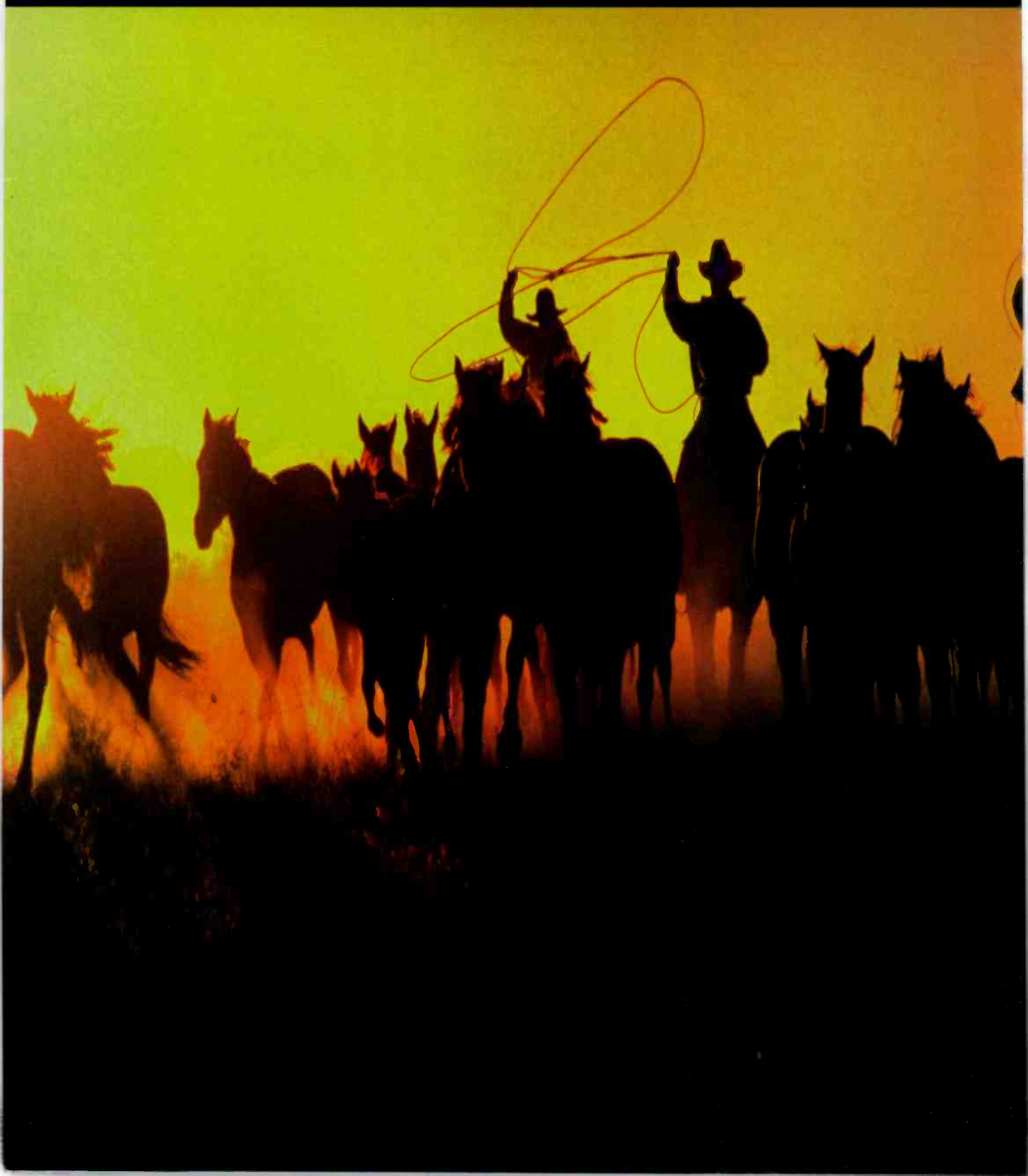


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APRIL 1995

Cover: NHT's VT-1C center-channel speaker, VT-1A towers, HDP-1 surrounds, and SW2p subwoofer with the Magnavox FP4760C 47-inch TV (image of Arnold Schwarzenegger from *Total Recall*, courtesy Carolco Home Video). For more home theater options see "Surround Speakers," page 46, and "Big Screen Bonanza," page 53.

Photograph by Roberto Brosan

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Bulletin

New digital videodiscs, Hall of Fame Awards, Bob Dylan on CD-ROM, and more
• by Bob Ankosko and William Livingstone

Peripherals

Video-game soundtracks get real
• by Marjorie Costello

Equipment Test Reports

Harman Kardon AVR25 A/V receiver, page 32
Paradigm Export/BP speaker, page 36
Sunfire power amplifier, page 40
AudioSource SW Four powered subwoofer, page 44

Surround Speakers

Dipoles? Bipoles? Boxes? In-walls? A guide to choosing (and using) surround speakers
• by Daniel Kumin

Big Screen Bonanza

When it comes to TV screens for home theater, bigger is better. A roundup • by James Barry

Loudspeaker Design

What matters, and what doesn't – how to set priorities when you're choosing speakers
• by Howard Ferstler

The Russians Are Coming

Communism is gone, and Russian musicians are a hot property in the West
• by Jamie James

Showstoppers

Highlights from the 1995 Winter Consumer Electronics Show • by Bob Ankosko

Best Recordings of the Month

The confessions of Martin Zellar, Rudolf Firkusny's farewell recording, masterly storytelling from Townes Van Zandt, and Angelina Reaux sings Weill and Berg



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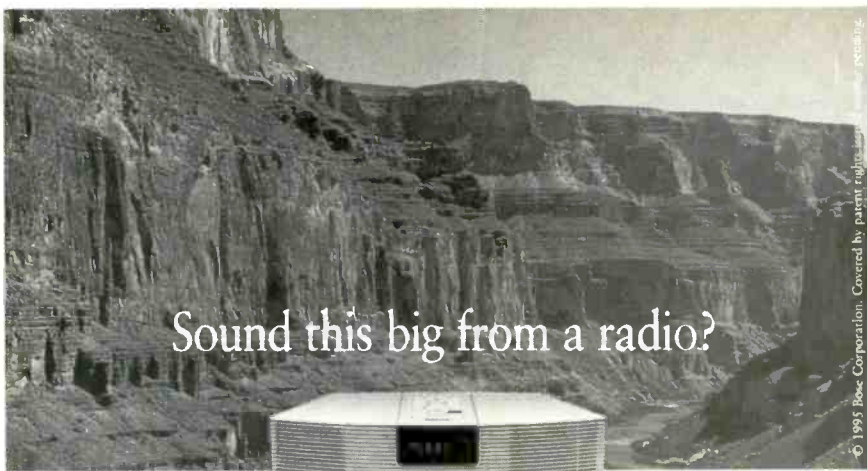


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Julian Hirsch
Stereo Review, Jan '95

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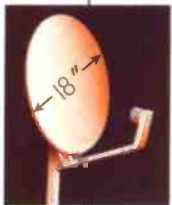
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CIRCLE NO. 19 ON READER SERVICE CARD

BULLETIN

BY WILLIAM LIVINGSTONE
AND BOB ANKOSKO

GETTING SATISFACTION

The Verity Group, a market-research firm serving the consumer electronics industry, has announced the winners of its fourth annual Verity Customer Satisfaction Index (VSCI) Awards. The winners are chosen on the basis of more than 51,000 interviews with a sampling of consumers who represent the population as a whole, and in general the results show that customer satisfaction with consumer electronic products is very high. Among the winners in various categories are Alpine (car stereo), Kenwood (home CD player), Mitsubishi (VCR and TV larger than 30 inches), Pioneer (home stereo receiver and one-brand stereo system), and Sony (home tape deck).

FACTS & FIGURES

A survey by the Consumer Electronics Group (CEG) of the Electronic Industries Association shows that for the majority of high-income buyers of audio equipment, quality is more important than price. (High income is defined as \$35,000 for singles, \$45,000 for married couples.) In deciding on purchases, 68 percent reported that sound quality was the most important factor, followed by price and brand recognition. When asked the reason for buying new stereo components, 63 percent said it was to improve sound quality, and 62 percent said it was to take advantage of new technologies. . . . According to another CEG survey, more than 70 percent of U.S. households own at least one piece of car stereo equipment that did not come with a new car. Nearly 70 percent of households with incomes of \$40,000 or more own at least one car cassette head unit. . . . A report from InfoTech, an international multimedia market-research firm, shows that the number of installed CD-ROM units grew to 26.9 million world-

VIDEODISCS GET SMALL

In almost back-to-back announcements, rival coalitions heralded what promises to be a new era in home video, based on advanced, high-density, CD-size digital videodiscs (DVD's). Sony and Philips kicked off in early January at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show, but Toshiba and Time Warner one-upped them just a few weeks later with details of their own system and backing from much of the rest of the audio and entertainment industries, including Matsushita (Panasonic, Technics, Quasar), Thomson (RCA, GE, ProScan), Pioneer, Hitachi, JVC, Denon, MCA (Universal), MGM/UA, and Turner Home Entertainment. Fortunately, the systems are more similar than different in their essentials, and talks aimed at unifying the formats in time for the projected 1996 launch are under way. Both systems pack 135 minutes of high-quality digital video onto a single side, and picture quality, in the limited demonstrations so far, appears to surpass not merely that of Video CD but also that of laserdisc.

wide in 1994, up 137 percent from the preceding year. The U.S. accounted for the largest increase, followed by the U.K., Germany, and Japan.

ENDURING FAME

The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) has granted lifetime-achievement awards to the singers Patsy Cline, Peggy Lee, and Barbra Streisand, to the Chicago soul pioneer Curtis Mayfield, and to the composer/arranger Henry Mancini.

Recordings admitted into the NARAS Hall of Fame this year are the Beatles' "Abbey Road," "Jazz at Massey Hall" (with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Max Roach, and Charles Mingus), Hoagy Carmichael's *Star Dust*, Spike Jones's *Cocktails for Two*, and Sophie Tucker's *Some of These Days*.

The following artists have been chosen as this year's inductees into the Rock 'n'

Roll Hall of Fame: the Allman Brothers Band, Al Green, Janis Joplin, Led Zeppelin, Martha and the Vandellas, Neil Young, and Frank Zappa. The R&B band the Orioles was included among early influences on rock.

HIGH POINTS

The Recording Industry Association of America has announced that Fleetwood Mac's album "Rumours," released in 1977, has sold 17 million copies in the United States, making it the second-best-selling album in history, after Michael Jackson's "Thriller" with sales of 24 million. . . . The newest release by the children's recording artist Joe Scroggs, "Ants" (Shadow Play), received the 1994 National Parenting Publications Honors Award. . . . According to the music industry magazine *Pollstar*, the Rolling Stones' "Voodoo Lounge" tour took in more than \$121

million, making the band the greatest money-makers in concert history.

MUSIC NOTES

Graphix Zone and Columbia Records have released "Bob Dylan: Highway 61 Interactive," an exploration on CD-ROM of Dylan's world from the 1960's into the 1990's, with 10 full-length songs, samples of 42 others, and an interactive time line of significant events in Dylan's life. Price: \$59.95. . . . The Leonard Bernstein Jerusalem International Music Competitions begin this year with a contest for conductors open to qualified applicants of ages 24 to 37. The deadline for application is April 15. For more information contact the Amberson Group, 25 Central Park West, New York, NY 10023; phone, (212) 315-0640.

BOOKS

McFarland and Company, of Jefferson, NC, has published Howard Ferstler's *High Definition Compact Disc Recordings* (\$29.95), evaluations of more than 1,400 technically excellent CD's. . . . Harper-Collins has brought out *Mozart, A Life* (\$35), an ambitious biography by the distinguished music historian Maynard Solomon. . . . Miller Freeman Books has issued a new version of the *All Music Guide* (\$24.95), which in 1,400 pages describes and reviews more than 23,000 CD's, LP's, and tapes in twenty-two categories ranging from blues, children's, and rock to world beat and zydeco. □

ILLUSTRATION BY TERRY ALLEN

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CIRCLE NO. 20 ON READER SERVICE CARD

LETTERS

Record of the Year Awards

One might expect that STEREO REVIEW's Record of the Year Awards in February would be drawn largely from albums reviewed in "Best Recordings of the Month" during the previous twelve months. Surprisingly, that was hardly the case for 1994.

Among the popular selections, two of the six winners and eleven of the thirteen honorable mentions had not warranted a "Best of the Month" review. Among classical selections, three of the six winners and six of the eleven honorable mentions had not made it to "Best of the Month" ranking. That is a marked level of inconsistency between monthly and annual recognition. Were there too many cooks in the kitchen?

WILLIAM F. PANK
Rowayton, CT

"Best of the Month" albums are nominated by the individual critics who write the reviews. Record of the Year Awards are open to nominations from all of our critics and editors, a diverse group with diverse opinions; one person's imperishable masterpiece can be another's unlistenable noise.

Disgraceland

Parke Puterbaugh should find another line of work. His choice of Pink Floyd's "The Division Bell" as one of the ten worst pop albums of the year (February) shows a lack of understanding of music as an expression of the human spirit.

REMY L. GAPP
Rochester, NH

Obviously Mr. Puterbaugh is out of touch with what the record-buying public regards as good music.

SAM SCAMARDO
Bryan, TX

DSS Pros and Cons

I recently purchased the RCA Digital Satellite System (reviewed by Rich Warren in January), and I've found that the video is only slightly better than what I am getting on cable, and the audio is no better. The only exception is pay-per-view movies, which have laserdisc picture quality and near-CD sound. Yes, DSS is relatively inexpensive, and it works rather well. But I guess I expected some sort of miracle.

Also, there have been several rainstorms locally since I installed my system, and I have lost the signal completely for several minutes at a time. Has RCA switched to the MPEG-2 standard yet? If so, is that supposed to correct the problems during rainstorms?

WILLIAM HINSON
Jacksonville, FL

In "DSS at Home" (January), Rich Warren states that his C-band system scans some twenty-seven satellites. What seven satellites am I, *Orbit* magazine, and every other satellite publication missing?

My C-band equipment can scan the entire spectrum of satellites from east to west (or vice versa) in just under 1½ minutes, which includes reaching for my UHF remote control. Is Mr. Warren using a hand crank?

DANIEL K. NICHOLSON
Ossian, IN

I bought my satellite dish almost ten years ago. To compare DSS with a good C- or Ku-band system is unfair to DSS. Anyone who thinks MPEG-1 video is even close is blind; our local dealers never recommend using a VCR with the system. I know DSS is new technology, and there are lots of warm feelings about anything digital, but let's stick to reality. Where's the data?

If Rich Warren's Toshiba TRX-2220 C-band receiver has sparklies and takes 5 minutes to acquire a signal, he is not getting "excellent reception."

LAWRENCE WITT
Brookings, OR

Rich Warren replies: I cannot comment on Mr. Hinson's observations about DSS picture and sound quality, since I have no idea how his equipment is connected. As for rain fade, I have watched the system through three major storms in my area. In only one, with 45-mph winds driving rain into the dish, did I experience any signal interruption, and then only briefly. The transition to MPEG-2 is supposed to be complete by the end of March. Its main effect should be to improve picture quality and increase channel capacity, however.

Satellite TV Week lists twenty-two C-band and five Ku-band satellites, although one of them, Telstar 402R, is currently inactive. My 8-foot dish takes almost 5 minutes to scan from the easternmost to the westernmost satellite. System scan speeds vary depending on ambient temperature, dish size, actuator, and receiver.

My ophthalmologist says my eyes are in perfect condition. I've been watching C-band for seven years and have used both the top-of-the-line GI 2750R receiver and the Toshiba. Reception is usually excellent, although area satellite installers tell me that sparklies are not unusual on a few transponders from this location. The best MPEG-1 video can surpass most analog video.

[Editor's notes: We have received very few complaints of rain fade. Based on that and information from the DSS consortium, we suspect that most people who do experi-

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ence persistent problems with rain fade may be suffering from installation errors. Under ideal conditions, it is possible to get a good picture with the dish slightly misaimed or with minor obstruction between dish and satellite, but the system's ability to maintain reception in bad weather will be degraded. For optimum performance under such circumstances, it is important that the dish be aimed spot-on at the satellites and have a clear line of sight.

[There was no data in the review because we have no way to inject appropriate test signals into the receiver. If your local dealers are getting consistently bad video from DSS they might do well to check their installations. We have gone from a store in which the picture looked quite bad to a demo in which it was stunning, a few miles and a day apart.]

The Sound of "Robocop"

In "The Sound of Movies" in January, author Karl Straley discusses films transferred using optical soundtracks and mentions, as an example of what can be missing, "... those deliciously thunderous footsteps of ED-209 in *Robocop*? Can't even hear 'em!" As the audio engineer who actually did the transfer of *Robocop* for home video, I can assure Mr. Straley that I did *not* use an optical soundtrack! In fact, this was one of the first films released in the extremely wide-dynamic-range Dolby SR audio format, and for the transfer to videotape I used a 35mm, Dolby SR-encoded, Dolby Stereo L_T/R_T (surround-encoded) theatrical-mix magnetic soundtrack. It was transferred, synchronized with the video, to a digital audio tape, and the "thunderous" footsteps of ED-209, and everything else in that soundtrack, were there on the DAT!

I cannot, of course, be responsible for what happens after the original transfer. On occasion a duplicator may "screw it up," but this is happening less and less as time goes on. The VHS Hi-Fi format does not have the same dynamic range or headroom as DAT, and sometimes wonderful theatrical mixes must be processed (usually compressed) to "make it" safely, without distortion, to the analog world. If this processing is not done carefully enough, the results can be less than perfect.

GENE HOBSON
 Chief Audio Engineer, All-Post, Inc.
 Burbank, CA

Correction

The March test report on the Polk Audio RM7000 speaker system incorrectly states that the PSW100 subwoofer included in the system is magnetically shielded, which it is not. Also, the RM2000II satellites are 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches wide rather than 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. □

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

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NEW PRODUCTS

AIWA ▶

Aiwa's DX-C100M 100-disc CD changer lets users create and store in memory a playlist of up to 99 selections from any of the discs loaded in the unit. Other features include a 1-bit digital-to-analog converter, an optical digital output, random play, four repeat modes, direct selection of discs and tracks via ten numeric buttons, and a binder to hold CD liner notes. Dimensions are 8¾ x 13¼ x 14½ inches. Price: \$650. Aiwa, Dept. SR, 800 Corporate Dr., Mahwah, NJ 07430.

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FIRSTAUDIO ▶

FirstAudio's 44-inch-tall M500 speaker combines two 6½-inch woofers and a 1-inch cloth-dome tweeter in a 44-inch-tall cabinet finished in mahogany Formica. Placing the tweeter between the vertically aligned woofers is said to stabilize imaging for off-axis listeners. Bandwidth is given as 37 Hz to 20 kHz and recommended power as 25 to 150 watts. Price: \$1,499 a pair. FirstAudio, distributed by Nova USA, Dept. SR, 700 University Dr. E., Suite 106, College Station, TX 77840.

Circle 121 on reader service card



◀ CERWIN-VEGA

Part of Cerwin-Vega's Stealth Series, the SS 5.2 (shown, \$210) and SS 6.2 (\$230) car speaker systems are designed for use with a subwoofer. Each package includes pairs of 5¼-inch (SS 5.2) or 6½-inch (SS 6.2) woofers with removable grilles, ¾-inch polycarbonate tweeters, and 12-

dB-per-octave crossovers (not shown). The woofers are rated down to 78 and 60 Hz, respectively, and are 2¼ and 2½ inches deep. A surface/flush tweeter-mounting kit is included. Cerwin-Vega, Dept. SR, 555 East Easy St., Simi Valley, CA 93065.

Circle 122 on reader service card



OHM ACOUSTICS ▶

Ohm's Walsh home theater system is designed to reproduce music and movie soundtracks without a center speaker or (except in very large rooms) a separate subwoofer. The 43-inch-tall Walsh 200 front speaker uses a 10-inch inverted-cone driver and a supertweeter, while the 36½-inch-tall SCT-Omni surround speaker uses an 8-inch inverted-cone driver and three tweeters.

The patented, top-mount inverted-cone design is said to produce three-dimensional imaging. Respective low-frequency limits are given as 32 and 40 Hz. Standard finishes are walnut, oak, black, and white (wood veneer on the Walsh 200, vinyl on the SCT-Omni). Price: \$2,545. Ohm Acoustics, Dept. SR, 241 Taaffe Place, Brooklyn, NY 11205-4383.

Circle 123 on reader service card



NEW PRODUCTS



▲ PROTON

The 35-inch NT-3740, Proton's largest TV set to date, uses a flat high-contrast picture tube that's said to deliver 600 lines of horizontal resolution. It features dual-tuner picture-in-picture, which allows two TV programs to be displayed on the screen at once, decoders for closed captioning and stereo sound, a remote control, on-screen

programming cues, and six speakers. There are three rear-panel A/V inputs, an A/V output, a variable-level audio output, an S-video input/output, and a front-panel A/V input. The set is 37 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches wide and 24 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches deep. Price: \$3,000. Proton, Dept. SR, 13855 Struikman Rd., Cerritos, CA 90703.

Circle 124 on reader service card



◀ MB QUART

The 33-inch-tall Quart Two XL speaker from MB Quart teams a 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch woofer, 1-inch titanium-dome tweeter, and a seven-element crossover in a bass-reflex cabinet made of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch high-density particleboard with a black ash finish. Bandwidth is given as 42 Hz to 32 kHz, sensitivity as 88 dB, power-handling capability as 80 watts continuous, and nominal impedance as 4 ohms. Includes removable isolation spikes. Price: \$549 a pair. MB Quart, Dept. SR, 25 Walpole Park So., Walpole, MA 02081-2532.

Circle 127 on reader service card

NEWFORM ▶

The 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch "wide dispersion" ribbon element used in Newform Research's R5-2 speaker handles frequencies above 1.2 kHz. Its slender enclosure is attached to a black oak-grain cabinet containing two 5-inch woofers. The 23-inch-tall system is rated down to 60 Hz. Available factory-direct for \$587 a pair (including shipping) from Newform Research, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 475, Midland, Ontario L4R 4L3; phone, 705-835-9000.

Circle 125 on reader service card



▲ ANGSTROM

Angstrom's Model 200 Home Entertainment Director combines an A/V preamp with switching for six A/V sources and a digital Dolby Pro Logic surround decoder that uses proprietary algorithms and FIR (finite impulse response)

digital filters. It features three digital inputs and a remote control. Price: \$2,995. Angstrom, Div. of MML, Dept. SR, 5273 Commerce Ave., Unit 1, Moorpark, CA 93021.

Circle 126 on reader service card



◀ BIC AMERICA

BIC America's C-10 PWR powered subwoofer packs a 10-inch driver, a 100-watt amp, and an adjustable (50 to 200 Hz) crossover in a 17 x 13 x 16-inch vented cabinet finished in black woodgrain vinyl. Rated down to 32 Hz, it accepts speaker- or line-level inputs. Price: \$449. BIC America, Dept. SR, 883-E Hampshire Rd., Stow, OH 44224.

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Nirvana: Unplugged In New York (DGC) 06284

The Best Of Miles Davis: The Capitol/Blue Note Years (Blue Note) 11000

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

Aaliyah: Age Ain't Nothing But A Number (Jive) 14701

Nirvana: Nevermind (Geffen) 15600

The Best Of Aretha Franklin (Atlantic) 20078

Paul Simon: Negotiations And Love Songs 1971-86 (Warner Bros.) 20461

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Aerosmith: Get A Grip (Geffen) 20814 \$

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 The Notorious B.I.G.: Ready To Die (Bad Boy/Arista) 06160
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 Little Texas: Kick A Little (Warner Bros.) 06163
 Beverly Hills, 90210—The College Years (TV Sdtrk. (Giant) 06168

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Pavarotti: The Early Years, Vol. I (RCA Victor Gold Seal) 06200

Melrose Place—The Music (Giant) 06261

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Black Sheep: Non Fiction (Mercury) 06273

Red Hot Chili Peppers: Out In L.A. (EMI) 06276

Skrynyra Frynds (MCA) 06290

Barbra Streisand: In Hello Dolly (Philips) 06314

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Jeff Lorber: West Side Stories (Verve) 06330

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TLC: CrazySexyCool (LaFace/Arista) 06352

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 Thug Life: Volume 1 (Interscope) 04920 \$
 BLACKstreet (Interscope) 04922

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 Dazed And Confused/Sdtrk. (Giant/Warner Bros.) 04944
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 Changing Faces (Atlantic) 05892
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Soundgarden: Superunknown (A&M) 02515
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 Seal (1994) (Warner Bros./Sire) 05907
 Weezer (DGC) 05943
 Nanci Griffith: Flyer (Elektra) 05982
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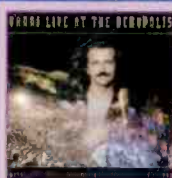
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 The Andrews Sisters: Fiftieth Anniversary, Vol. 1 (MCA) 01770

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Frank Sinatra | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> COUNTRY
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Reba McEntire | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> HARD ROCK
Aerosmith
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Sting | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> CLASSICAL ⁽¹⁾
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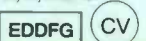
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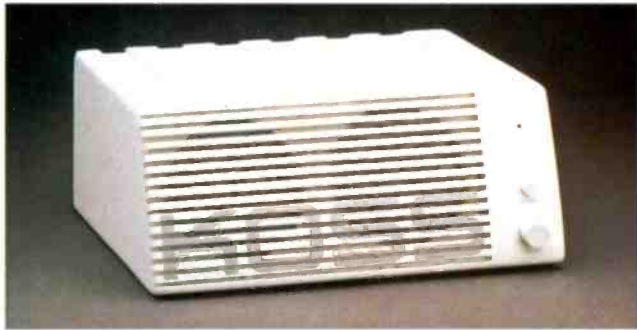


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speeds. A Sanyo magnetic cartridge with LP and 78-rpm diamond styli is included. Wow and flutter is given as 0.025 percent. Price: \$530. Esoteric Sound, Dept. SR, 4813 Wallbank Ave., Downers Grove, IL 60515.

• Circle 129 on reader service card



◀ KOSS

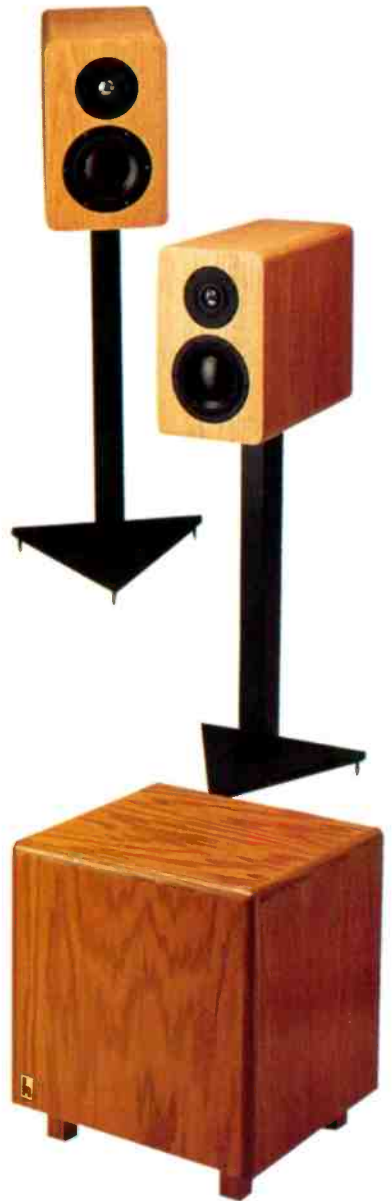
The SW/1 powered subwoofer from Koss is designed to boost the bass output of computer speaker systems. The 12 x 5 x 10-inch module, which carries a lifetime warranty, uses two 4-inch drivers and a 20-watt amp to bolster output in the 40- to 120-Hz range. An AC/DC adaptor is supplied. Price: \$130. Koss, Dept. SR, 4129 N. Port Washington Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212.

• Circle 130 on reader service card

HUBBELL ▶

Hubbell's Sonaré satellite speaker (\$1,399 a pair, shown on Sanus RF24 stands) teams a 5¼-inch woofer and aluminum-dome tweeter in a 12½-inch-tall oak-veneer cabinet; rated response is 53 Hz to 20 kHz ± 3 dB. The 18-inch-square HS12DVC subwoofer (\$549), also in oak veneer, has a 12-inch driver and a bandwidth of 32 to 70 Hz. Hubbell Sound Systems, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 30136, Des Moines, IA 50310.

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▼ FINE LINE AUDIO

Fine Line Audio's patented Phase Around surround-sound decoder is a passive device that connects to a stereo receiver via a tape-monitor loop. It can be configured for three- or five-channel operation and is said to "properly decode" Dolby Surround movie

and music recordings. Available by mail-order for \$129 (plus \$7 shipping and handling) with a thirty-day money-back guarantee. Fine Line Audio, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 123, Elmira, NY 14902-0123; phone, 1-800-828-7200.

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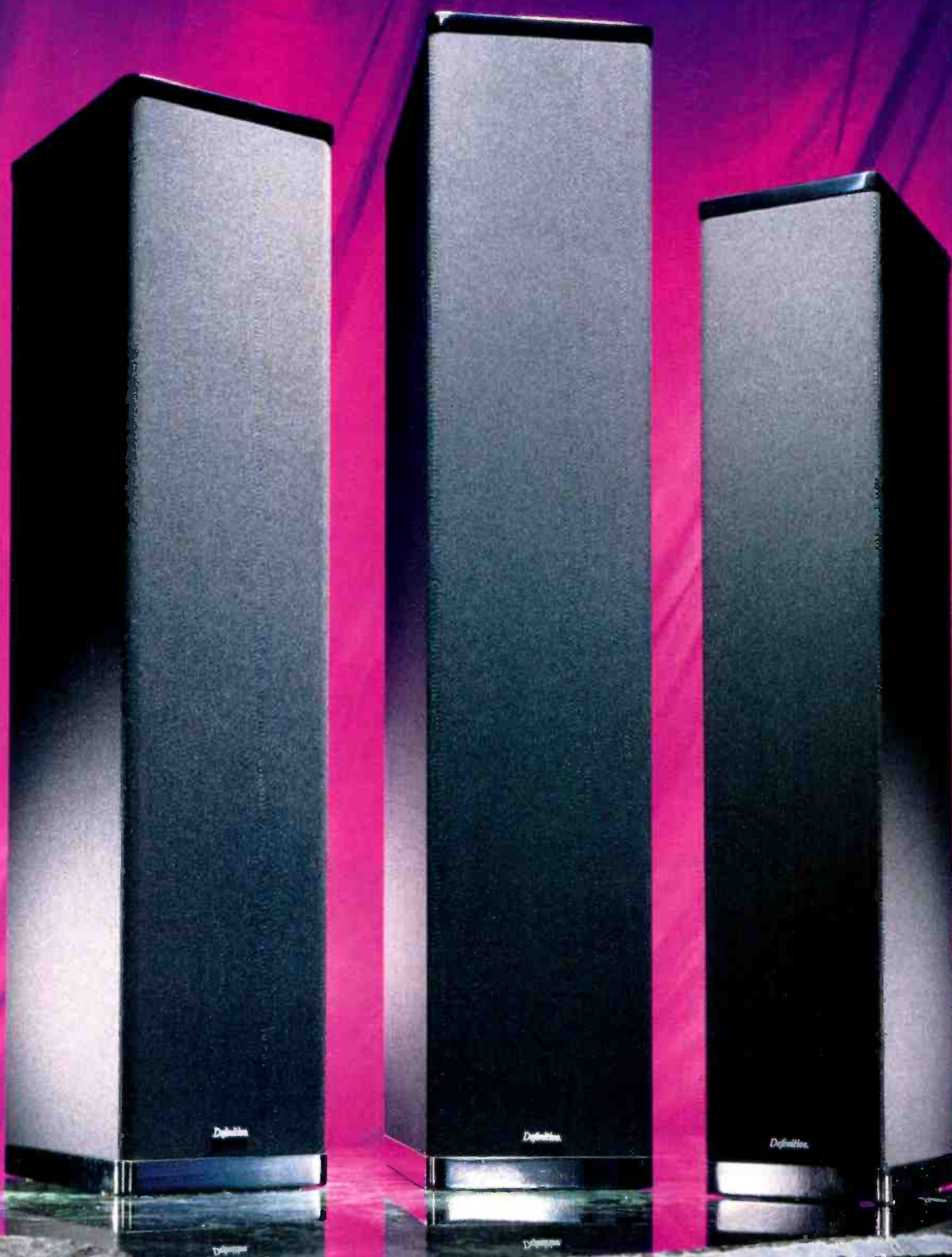


◀ REEL-TALK

Reel-Talk's Radio Talk Show Timer-Recorder is an AM/FM radio with a built-in cassette recorder and a VCR-like timer that can be set to record favorite programs for playback at a later time. Up to 4 hours of continuous recording is possible on one side of a C-120 tape. Available by mail-order for \$99.99 (plus \$15 shipping and handling) with a two-week money-back guarantee. Reel-Talk, Dept. SR, 4790 Irvine Blvd., Suite 105-406, Irvine, CA 92720; phone, 1-800-766-8255.

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AUDIO Q & A

BY IAN G. MASTERS

Garbled Channel

Q My receiver is eight years old, and lately when I play CD's the left channel intermittently becomes garbled and distorted, and the left output meter drops in level. When I switch to the tuner, everything's fine. Can you tell me what's happening and what's the cure?

WILLIAM J. DORR
Stony Point, NY

A You can probably find out by a process of elimination. Since everything's okay when you switch to the tuner, that rules out most of the receiver itself. It could be a problem with the CD player, the connection between it and the receiver, or the input selector itself. Try feeding the CD player temporarily to another high-level input — auxiliary, say, or tape. If everything is fine, you've eliminated the CD player as the source of the problem. If not, try replacing the patch cables between the player and the receiver; if that clears things up, ditch the old cables.

If these tests show that the problem is with the receiver's input jacks or selector, the cure may just be a thorough cleaning. If that doesn't work, a trip to the shop is probably necessary, but I doubt that the repair would be very expensive.

Low-Bass Punch

Q I am mostly happy with my new stereo system, but it doesn't have as much low-bass punch as I would like, even though my speakers have a sensitivity of 100 dB SPL. My receiver puts out 50 watts a channel; should I invest in a new one? An equalizer? Something else?

CALEB WYLIE
Columbus, OH

A Speaker sensitivity has nothing to do with low-bass output; it's simply an indicator of how much output (in decibels) a speaker puts out when it's fed a given input (usually 1 watt). Speaker designers over the years have often sacrificed output in the power-hungry lowest octaves in order to increase overall sensitivity, which might be the case with your speakers. You can try boosting the bass with a graphic equalizer, but I doubt that that will satisfy your craving for low bass. In fact, pushing an EQ's bass bands much beyond a nudge or two might produce distortion since your system's power output is relatively low.

It sounds like a subwoofer is in order. But finding a passive model that matches the high sensitivity of your main speakers will be difficult at best, so look into a powered subwoofer — that is, one that has its own built-in amplifier and crossover. You'll be

able to balance the subwoofer's output with that of your main speakers by adjusting its crossover and level control — without placing an additional burden on your existing amplifier.

Replacing an Amplifier

Q I own a 250-watt power amplifier that dates back to the early 1970's, and I'm wondering whether I should invest in a new one or stick with what I've got. Do newer amplifiers offer significant advantages over what I have now?

PETER THOMPSON
Muskegon, MI

A At the lower end of the price scale, you probably do get more bang for your buck today. But that's largely a matter of money; in absolute terms, top-line power amplifiers back then were very good. So unless your old amp is missing something you need — meters, say, or higher current capability — there's no real point in replacing it.

Secondhand Speakers

Q I recently bought a pair of used speakers, which the previous owner had attached to the ceiling with large screws. I'm not sure if the holes pass all the way through the cabinet, but if they do, what effect will they have on the sound? Also, I'm not sure of the function of the equalizer box that came with the speakers; would a different graphic or parametric model give the same result?

DAEN C. HENDRICKSON
Apache Junction, AZ

A The holes might have no audible effect or a fairly severe one; the only way to know for sure is to plug them and see what happens. If you can't tell whether they go all the way through the enclosure, you might be able to hear by putting your ear to the opening while music is playing. The other thing you can do is hold a candle or match close to the hole while some fairly loud music with lots of bass is playing; watch to see if the rush of air disturbs the flame. If it does, you'll have to plug the opening; the easiest way is simply to insert the sort of screw that made the hole in the first place.

As for the equalizer, some manufacturers supply these with their speakers to help smooth out response irregularities. You could do the same with a conventional equalizer if you knew exactly what correction the dedicated equalizer provided. Or you could adjust it by trial and error until things sounded right, but why go to that

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trouble when the manufacturer has done all the work for you?

Motorized Noise

Q My receiver has a motorized volume-control knob, and when I activate it from the remote control, I hear audible static through the speakers that seems to coincide with the blinking of the red LED on the knob. The noise doesn't occur when I adjust volume by hand. I have had the unit serviced twice and replaced all the cables, but

there is still no change. Any idea what's going on?

KEVIN HARBART
Sacramento, CA

A I would normally suspect dirt in the control itself — usually correctable by a shot of contact cleaner — but that's obviously not the problem here or it would be audible when you made manual adjustments as well. Since it corresponds to the blinking indicator LED, I suspect some sort of electrical interference, perhaps (though probably not) with another component. Does it hap-

pen with all inputs or just with, say, your CD player? If the latter, simply rearranging the components may do the trick.

If the interference is inside the receiver itself, there's not much you can do other than take it in for service once again. But before you do that, it might be worthwhile to borrow another, identical receiver and see if the same thing happens. If not, a qualified technician should be able to repair your receiver; otherwise, it may be a design fault.

Converting Power

Q I would like to buy an amplifier, but I'm stationed in Europe and the power standard here is 220 volts. If I buy equipment to use here, will it be difficult and expensive to have it converted when I return home?

MICHAEL SANCHEZ
Schweinfurt, Germany

A It will either be a breeze or virtually impossible, depending on the specific model you buy. Not only is the voltage different, but the standard line frequency as well: Europe and some other parts of the world use 50 Hz rather than our 60 Hz. With some equipment, even if you do manage to find a way to adapt the voltage — no big deal — the various circuits designed to filter out AC hum might not work properly. On the other hand, lots of components are designed to work in a variety of markets, and those can usually accommodate the various line frequencies. In Japan, both 50 and 60 Hz are used domestically, so most Japanese-made equipment can handle both. If, as is often the case, the component has a multi-position voltage switch on the back panel, you can safely buy that model and use it when you get home.

Vanishing Models

Q Several times I have bought audio equipment of a particular brand, intending to add matching models later when my budget permitted, only to find that the line had been discontinued. In one case, the manufacturer dropped the models I was interested in, in another the company had gone out of business. Is there anywhere I can go to find specific unsold or "factory extras" of the equipment I want?

BRUCE AUGUSTINE
Hollis, NH

A While you may be able to find specific models in audio stores if you hunt hard enough, I'm not aware of anyone who specializes in cataloging such products. Your best bet is probably the secondhand market. Audio Classics of Walton, New York (607-865-7200), publishes a catalog of new and used stereo equipment that may list some of the components you seek. Also check the newspaper want ads.

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

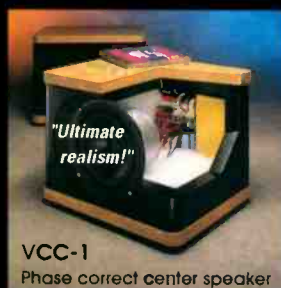
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*Quote excerpted from a review of the **SRS (●)®** technology from the April 1992 issue of *Audio Magazine*. The Vivid 3D sound enhancement system won the Retail Vision "Best Product" award in May 1994, and the Innovations award from the International Consumer Electronics Show in June 1994. © 1994 NuReality. All rights reserved. SRS is a registered trademark of SRS Labs. All product names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders. SR2



SIGNALS

BY KEN C. POHLMANN

The Battle of the Balcony

Most of us have all but forgotten that long before color television there was something called black-and-white TV. When the tiny, grainy screen was introduced it had a dramatic impact on the way people spent their free time. Feeling threatened, the mighty movie industry responded with wider-screen, more colorful movies. Then along came color television. Even though programs like *Bonanza* featured panoramic shots of a Hollywood set, people were fascinated with the changeover from black-and-white to color images. The NBC peacock became a national icon, and TV almost immediately gave birth to a strange new life form — the couch potato.

Now, thanks to television's total conquest of our society, we have become a sedentary bunch — eyes glued to the screen, one hand in the bag of Fritos, the other on the remote. Television screens have gotten much, much larger, and many are now hooked up to audio systems, a growing number of which are designed to deliver enveloping, theater-like sound.

Meanwhile, many movie theaters are now called cineplexes, which means that the theaters are about the size of your living room and have screens that aren't much bigger than a king-size projection TV. Keenly sensing that movie theaters may be facing obsolescence, the movie studios have determined that digital audio is really more than a fad and, in fact, should be incorporated into their films.

Clearly, any new motion-picture audio system must be multichannel, with at least left, right, and center channels, two surround channels for ambience, and a subwoofer channel. To reduce the large amount of data necessary to convey all of that information, a digital cinema system must employ some sort of compression scheme. Optical soundtracks have to be robust, able to withstand hundreds or thousands of passes through the projector, so reliable error correction is mandated. In addition, the system must support high-speed copying for mass replication of films. In other words, it ain't easy.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of

putting digital soundtracks on film is finding somewhere to put the audio data. Motion pictures normally have an optical analog soundtrack, called the stereo variable area (SVA), printed along the frame's edge. Several digital formats have been developed that preserve this conventional optical track while adding multichannel digital audio data, optically encoded on the film itself. In other systems, external audio playback devices are synchronized to the picture using a time-code stripe added to conventional motion-picture film. Both kinds of systems provide compatibility with existing motion-picture projection systems, and in the event of catastrophic damage to the digital soundtrack, they automatically and momentarily switch to the optical analog tracks. Many companies have tried to capture the theater sound market, and failed, but now three systems have emerged as true contenders. Their technologies are all, to one

Dolby Laboratories, a company with tremendous experience in both home and theater sound, hit the screens with *Batman Returns*. It retains analog optical tracks for compatibility and adds an optical data track between the film's sprocket holes, on the same side as the analog tracks. The digital tracks consist of six audio channels sampled at 48 kHz, quantized with 18 bits, and encoded using Dolby's AC-3 data-compression algorithm — a technology that is also moving swiftly into the home via laserdisc and (eventually) HDTV. While the film is rolling, a scanner reads the optical digital information, which is then demultiplexed, decompressed, and fed to the theater's sound system.

The Sony Dynamic Digital Sound (SDDS) system debuted inauspiciously with *The Last Action Hero*, one of Arnold's lesser efforts. In SDDS, as many as eight audio channels are encoded using

Movie studios have determined that digital audio is really more than a fad and, in fact, should be incorporated into their films.

degree or another, works in progress, but their goals are as visible as the big screen itself.

If you are still having nightmares about *Jurassic Park*, it might be because many theaters showed the film with DTS sound, a brainchild of Digital Theater Systems. DTS is a double-medium system that stores the digital audio data external to the movie film, in this case on CD-ROM's. A time-code track placed between the picture and the standard analog optical track is used to synchronize the film with the external CD-ROM drives. DTS discs contain six data-compressed audio channels, which are delivered to external compression decoders that plug into movie-house sound systems. One of the biggest problems in any double system is the potential for physically losing the audio tracks. DTS addresses this issue by placing the CD-ROM's in shipping containers that fit inside the standard cases used to ship 2,000-foot projection reels to theaters.

The Dolby Stereo Digital system from

the ATRAC data-reduction algorithm, originally devised for MiniDisc, and placed in two data tracks running outside the perforation holes, one thin stripe on each side of the film. The analog optical tracks are retained. A full-bore system has five playback loudspeakers placed behind the screen, a subwoofer, and two arrays of surround speakers, but theaters have the option of using a scaled-down version with just three front speakers.

Given these three more or less incompatible systems (the Sony and Dolby soundtracks and the DTS time-code can actually all fit on the same film, and there have been a number of dual-format releases), it is hard to predict which might win the struggle. Mainly that's a question of cost to studios and theaters — and Hollywood muscle. But the real question is whether even souped-up movie theaters can compete with home theaters. That battle for the hearts, minds, and concession-stand dollars of Americans will determine whether we'll go to the movies, or the movies will come to us. □

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A speaker must be large to deliver real bass.**
Our CRS monitors will astound you with their ample
bass, thanks to computer-optimized DCD bass units
(advanced technology borrowed from our acclaimed
Lynnfield VR Series).

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Small speakers have small,
anemic tweeters.** Not so. The
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25mm Kortec™ tweeter in our
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smooth, incredibly detailed,
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PERIPHERALS

PRODUCTS AND TRENDS

THAT GO BEYOND

MAINSTREAM AUDIO/VIDEO

Video-Game Soundtracks Get Real

BY MARJORIE COSTELLO

The stark scene opens on a frail-looking, bearded old codger cranking away on a gramophone playing a simple, tinny-sounding melody. A contemporary beat fades up. Suddenly, a boombox and a hooting gorilla come crashing down, accompanied by new-age music and a colorful jungle landscape. The robust sound and vivid graphics knock the old fellow and his music out of the scene.

The opening of Nintendo's latest blockbuster video game, *Donkey Kong Country*, could serve as a metaphor for the transformation that has occurred in video-game soundtracks since the days of early titles like *Pong*. Gone are the plinkity-plink melodies and mind-numbing blips and bleeps. As you maneuver your way through *Donkey Kong Country's* dozens of levels (or at least try to), the action is propelled by driving music and realistic sound effects.

In making the move from simple toys-for-boys to a more sophisticated form of entertainment, video-game companies are responding to the public's growing appetite for more realistic action with enhanced graphics and sound quality. And with competition intense in the \$6 billion video-game industry, it seems that each week brings a new game or system that promises to raise the level of audio quality.

In the early days of video games, sound was "almost an afterthought," recalls Michael Kelbaugh, product testing supervisor for Nintendo. "[The soundtrack] would not be developed until the last minute. But as an industry we are now giving audio a lot more emphasis. It's as important as anything else in the game. Blips and bleeps have been replaced by more dynamics."

While the fiercely competitive Sega of America (based in Redwood City, California) and Nintendo of America



Spencer Nilsen (front) shows off Sega's state-of-the-art audio production facility.

(Redmond, Washington) seldom agree on anything, they both equate scoring video games to creating movie soundtracks. "We're trying to blow the people away when they put the game audio up on their speakers," says Spencer Nilsen, director of the San Francisco-based Sega Music Group, a state-of-the-art audio composition, mixing, and post-production facility. "We use the movies as the model [so we can give game players] a very personal, surround-sound experience."

The video-game industry's major break with its past step-child treatment of audio occurred when Sega and Nintendo introduced 16-bit cartridge-based systems as replacements for the crude 8-bit machines that dominated the games scene in the Eighties. The increased memory and processing speed of Sega Genesis, introduced in 1989, and the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, or SNES (1991), paved the way for game designers to pack not only more color and action into their games but to feature better-sounding and more elaborate audio tracks as well.

Video-game quality is directly related to the amount of memory designers dedicate to the audio and video portions, as well as to how much compression they use to squeeze in as much data as possible. It's also a function of the system's processing power, the storage capacity of game media, and the ingenuity of programmers and designers. Of course, budget and pricing considerations play a role in determining which features the game companies can put into their hardware and software and still remain competitive. But, as independent video-game composer Mitchell Stein points out, "Game companies now realize that better audio doesn't cost that much more."

The Sega Genesis system (\$100) uses a Yamaha chip to synthesize FM tones and generate audio on the fly during game play. In 1993, Sega upped the audio ante with its Sega CD module (\$229), a CD-ROM drive that connects to the Genesis console. Thanks to CD-ROM's immense storage capacity, Sega CD's incorporate generous sequences of full-bandwidth CD-quality audio. Sega also offers the Genesis



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In sum: the CT-27v is the heart (and soul) of the most uncompromising home theater system. For more of the story, contact Carver today for a feature length brochure.

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CIRCLE NO. 44 ON READER SERVICE CARD

CAMBRIDGE
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BY HENRY KLOSS



Includes
Guide To
Surround
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At Cambridge SoundWorks we make speakers and music systems designed by Henry Kloss (founder of AR, KLH & Advent). We sell them—and components from companies like Sony, Pioneer, Philips, Carver and others—factory-direct, with no expensive middlemen. For example, a Dolby Pro Logic Surround Sound system with Model Six speakers, rear speakers, a Sony Pro Logic receiver and remote is only \$747. Call today and find out why *Audio* magazine said we may have “the best value in the world.”

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CDX (\$399), a portable system that plays Genesis cartridges, Sega CD's, and regular music CD's (JVC's X'Eye and Pioneer's LaserActive entertainment systems also play Sega Genesis cartridges and Sega CD's).

Nintendo's SNES (\$100) retrieves and plays sound samples from a Sony-made eight-channel digital sampling card that produces effects like reverb and delay.

The 3DO Multiplayer, currently available for \$399 from Panasonic and Goldstar, is a more powerful 32-bit CD-based system that reached stores in late 1993. (The system was developed by the 3DO Company and is made and sold by third-party licensees.) It incorporates a custom digital signal processor that “can create interesting effects such as reverb and feedback loops” as well as digitized speech, explains R. J. Mical, co-developer of the 3DO system. It also uses proprietary algorithms to produce a 3-D surround-sound effect. Like the Sega CD module, the 3DO system plays standard CD's — it even has a Color Echo mode that creates kaleidoscopic images in sync with the music.

Pushing the Sound Envelope

The introduction of Sega CD and the company's subsequent licensing of the image-enhancing QSound system pushed the Genesis system's audio performance to the next level. Sega CD's featuring QSound — such as *Jurassic Park*, *Ecco the Dolphin*, and *Ecco: The Tides of Time* — offer 3-D audio and other effects. At the end of last year, Sega also rolled out its Genesis 32X module (under \$160), which upgrades the 16-bit Genesis and Sega CD systems to 32-bit gaming power. Sega is promising that 32X software will deliver the first “full implementation” of QSound in video-game play.

To further enhance game soundtracks, some Nintendo and 3DO titles are encoded in Dolby Surround for playback through a Dolby Pro Logic-equipped audio rig. For the Nintendo system, the Dolby Surround lineup includes *King Arthur's World* (Jaleco) and such more recent titles as *Jurassic Park* (Ocean), *Vortex* (Electro Brain), and *Lost Vikings* (Interplay).

3DO's Dolby Surround list includes *Shock Wave*, *Jump Gate*, and *Road Rash* (all from Electronic Arts). The capabilities of the 3DO player, coupled with Dolby Surround playback,

make these games among the most spectacular in terms of sound quality.

Video-game companies are also exploring new and expanded sources of content for music. The 3DO title *Road Rash*, for example, features fourteen rock songs from six A&M recording artists, including Soundgarden. Another 3DO title, with a classical bent, is the cleverly named *C.P.U. Bach* (MicroProse), which taps artificial intelligence to “write” music inspired by the works of Johann Sebastian.

Apart from the game companies' sound-enhancing efforts, NuReality of Santa Ana, California is marketing the Vivid 3D system, an \$80 add-on device incorporating the Hughes-developed SRS (Sound Retrieval System), which is designed to provide a three-dimensional effect with only two speakers. The device requires no special coding, so it can be used with any game system.

The bar will again be raised in audio performance as a host of new, more powerful game systems reach store shelves this year. Among them are Sega's Saturn, Nintendo's Ultra 64, and 3DO's M2 Accelerator. Even consumer-electronics giant Sony is planning to jump on the video-game bandwagon with its PlayStation system. All of the new game systems will be CD-based (except for Nintendo's Ultra 64) and cost more than current systems (prices are expected to range from

**“Game companies
now realize that better
audio doesn't cost that
much more.”**

— Mitchell Stein
video-game composer

\$200 to more than \$400). These next-generation game systems will also look more like traditional A/V components, which manufacturers hope will inspire more people to add gaming capability to their home theater systems. And you thought video games were just kid stuff? □

Marjorie Costello, based in New York City, is a writer/consultant specializing in consumer electronics and high technology.

How Do You Improve On "... The Best Value In The World"?

Cambridge SoundWorks Introduces *New Ensemble*, *New Ensemble II* – and a new member of the family, *Ensemble III*.

Audio magazine once said our *Ensemble*® speaker system may be "the best value in the world." Since then, numerous critics have applauded our *Ensemble* and *Ensemble II* systems. Designed by Henry Kloss (founder of AR, KLH and Advent), they became best sellers by offering quality construction and accurate, wide-range music reproduction — at factory-direct prices.

We're pleased to introduce new versions of our *Ensemble* and *Ensemble II* systems, as well as our new, ultra-compact *Ensemble III*.

The New Ensemble

New Ensemble is an improved version of our original dual-subwoofer/satellite speaker system. *New Ensemble* maintains the dual subwoofer design, which allows for maximum room placement flexibility. Placement of bass and high-frequency speakers in a room (and how those speakers interact with the room) has more influence on the sound quality of a music system than just about anything. *New Ensemble's* ultra-slim (4 1/2") subwoofers give you more placement flexibility than any system we know of.



So What's New?

New Ensemble maintains the tonal balance, frequency range and quality of construction of the original. There are two basic differences.

1. *New Ensemble* uses a new 8" woofer with a very long "throw" for linear cone excursion and more accurate bass. An integral heat sink provides improved power handling.

2. *New Ensemble's* satellite speakers use the same speaker drivers and crossover as the original, but with new midrange and high frequency balance controls.

The midrange control lets you choose the same output in the key 800-1600 Hz octave as in the original, or you can emphasize that octave by 2 dB. *Ensemble* satellites have relatively less output in this range to avoid the "boxy" sound typical of many speakers. This results in an "open" sound on large-scale symphonic works. For small-scaled music, the higher output position proves a "warmer" sound.

A high frequency control has three positions: A) The same balance as original *Ensemble*. B) A 2 dB high frequency increase. C) A 2 dB high frequency decrease. The switch can subtly increase the system's "airiness" (Increase) or it can reduce any tendency towards "edginess" (Decrease).

In terms of "real life" performance, we believe our *New Ensemble* system competes head-on with speakers selling for hundreds more. Available with black-laminate subwoofers for \$629, or with vinyl-clad subwoofers for \$549.

The New Ensemble II

New Ensemble II is an improved version of our best-selling speaker system. It's more affordable than *New Ensemble* because it uses one cabinet to house both subwoofer speakers. *New Ensemble II* maintains the tonal balance, frequency range, power handling and construction quality of the original *Ensemble II*. But its satellite speakers use the same tonal balance controls as *New Ensemble's*.

New Ensemble II also uses a new flared subwoofer port. The subwoofer cabinet encloses two 6 1/2" long throw woofers mounted in a sealed "acoustic suspension" chamber. They project into a second chamber fitted with the flared port, which provides smoother air flow, eliminating extraneous noise on strong bass notes.

Stereo Review said the original *Ensemble II* "performs so far beyond its price and size it can be compared only with much larger speakers at substantially higher prices." *New Ensemble II* carries on this tradition, outperforming other speakers in its category, including well-known models for about twice the price. Factory-direct price, \$439.

The Ensemble III

Now you can bring the clear, balanced wide-range sound of *Ensemble* speakers to a small, crowded room. Our new *Ensemble III's* satellite



speakers are only 4 1/2" x 6 1/2" x 3" and its subwoofer is 8" x 8" x 15".

Compared to *New Ensemble II*, *Ensemble III* gives up a little in power handling, low bass range, and efficiency. Unlike the "cube" satellite speakers you'll find in most similarly priced systems, *Ensemble III's* satellites are two-way speakers. *Ensemble III's* 6 1/2" woofer uses two

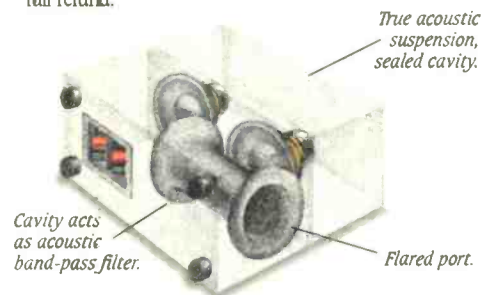
voice coils in a cabinet with a flared port for smooth air flow.

With most recordings *Ensemble III* will sound virtually identical to *New Ensemble II*. It simply won't play as loud. Its construction quality is normally found only in much more expensive speakers.

Factory-direct price, including connecting wire, cutter/stripper and Hook-Up Guide, is only \$329.

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CIRCLE NO. 6 ON READER SERVICE CARD



TECHNICAL TALK

BY JULIAN HIRSCH

Audio's Ongoing Evolution

As regular readers of STEREO REVIEW appreciate, the hi-fi world has undergone some major changes in recent years. That has been dramatically evident in the focus of recent trade shows, such as the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) held in Las Vegas last January.

From its inception, "high-fidelity" audio was just that — a means of enjoying high-quality sound (usually in the form of music) in the home. In the early years, from the end of World War II to the 1950's, the improvement of component hi-fi over the console radio/phonograph that preceded it was largely achieved by putting the speaker (only one, in those pre-stereo days) in an enclosure separate from the main cabinet, sometimes adding a tweeter to improve the high-frequency response.

The roughly contemporaneous growth of FM broadcasting and the LP record made a pronounced improvement in sound quality. Many people, finding a large console cabinet to be unnecessary as well as inconvenient for a system formed of several discrete components, preferred to use a separate tuner and amplifier (with or without a record player) instead of a one-piece receiver. Those amplifiers were often derivatives of low-powered public-address (PA) models, with power ratings typically less than 25 watts.

The development of stereo FM and phonograph systems in the late 1950's and early 1960's spurred the design of two-channel amplifiers (initially, some people chose to add a separate amplifier for the second channel, and several companies produced stereo adapters that staved off system obsolescence by providing the necessary balance and gain adjustments for two amplifiers). Early in the transition to stereo FM, as in the case of stereo phonograph discs, there were several mutually incompatible encoding/decoding systems vying for acceptance, and some tuner manufacturers left space on their monophonic products for future add-on decoders that would presumably forestall incompatibility regardless of the final choice. I never heard of any of these add-

on decoders actually being produced, however.

By the early 1960's, a typical home stereo system was essentially similar to today's, and some of them are still, I imagine, doing a fine job. A feature of the 1970's was quadraphonics, a precursor of today's much more successful Dolby Surround system, which suffered from several fatal illnesses. None of the developers of the several mutually incompatible systems (SQ, QS, CD-4) agreed on exactly what they were trying to achieve, other than putting the listener in the midst of four vaguely different and uncertainly located sound sources.

There was also an early attempt to enhance the spatial character of the sound by driving rear or side speakers with a delayed version of the main signal. That could produce some interesting effects, but the delay units were too expensive to

hibit were devoted entirely or in part to home theater, ranging from numerous displays of whole new families of loudspeakers specifically designed for that purpose to arrays of the most elaborate and expensive audio/video electronic components, video projectors, and the like.

The demonstrations of some of these audio/video systems reminded me of the early days of stereo, when recordings of locomotives, over-flying airplanes, and thunderstorms were often used to drive home in a not-too-subtle manner the difference between this new sound and the old-fashioned variety. This year I found that after a while the ear-splitting selections from *Jurassic Park* and other highly dynamic material, impressive as they were, got to be a bit wearying.

In fairness, a number of manufacturers displayed product lines in all price ranges that were still recognizable for their audio

The A/V demonstrations reminded me of the early days of stereo, when recordings of locomotives and thunderstorms were used to drive home the difference between the new sound and the old-fashioned.

gain a significant share of the market. Barring these efforts and the hugely successful introduction of the cassette tape recorder by Philips and its licensees, there was little fundamental change in the makeup of home audio systems until the early 1980's, when the introduction of the CD kicked off the digital revolution.

We all know what the compact disc did to the phonograph in less than a decade. Beyond that, it heralded a seemingly endless series of previously unimaginable electronic wonders based on digital technology. That can be a very healthy trend, and I am all for it. The only caution that comes to mind is the thought that merely because something can now be done for the first time, through digital means, does not necessarily make it a useful or desirable achievement.

Coming to today's audio scene, we find ourselves in the midst of the home theater boom. At the recent Consumer Electronics Show, a large number of the audio ex-

functions, and there were others whose video-oriented components were both affordable and practical for a large segment of the buying public.

Anyway, it is certain that home theater will be with us for some time to come. It would be easy to assume, from some of the show demonstrations and the elegant A/V installations appearing in the press, that home theater is the province solely of the very wealthy or those whose idea of entertainment consists of violence and destruction at high sound levels, ad infinitum. Fortunately, it is not limited to either group, and the explosive growth of audio/video entertainment means that it will become an increasingly attractive option for the public at large.

And, in case you are worried about stereo music reproduction sans video disappearing from the market, be of good cheer. There is a lot of life left in hi-fi as we know it. Actually, the best is yet to come. □

In The Mid '70s We Created Home Theater. Now We've Created A New Way To Buy It.



The people who work at Cambridge SoundWorks - including our cofounder Henry Kloss (who also founded AR, KLH and Advent) - have been involved with the concept of home theater from the beginning. In 1969 (years before VCRs and cable TV), Henry Kloss founded Advent, the company that introduced the first home theater audio/video systems - complete with big-screen TVs and digital surround sound. We have had an ongoing relationship with the people at Dolby Laboratories, creators of Dolby Surround Sound, since Henry Kloss introduced the *first* consumer products with Dolby noise reduction over 20 years ago. And now at Cambridge SoundWorks we believe we have set a new price-to-performance standard for home theater components.



Surround Speakers

Cambridge SoundWorks makes two "dipole radiator" surround sound speakers. Dolby Laboratories recommends dipole radiator speakers for use as surround speakers.

The Surround has a very high power handling capacity and is often selected for "high end" surround sound systems. *Audio*, describing a system that included *The*

Surround said, "In many ways the surround sensation was every bit as good as far more expensive installations." **\$399 pr.** The smaller *The Surround II* is arguably the country's best value in a dipole radiator speaker. **\$249 pr.**

Powered Subwoofers

The original *Powered Subwoofer* by Cambridge SoundWorks consists of a heavy-



duty 12" woofer housed in an acoustic suspension cabinet with a 140-watt amplifier and a built-in electronic crossover. *Stereo Review* said it provides "deep powerful bass...31.5 Hz bass output was obtainable at a room-shaking level... they open the way to having a 'killer' system for an affordable price." **\$699.** Our *Slave Subwoofer* uses the same woofer driver and cabinet, but does not include the amplifier or crossover. It can only be used in conjunction with the *Powered Subwoofer*. **\$299.** The new *Powered Subwoofer II* uses a 120-watt amplifier with an 8" woofer. **\$399.**

Our *EXO-1* electronic crossover can be used with either of our powered subwoofer systems,

or with powered subwoofers made by other companies. Its high pass filters keep strong, low bass signals out of the main stereo speakers, and directs them to the powered subwoofer. **\$299.**

Home Theater Speaker Systems

We have assembled a number of home theater speaker systems that consist of center channel, surround and main stereo speakers. The



combination we show here is our best seller. It includes our critically acclaimed *Ensemble* subwoofer satellite speaker system (with dual subwoofers), our *Center Channel Plus* and a pair of our best surround speakers, *The Surround*. You could spend hundreds more than its **\$1,167** price without improving performance.

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Center Channel Speakers

Cambridge SoundWorks manufactures three speakers for use as center channel speakers in Dolby Pro Logic home theater systems. All three are magnetically shielded so they can be placed near a TV or computer monitor. *Model Ten-A* is a small, affordable two-way speaker. **\$80.** *Center Channel* is identical to a



Cambridge SoundWorks *Ensemble* satellite (but with magnetic shielding). **\$149.** *Center Channel Plus* uses an ultra-low, ultra-wide design that is ideal for placement above (or, with optional support stand, below) a TV monitor. **\$219.**

TEST REPORTS



Harman Kardon AVR25 A/V Receiver

DAVID RANADA • TECHNICAL EDITOR

Holding the second slot among Harman Kardon's A/V receivers, the new AVR25 is rated at 75 watts per channel in stereo mode, 65 watts for each of the three front speakers and 25 watts for the surrounds in surround mode. In addition to standard Dolby Pro Logic decoding, it offers two surround modes, Theater and Stadium, both designed for ambience enhancement of conventional two-channel music recordings.

The receiver provides two sets of A/V connections for VCR's (one play-only), one A/V input for a laserdisc player, two sets of connections for audio tape decks (both record/play), and one input each for a CD player, a phonograph cartridge, and another line-level auxiliary audio source. The rear-panel VCR2 play-only A/V connections have front-panel duplicates that can be selected by a front-panel push-button, effectively giving the receiver yet another A/V input, though one that

cannot be switched from the remote control.

All the video connections are phono jacks for standard composite video, as are the two rear-panel video-monitor outputs. All the back-panel input jacks are arrayed horizontally, easing "blind" hookup by feel from in front of the receiver, and the various video connectors are directly above their corre-

DIMENSIONS

17 $\frac{3}{8}$ INCHES WIDE, 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ INCHES HIGH,
16 $\frac{1}{2}$ INCHES DEEP

WEIGHT

27 POUNDS

PRICE

\$769

MANUFACTURER

HARMAN KARDON, DEPT. SR, 240 CROSSWAYS
PARK WEST, WOODBURY, NY 11797

sponding audio jacks. In that respect, as in ease of use generally, the AVR25 represents an improvement over the top-of-the-line AVR30, which we reviewed in the April 1993 issue. The AVR25 also boasts about 1 dB more power in each channel. The AVR30 retains the advantage in versatility, however, with more inputs and seven music-enhancement modes.

A line-level preamp-out/main-in loop is provided for the front left and right channels, and there are also preamp outputs for the center and surround channels, enabling you to replace any of the receiver's internal power amplifiers with more powerful external ones and facilitating connection of a powered subwoofer or two-channel equalizer. (The manual's page 11 mistakenly shows a hookup driving an external front-speaker amplifier from the Main-In jacks rather than the Pre-Out connections, however. Also, the manual calls the front panel's FM Mode button the FM Mono button, which is what it really is.) Connectors for main left and right and remote speakers are multiway binding posts that take single or dual banana plugs and wire ends, but not spade lugs.

PHOTO: JOCK P. LEUNG

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The original cool cats of contemporary jazz, Russ Freeman and The Rippingtons, have been exploring the genre with outstanding musicianship, new ideas and innovative experiments for almost ten years. With Freeman's supple guitar work and the group's inventive performances, *Sahara* reaches beyond the band's past musical boundaries by adding vocals to their signature instrumentals.



Russ Freeman & The Rippingtons—Sahara (GRP) 102•293

Jeff Lorber—West Side Stories (Verve Forecast) 114•090

Clarke/Carlton/Cobham/Johnson/Najee—Live At The Greek (Slamm Dunk/Epic) 489•120

Chet Baker—My Funny Valentine (Pacific Jazz) 474•957

Charlie Parker—Now's The Time (Verve) 429•605

Dave Grusin—The Orchestral Album (GRP) 111•047

Kenny G—Duotones (Arista) 346•544

Harry Connick, Jr.—Blue Light, Red Light (Columbia) 429•191

Fourplay (James, Ritenour, East & Mason) (Warner Bros.) 428•334

Dave Koz (Capitol) 420•539

John Coltrane—Giant Steps (Atlantic) 371•591



Hiroshima—Hiroshima/L.A. (Reprise/Qwest) 101•451

Ray Charles—His Grt. Hits, Vol. 1 (DCC Compact Classics) 365•791

Dave Koz—Lucky Man (Capitol) 461•848

Dave Brubeck Quartet—Time Out (Columbia Jazz Masterpieces) 353•060

Miles Davis—Kind Of Blue (Columbia Jazz Masterpieces) 353•045

A Tribute To The Music Of Buddy Rich—Various Artists (Atlantic) 108•589

The Rippingtons—Live In L.A. (GRP) 463•471

The Rippingtons—Weekend In Monaco (GRP) 445•296

Kenny G—Breathless (Arista) 448•142

Duke Ellington—Ellington At Newport (CL Jazz Masterpieces) 354•662

Charles Mingus—The Complete Town Hall Concert (Blue Note) 488•718

Carnegie Hall Salutes The Jazz Masters—Various Artists (Verve) 484•774

Best Of Thelonious Monk (Blue Note) 419•663

Betty Carter—Feed The Fire (Verve) 110•064

Best Of Earl Klugh (Blue Note) 419•655

Kenny G. Live (Arista) 401•505

Grover Washington, Jr.—Next Exit (Columbia) 435•396

Anthology Of Grover Washington, Jr. (Elektra) 338•632

George Benson—The Collection (Warner Bros.) 312•892

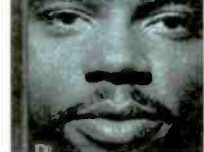
The Best Of The Manhattan Transfer (Atlantic) 312•009

Lee Ritenour—Rio (GRP) 111•617

Ella Fitzgerald—First Lady Of Song (Verve) 110•494

Kenny G—Miracles (Arista) 106•567

Boney James—Backbone (Warner Bros.) 102•186



Norman Brown—After The Storm (Mojazz) 481•796

Billie Holiday—Billie's Best (Verve) 447•607

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NEW AGE

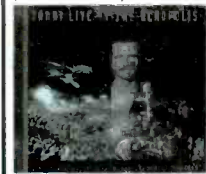
Jan Hammer—Beyond The Mind's Eye (Miramar) 489•617

Tangerine Dream—Turn Of The Tides (Miramar) 489•591

Piano Sampler II—Various Artists (Windham Hill) 489•468

In Search Of Angels—Various Artists (Windham Hill) 488•247

Ray Lynch—Nothing Above My Shoulders But The Evening (Windham Hill) 487•108



Yanni—Live At The Acropolis (Private Music) 475•178

Nature Sounds Series—Music Of Nature (Special Music Co.) 478•057

Best Of Herbie Hancock (Blue Note) 419•408

Sound Of Jazz—Various Artists (Cl Jazz Masterpieces) 408•732

Richard Elliot—After Dark (Blue Note) 108•407

Art Porter—Undercover (Verve Forecast) 101•279

Andreas Vollenweider—Eolian Minstrel (SBK) 471•300



Windham Hill Sampler '94—Various Artists (Windham Hill) 483•487

Jim Oliver—Music For Relaxation (Relaxation Company) 471•110

Kitaro—Dream (Geffen) 444•299

Passion—Music For Guitar—Various Artists (Narada) 111•146

Ottmar Liebert & Luna Negra—The Hours Between Night & Day (Epic) 464•149

Mark Whitfield—True Blue (Verve) 110•528

Charo—Guitar Passion (Universal Wave) 486•076

Al Jarreau—Breakin' Away (Warner Bros.) 311•084

Red Hot On Impulse—Various Artists (Impulse) 113•456

The Brecker Brothers—Out Of The Loop (GRP) 107•201

Mei Torme—The Great American Songbook (Telarc) 483•628



Since bursting onto the music scene two years ago, tenor saxman Joshua Redman has made his mark on the jazz community by mixing his musical prowess with a finely-honed academic sensibility. Performing with his quartet on *MoodSwing*, this *summa cum laude* Harvard grad continues to expand his artistic vision on original compositions that soulfully explore vast and varied emotional terrains.



Joshua Redman—MoodSwing (Warner Bros.) 106•872

Shirley Horn—I Love You, Paris (Verve) 103•705

Joe Sample And The Soul Committee—Did You Feel That? (Warner Bros.) 102•269

Dr. John—Television (MCA/GRP) 478•073

The Modern Jazz Quartet—A 40th Anniversary Celebration (Atlantic) 475•228

Lee Ritenour—Wes Bound (GRP) 456•756

Branford Marsalis—I Heard You Twice The First Time (Columbia) 445•460

Stan Getz & Joao Gilberto—Getz/Gilberto (Verve) 426•221

Stanley Jordan—Bolero (Arista) 475•095

Joshua Redman—Wish (Warner Bros.) 466•664

Joshua Redman (Warner Bros.) 458•778

Ginger Baker Trio—Going Back Home (Atlantic) 102•558



Marcus Roberts—Gershwin For Lovers (Columbia) 102•848

Dinah Washington—Compact Jazz (Mercury) 429•613

Stanley Jordan—Stolen Moments (Blue Note) 433•417

David Benoit—Shaken, Not Stirred (GRP) 103•903

Boney James—Trust (Warner Bros.) 107•268

Basia—The Sweetest Illusion (Epic) 477•331



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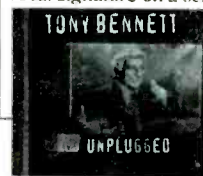


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American songbook standards for years and, like a fine wine, only improves with age.

Tony Bennett—MTV Unplugged (Columbia) 486*746



With his unerring chops, impeccable timing and soaring alto sax, five time Grammy-winner David Sanborn has been creating soulful and elegant music for more than a decade. These 16 favorites—with guests like Marcus Miller, Omar Hakim, Luther Vandross, James Taylor & Patti Austin—spotlight the virtuosic mastery of this jazz/pop superstar as both soloist and bandleader.



David Sanborn—The Best Of David Sanborn (Reprise) 110*585

George Howard—A Home Far Away (GRP) 488*197

John Scofield—Hand Jive (Blue Note) 488*957

Everette Harp—Common Ground (Blue Note) 488*783

Take 6—Join The Band (Reprise) 487*173



Najee—Share My World (EMI) 108*290

Tony Bennett—Steppin' Out (Columbia) 467*431

John Tesh—Sax By The Fire (GTS) 486*100

Chick Corea—Expressions (GRP) 484*683

Nancy Wilson—Love, Nancy (Columbia) 482*000

Roy Hargrove—Quintet With The Tenors Of Our Time (Verve) 481*846

Lena Horne—We'll Be Together Again (Blue Note) 481*820

Earl Klugh—Move (Warner Bros.) 480*509

Patti Austin—That Secret Place (MCA/GRP) 480*186

The Best Of Hiroshima (Epic) 477*349

Gerald Albright—Smooth (Atlantic) 475*152

David Sanborn—Hearsay (Elektra) 481*762

David Sanborn—Up-front (Elektra) 438*994

Diane Schuur & B.B. King—Heart To Heart (GRP) 480*194

Al Jarreau—Tenderness (Reprise) 477*471

Terence Blanchard—The Billie Holiday Songbook (Columbia) 477*273

Hancock/Shorter/Carter/Williams/Foney—A Tribute To Miles Davis (Qwest) 476*382

Bob James—Restless (Warner Bros.) 476*309

Yellowjackets—Run For Your Life (GRP) 474*437

The Benoit/Freeman Project (GRP) 474*429

Tom Scott—Reed My Lips (GRP) 474*379

Ella Fitzgerald—The Best Of The Songbooks (Verve) 468*231

Ramsey Lewis—Sky Islands (GRP) 468*074

Spyro Gyra—Dreams Beyond Control (GRP) 467*951

Fourplay—Between The Sheets (Warner Bros.) 464*578

Nina Simone—A Single Woman (Elektra) 464*263

Miles Davis & Quincy Jones—Live At Montreux (Warner Bros.) 463*554

Louis Armstrong—What A Wonderful World (MCA) 368*852

Stanley Clarke—East River Drive (Epic) 449*777

Grover Washington, Jr.—All My Tomorrows (Columbia) 489*138

Najee—Just An Illusion (EMI) 442*251

Cassandra Wilson—Blue Light 'Til Dawn (Blue Note) 471*656

Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers—Night In Tunisia (Blue Note) 448*811

see details below
Harry Connick, Jr.—25 (Columbia) 451*443

Tower Of Power—T.O.P. (Epic) 456*616

Pat Metheny—Secret Story (Geffen) 444*422

POP HITS

Harry Connick, Jr.—She (Columbia) 488*437

"The Lion King"—Orig. Sndtrk. (Walt Disney Records) 481*242

Ace Of Base—The Sign (Arista) 468*108

Counting Crows—August And Everything After (DGC) 467*944

Frank Sinatra—Duets II (Capitol) 113*738

Anita Baker—Rhythm Of Love (Elektra) 101*121

Eric Clapton—From The Cradle (Reprise) 101*873

Luther Vandross—Songs (Epic) 101*600

Sting—Fields Of Gold (A&M) 113*555

The Best Of Sade (Epic) 110*379

R.E.M.—Monster (Warner Bros.) 103*929

Vanessa Williams—The Sweetest Days (Wing) 114*256

Gloria Estefan—Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me (Epic) 110*486

Barbra Streisand—The Concert—Live At Madison Square Garden (Columbia) 103*838/393/835

Boyz II Men—II (Motown) 102*681

Eric Clapton—From The Cradle (Reprise) 101*873

Luther Vandross—Songs (Epic) 101*600



Acoustic Alchemy—Against The Grain (GRP) 111*054

Alex Bugnon—This Time Around (Epic) 449*751

Al Jarreau—Heaven And Earth (Reprise) 439*240

Bob James & Earl Klugh—Cool (Warner Bros.) 439*232

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TEST REPORTS

Connectors for the center and two surround speakers are spring clips. An F-connector and a pair of binding posts are provided for an FM antenna and the supplied AM loop antenna, respectively, as are one unswitched and two switched AC outlets. I liked how the manual cautions against plugging high-current devices into the latter, devices like "irons or toasters."

Miscellaneous convenience features include thirty memory presets for the tuner, a display-intensity control (bright, dim, off), and a sleep timer. The latter two features are operable only from the remote handset, which can also control selected Harman Kardon CD players and cassette decks. The remote is nicely done, with clusters of related controls differentiated variously by spacing, shape, and color.

Lab measurements showed the AVR25 to be a fine performer in the Harman Kardon tradition. That her-

itage is most evident in the hefty output power levels available for 4-ohm loads. Most of the other amplifier measurements also showed very good performance. The tone controls produced a non-flat frequency response when centered, however: a very slight bass rise and a -1-dB shelf above about 2 kHz. We were able to achieve flat response by turning the treble control to its 1-o'clock position and nudging the bass control down to just below its detent. But an easier way to even out the receiver's frequency response is simply to hit the Direct button on the front panel, which bypasses the tone-control circuits altogether.

The tuner section was more middle-of-the-road in its performance. Capture ratio, AM rejection, and alternate-channel selectivity on the FM band were very good, but the frequency response, image rejection, sensitivity, and stereo signal-to-noise ratios were

only average. Pilot-carrier leakage was unusually low (good). AM frequency response was typically dismal.

In general, the measured Dolby Pro Logic performance was also typical of a receiver in this price class. In Wide-band operation, the center channel rolled off at low frequencies earlier than we usually find. Since most installations will use the Normal setting, which shunts center-channel bass to the front left and right speakers starting at an even higher frequency, this is of no major consequence. The slightly extended surround-channel treble response, relative to a more typical 7-kHz cutoff, was due mainly to a 2.3-dB peak near 7 kHz that delayed the required rolloff to a higher than normal frequency.

Pro Logic separation figures were fine, but the measured surround-channel noise was higher than we're used to seeing (it wasn't annoyingly audi-

MEASUREMENTS

AMPLIFIER SECTION

All data for two-channel stereo operation

Output at clipping (1 kHz)

8 ohms 100 watts
4 ohms 140 watts

Clipping headroom (re rated output)

8 ohms 1.25 dB

Dynamic power

8 ohms 110 watts
4 ohms 175 watts

Dynamic headroom (re rated output)

8 ohms 1.66 dB

Distortion at rated power (75 watts, 1 kHz)

8 ohms 0.026%

Sensitivity (for 1-watt output into 8 ohms)

CD 20 mV
phono 0.32 mV

Noise (re 1-watt output, A-wtd.)

CD -78 dB
phono -82 dB

Phono-input overload

..... 151 mV

Phono-input impedance

..... 46,000 ohms in parallel with 125 pF

RIAA phono-equalization error

20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.15, -0.3 dB

Frequency response (20 Hz to 20 kHz)

tone controls centered +0, -1 dB
direct mode +0.04, -0.09 dB

Tone-control range

100 Hz ±10 dB
10 kHz ±10 dB

TUNER SECTION

All data for FM only except frequency response

Sensitivity (50-dB quieting)

mono 26 dBf
stereo 45 dBf

Signal-to-noise ratio (at 65 dBf)

mono 76 dB
stereo 68.5 dB

Distortion (THD+N at 65 dBf)

mono 0.135%
stereo 0.16%

Capture ratio (at 65 dBf)

..... 2 dB

AM rejection

..... 74 dB

Image rejection

..... 46 dB

Selectivity

alternate-channel 80 dB
adjacent-channel 12 dB

Pilot-carrier leakage

19-kHz -80 dB
38-kHz -78 dB

Hum (120 Hz)

..... -76 dB

Channel separation

100 Hz 40 dB
1 kHz 42 dB
10 kHz 31 dB

Frequency response

FM 30 Hz to 15 kHz +0.9, -0.1 dB
AM 140 Hz to 3.2 kHz +0, -6 dB

DOLBY PRO LOGIC PERFORMANCE

Frequency response (tone controls centered)
left, right 20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.37, -0.91 dB
center 42 Hz to 20 kHz +0, -3 dB
surround 61 Hz to 10.5 kHz +2.28, -3 dB

Output at clipping

(channels driven individually)

left, right 85 watts
center 87 watts
surround 28 watts

Noise (re 1-watt output, A-wtd.)

left, right -76.6 dB
center -70.1 dB
surround -65.9 dB

Distortion (THD+N, 1 kHz, 1-watt output)

left, right 0.022%
center 0.027%
surround 0.15%

Surround decoder input-overload

margins (at 1 kHz)

left, right (re 2-volt input) 2.7 dB
center (re 1.414-volt input) 5.6 dB
surround (re 1.414-volt input) -0.4 dB

Surround-channel noise-reduction

calibration error

re Dolby level (247.5 mV) -7.4 dB
re Home THX level (141.4 mV) -2.5 dB

Channel separation (100 Hz to 7 kHz,
opposing channels driven individually)

worst case >37 dB

TEST REPORTS

ble, though). The surround-channel overload margin indicates that there is a theoretical possibility of clipping that channel of the Pro Logic decoder with the very rare soundtrack that has high peak levels in the surround channels (or with a videodisc player with much higher than normal output). But we heard no evidence of overload in our listening tests.

Another surprise was the distinctly low surround-channel noise-reduction calibration point, which could lead to the surround outputs being overly prominent in laserdisc playback. Admittedly, many people think that even properly decoded surround outputs are too soft, so the AVR25's behavior here may not always be considered a fault. Moreover, the lowish calibration level probably brings the decoder more into line with the audio output levels of most VCR's, which are typically about 3 dB lower than those of laserdisc players.

Hookup was easy, thanks to the nicely arranged rear-panel facilities. I missed a subwoofer output, but the Pre-Out/Main-In connections are suitable for feeding a powered subwoofer or two, especially those with loopback high-pass-filtered outputs such as we used in our listening tests.

The AVR25's remote has all the controls necessary for balancing speaker levels in Dolby Pro Logic mode, a stupendous improvement over the AVR30's front-panel-only center-level knob. The speaker-balancing test signal mutes for a fraction of a second when cycling between channels, however, which makes aural level comparison more difficult (surround speaker balancing should preferably be done with an inexpensive sound-level meter in any case). The 2-dB steps provided for the center- and surround-speaker adjustments are also too large for really precise balancing. On the test bench, trying to match the levels of the other channels to that of the left front, I could do no better than 0.8 dB high on the center and 0.4 dB low on the surrounds. The disparity between fronts and surrounds therefore exceeded 1 dB, which can easily throw off a carefully balanced sound effect. During listening tests, I never felt confident that the level matches I obtained



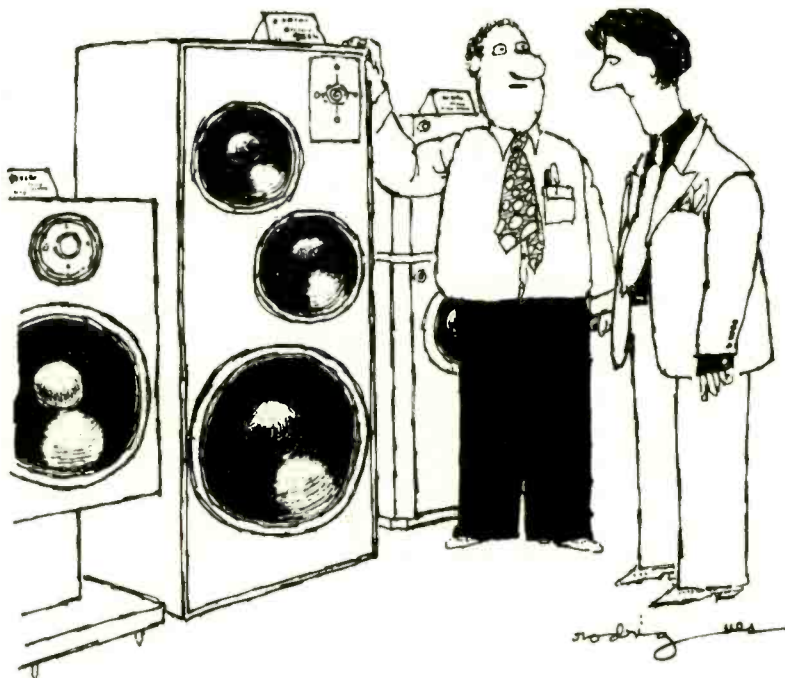
from the built-in test signal were any better. Such behavior is not unique to the AVR25, however. I would prefer to have a reduced control range on the center and surround outputs (the AVR25 provides an overly generous 70 dB) and finer gradations (more like 0.5 dB).

Once set up, the Dolby Pro Logic decoder proved accurate in imaging and sound steering. Use of a powered subwoofer (highly recommended with any medium-powered A/V receiver) enabled the AVR25 to produce some-

times enormous sound levels with special-effects-laden movies.

In contrast to my experience with some of the modes in the AVR30 — and many other A/V receivers, for that matter — I found it difficult to make the AVR25's two ambience-enhancement modes sound bad. That is actually high praise for processing that can be effective in adding spaciousness to many kinds of music. There is little audible or measurable difference between the Theater and Stadium modes when they are at the same delay setting. Both send a single simulated reflection to the surround speakers, derived from the difference between the two input channels and delayed by a user-selected interval. There is no recirculating, dense-echo reverberation, however, which is probably just as well, such artificial reverberation being much easier to get wrong than right. Better safe than sorry.

A handsome component that is easy to set up and use, the Harman/Kardon AVR25 is on the whole a very good receiver in its class. It is a safe recommendation for someone seeking solid but simple home theater performance at a reasonable price. □



... By the way, no trees were destroyed to make these speaker cones — they were manufactured from recycled disposable diapers."

N E W

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Before attempting the operation of the Lifestyle® 12 home theater system, the following instructions should be carefully reviewed and memorized.

Push



[“...operation is very intuitive...It offers style, versatility, and big sound in a small package.” – Home Theater Technology]

One button. That's all it takes to experience the dramatic sound of the Bose® Lifestyle® 12 home theater system.

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(Not shown, because you won't see it in your home, either.) However, there is one last instruction you should follow. Hold onto your seat – after all, the sound is from Bose.

For more information and names of retailers near you, just push these buttons: 1-800-444-BOSE Ext.526

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TEST REPORTS



Paradigm Export/BP Loudspeaker System

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

The Export/BP loudspeaker system, designed and manufactured in Canada by Paradigm Electronics, Inc., is a bipolar design with identical sets of drivers on its front and rear panels. The front drivers provide the signals normally heard from a conventional front-firing system, supplying program detail and image-localization information to the listeners. The rear drivers contribute spaciousness and in combination with the front drivers create a virtually omnidirectional sound field in the horizontal plane. The speakers are normally placed several feet in front of the wall behind them, so that the reflected output of the rear drivers is heard with

a slight delay that contributes to the sense of ambience.

Each of the Export/BP's two sets of drivers comprises a two-way vented

system consisting of a 6½-inch woofer crossed over at 1.7 kHz to a 1-inch soft-dome tweeter. Both sets of drivers are located near the top of the columnar enclosure, about 3 feet from the floor. The woofers share a common internal volume and exit port, near the bottom of the cabinet's back panel.

The enclosure is made of 1-inch-thick MDF (medium-density fiberboard) panels, heavily braced internally and damped by fiberglass and other materials. Each speaker weighs 55 pounds. The all-black cabinet is enclosed in a snug-fitting black cloth sleeve, or sock. The top and base are covered by wood plates that snap into place and hold the sleeve firmly (the bottom plate also has fittings for optional spikes, which are provided with the system). The end plates are available in a choice of finishes, including four woodgrains and a black gloss. The Export/BP is fitted with two pairs of gold-plated binding posts that permit biwiring or biamplification. Recessed into the rear of the cabinet near its bottom, they are normally joined by gold-plated jumper strips.

The instructions furnished with the speakers are quite specific in the advice they offer on installation and placement. Paradigm also has a brochure ("The Elements of Better Speaker Design") that is refreshingly factual and free of hype — well worth reading whether you are in the market for its speakers or not.

We set up the Export/BP speakers as recommended, about 3 feet from the wall behind them and 3 to 4 feet from the side walls. The room response, averaged for the two speakers, was extraordinarily flat from 750 Hz to 20 kHz, with a ± 1.25 -dB variation over that range (and within ± 2.5 dB down to 300 Hz). Almost unique in our experience, there was no trace of a response irregularity in the vicinity of the crossover frequency. This is the flattest response we have ever measured from a speaker over such a wide range that includes its crossover region.

The close-miked bass response reached a maximum at 170 Hz, falling by 6 dB at 65 and 750 Hz. Splicing it to the room curve was not as unambiguous as we would have liked, and the measured woofer output appeared

DIMENSIONS 8½ INCHES WIDE, 42 INCHES HIGH, 13¼ INCHES DEEP
FINISH LIGHT, DARK, OR BLACK OAK, WALNUT, OR BLACK GLOSS
PRICE \$999 A PAIR
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to drop off faster than what we heard actually suggested. At the system's rated lower limit of 42 Hz, its output was clean and undistorted, and even at 32 Hz the room was filled with powerful, clean bass that gave no clue to the relatively small size of the speaker's woofers.

Horizontal dispersion was typical of good 1-inch dome tweeters. The output 45 degrees off-axis was down 4 dB at 10 kHz, relative to the on-axis response, and down 8 dB at 20 kHz.

Paradigm gives the Export/BP's sensitivity as 90 dB SPL (sound-pressure level) in a room and 86 dB in an anechoic environment; we measured it as 87 dB. The speaker's impedance is rated as 6 ohms nominal, and Paradigm specifies the minimum as 4 ohms, which we confirmed. The Export/BP clearly should be an easy speaker for any decent amplifier to drive.

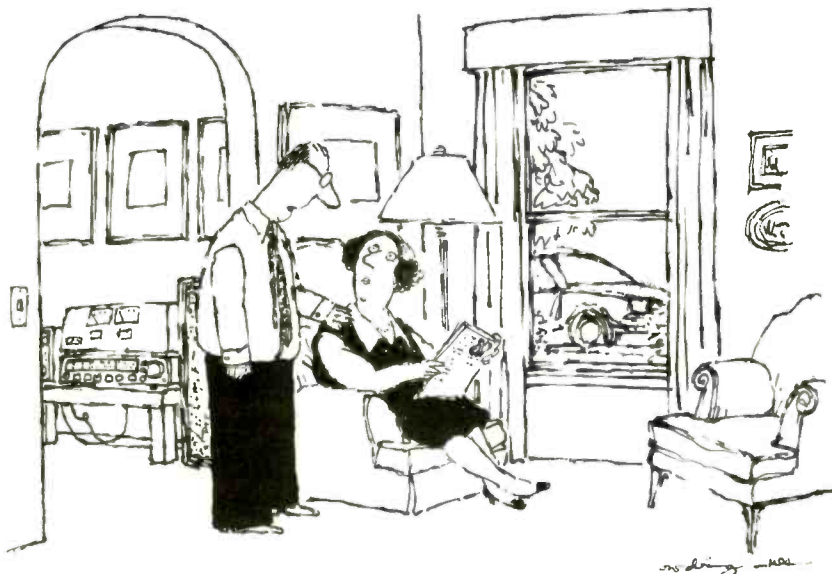
With a 4-volt input, corresponding to a 90-dB-SPL output, the system's distortion was between 0.3 and 1 percent from 120 Hz to 2 kHz, climbing at lower frequencies to 3 percent at 40 Hz and 5 percent at 30 Hz — very impressive performance from a pair of 6½-inch drivers. The small woofers were able to take single-cycle 100-Hz tone bursts of 325 watts into their 6-ohm impedance before the output became audibly raspy. At higher frequen-

cies the system easily absorbed everything we could put into it with no sign of damage or distress, limited by the amplifier to between 500 and 1,500 watts in the range of 1 to 10 kHz.

The measurements essentially confirmed our impressions from the extended listening sessions that preceded them. Although the Export/BP's sound tended to be slightly "soft," there was no hint of boom or tubbiness. That can be credited to the system's combination of a remarkably clean and extended low bass together with the flattest middle- and high-range response we have seen from a speaker.

The system's basic imaging characteristics seemed to be determined entirely by its front radiation, as claimed. The vertical and lateral positioning tests of the Chesky JT-37 test CD produced stereo location effects as good as we have heard, apparently undiluted by the output from the rear drivers. But in addition to contributing to the system's overall low-bass performance, the rear drivers did contribute an unmistakable sense of air and space.

Although bipolar speakers are not new, Paradigm's execution of the concept is noteworthy. The considerable effort the company says it put into the Export/BP's drivers and construction has paid off handsomely in the speaker's superb performance. □



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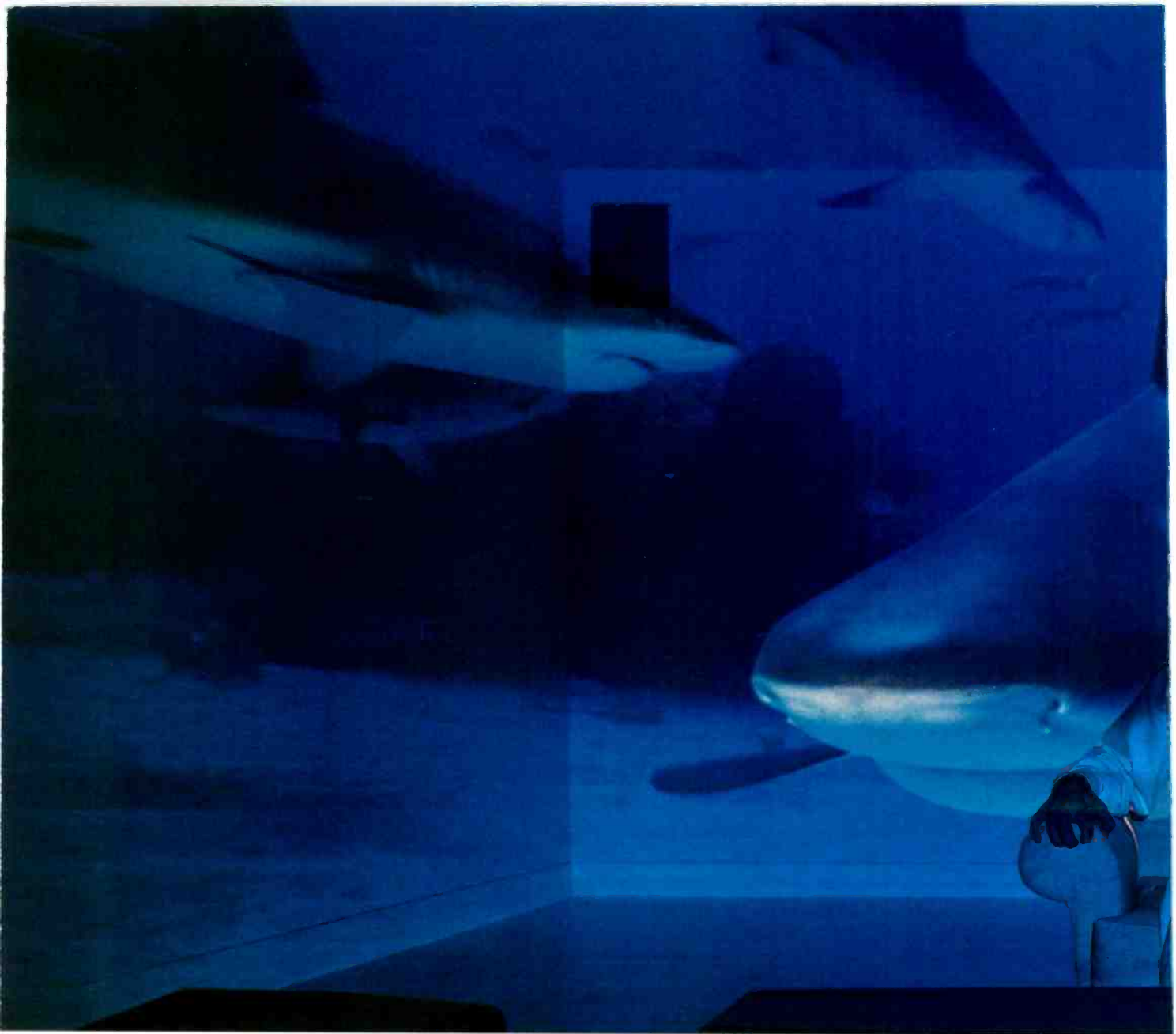
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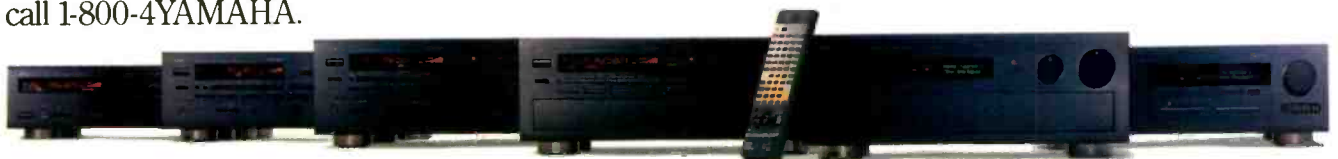
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Sunfire Stereo Power Amplifier

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

Bob Carver is recognized as one of the most innovative amplifier designers of our time. Founder of both Phase Linear and Carver Corporation (he is no longer affiliated with either company), he has been responsible for several of the audio world's most unusual and controversial products.

Carver's goal in his so-called "magnetic-field" amplifiers of the early 1980's was to make a highly efficient amplifier whose power-supply voltage "tracked" the signal envelope so as to minimize the power dissipation in the output transistors. At the time, he was unsuccessful in achieving that goal, although a signal-tracking power supply was included in his 1979 patent. The closest he came to a true signal-tracking supply in his magnetic-field amplifiers was a three-step approximation. But that changed with the development of what he calls a "tracking downconverter." The tangible result is actually two amplifiers from two different companies — the Carver Research Lightstar amplifier, which we

reviewed in the November 1994 issue, and the Sunfire amplifier, the first product from his new Sunfire Corporation. Although the two amplifiers operate on fundamentally similar principles, they differ in numerous design details, as well as in price, weight, and so forth.

A simplified explanation of the operation of the Sunfire amplifier is that the DC output of a conventional power supply is pulse-width-modulated by the audio signal. The supply delivers

narrow pulses when the signal level is low, increasing the pulse width linearly with signal level. The result is that most of the amplifier's output voltage comes from the power supply, leaving only about 6 volts across the output transistors. The action of the switching system (the "tracking downconverter") is analogous to that of a transformer, converting a high voltage at low current to a lower voltage at higher current, but without significant power loss or heat generation.

The Sunfire amplifier is fundamentally a voltage source, with a very low internal impedance. As a result, its output voltage for a given input level remains constant as the load impedance is reduced, whereas the current output (and thus the power output) is inversely proportional to the load impedance. That characteristic is reflected in the amplifier's rated output of 300 watts per channel (from 20 Hz to 20 kHz at less than 0.5 percent total harmonic distortion) into 8 ohms, 600 watts into 4 ohms, 1,200 watts into 2 ohms, and 2,400 watts into 1 ohm. (The 2-ohm and 1-ohm ratings are based on intermittent operation, since few home power outlets are rated to deliver the required current.)

Bob Carver says that the tracking downconverter is fully effective at fre-

DIMENSIONS
19 INCHES WIDE, 6½ INCHES HIGH,
15¾ INCHES DEEP (INCLUDING CONNECTORS)

WEIGHT
43 POUNDS

PRICE
\$2,175

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SUNFIRE CORP., DEPT. SR, P.O. BOX 1589,
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PHOTO: JOCK P. LEUNG

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Stereo Review

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TEST REPORTS

quencies up to about 7 kHz. Because of speed limitations in the switching system, the circuit's efficiency drops progressively at higher frequencies and at 20 kHz is little better than that of a conventional amplifier. That is not a problem in normal listening, however, since the higher audio frequencies are not usually present at high levels for an extended duration (if they were, few tweeters would survive). In addition, an internal ultrasonic filter sharply reduces the amplifier's response above 100 kHz.

The Sunfire amplifier is a fairly large and heavy unit, finished in black over its entire aluminum exterior. It has no switches or controls, only a single, softly lit meter in the center of the front panel. The meter, calibrated in joules, is marked **POWER SUPPLY ENERGY** and is, for all practical purposes, a high-tech pilot light. It reads a constant 380 joules unless the amplifier is delivering its full output, in which case your speakers or your eardrums are probably in shreds!

Since the amplifier has no power switch, and would therefore normally be turned on and off from a switched AC line output on a preamplifier, we were concerned about the ability of a typical preamplifier power switch to handle its potential kilowatts of output. Bob Carver told us that the ampli-

MEASUREMENTS	
Output at clipping (1 kHz)	
8 ohms	387 watts
4 ohms	768 watts
2 ohms	1,460 watts
Clipping-level headroom	
8 ohms	1.1 dB
4 ohms	1.07 dB
2 ohms	0.85 dB
Dynamic power and headroom see text	
Distortion (at 1 kHz into 8 ohms)	
THD+N at rated output (300 watts).....	0.03%
THD, 0.1 to 120 watts	<0.018%
Sensitivity (1 watt into 8 ohms)	90 mV
Noise (A-wtd., re 1-watt output)	-79 dB
Frequency response	
.....	20 Hz to 20 kHz +0, -0.1 dB

fier's drain on the AC line is minimal under no-signal conditions, however, and we measured it at a surprisingly low 40 watts or so. In fact, we left it on continuously for a week and it never became detectably warm to the touch. Even in normal listening, it was never more than faintly warm.

On the back of the Sunfire are separate inputs and outputs for the two channels. For each channel there are two phono jacks, marked **LAB DIRECT** and **NORMAL**, along with a standard three-pin Cannon-type balanced input.

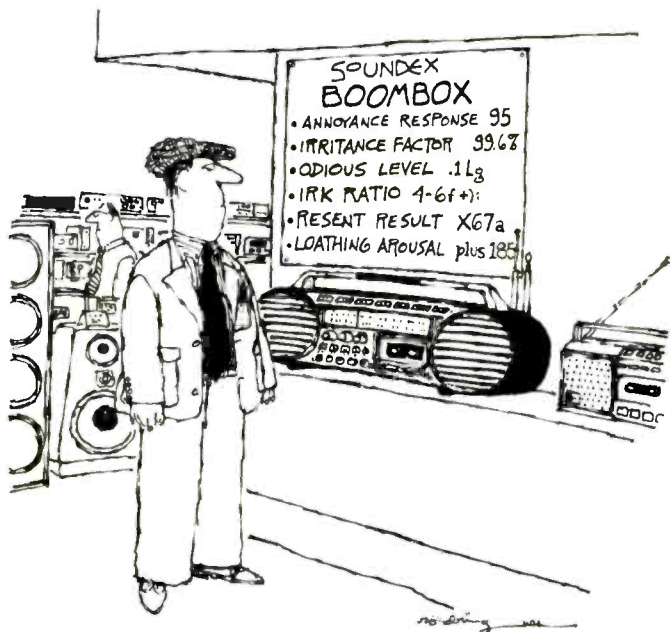
The **NORMAL** jack rolls off the response at infrasonic frequencies, to -3 dB at 1 Hz, whereas the direct and balanced inputs will pass DC.

Each channel has two separate outputs, through gold-plated binding posts that accommodate banana plugs, lugs, or wires. The outputs are marked **CURRENT SOURCE** and **VOLTAGE SOURCE** and have respective source impedances of 1 ohm and nearly zero. The **CURRENT SOURCE** output simulates the output characteristics of a vacuum-tube amplifier, whereas the **VOLTAGE SOURCE** output is typical of good low-output-impedance (high-damping-factor) solid-state amplifiers. The two sets of outputs can be used simultaneously, if desired, with biwireable speakers. Mono operation of the amplifier is also possible, either by parallel operation of both channels (through the 1-ohm **CURRENT SOURCE** outputs) or by series bridging via the balanced inputs.

The Sunfire amplifier comes with a heavy glass plate that can support the entire chassis. This is suggested as a means of raising the amplifier above a carpet (if it's placed on one) to prevent blockage of the airflow under the cabinet, although that seems an unlikely problem in a normal home installation.

We tested the Sunfire into loads of 8, 4, and 2 ohms, driving only one channel at a time to prevent interruptions from circuit breakers tripping on our AC line (we did blow the amplifier's own 10-ampere fuses on several occasions and had to resort to temporary use of 20-amp fuses to push the Sunfire to its limit into 2 ohms).

The Sunfire amplifier easily surpassed its published ratings, which are based on a limit of 0.5 percent distortion. Its distortion below the clipping point was typically well under 0.05 percent, and its dynamic and clipping-level power outputs were practically identical, as one would expect from a true voltage source. Indeed, the Sunfire proved to be a superb performer in every respect — as close to an ideal amplifier as we have ever encountered. It ran cool, sounded great, and undoubtedly could drive any loudspeaker on the face of the earth with complete aplomb. Once again, Bob Carver is off to an exciting start. □



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- Oversized magnetic structures

Cascade™ Enclosures:

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- High velocity, low turbulence ports



“Awesome!”

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TEST REPORTS



AudioSource SW Four Powered Subwoofer

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

AudioSource says it designed the SW Four powered subwoofer to be compatible with a wide variety of loudspeakers, and consequently it is equipped with a full complement of adjustments. Physically, however, it is an almost featureless black box meant to be placed on the floor in (usually) an inconspicuous location.

The subwoofer is raised 2 inches off the floor by four sturdy feet, and its 12-inch downward-facing driver radiates its output through that gap. The driver itself has dual voice coils that effectively sum left- and right-channel inputs to mono. The ducted enclosure is filled with a sound-absorbing material, and its port is close to the woofer on the bottom of the cabinet.

Also on the bottom is a panel with

the SW Four's inputs, outputs, and operating controls. The controls include small knobs that enable continuous adjustment of the crossover frequency,

DIMENSIONS

15 $\frac{1}{4}$ INCHES WIDE, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ INCHES HIGH
(INCLUDING FEET), 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ INCHES DEEP

WEIGHT

35 POUNDS

FINISH

BLACK WOODGRAIN

PRICE

\$500

MANUFACTURER

AUDIOSOURCE, DEPT. SR, 1327 N. CAROLAN
AVE., BURLINGTON, CA 94010

from 40 to 180 Hz, between the subwoofer and the main speakers and of the subwoofer's output level. The SW Four also contains a 150-watt amplifier whose heat-radiating fins are at one end of the enclosure.

Connecting the subwoofer to an audio system is a simple process, with two basic options: high-level input (through insulated binding posts) from the system amplifier's loudspeaker outputs, or line-level input (through standard phono jacks) from preamplifier outputs. Either way, the incoming signal is filtered through the crossover circuits, which send the bass frequencies to the subwoofer amplifier and the higher frequencies to the main loudspeakers or to the main speaker amplifiers.

The remaining controls (both slide switches) are a three-position power switch and a phase switch that introduces a 180-degree phase shift (a waveform polarity reversal) into the subwoofer output to compensate, if required, for the unavoidable difference in arrival time of sounds from the subwoofer and the main speakers. In some cases such reversal will yield a better blend of the outputs from the subwoofer and the main speakers. The power switch, in addition to on and off settings, has an Auto position that is its normal recommended setting. In Auto, the subwoofer switches on automatically when a signal is received and shuts off after no signal has been present for several minutes.

The SW Four's somewhat sparse specifications include an overall frequency range of 20 to 250 Hz and a signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) greater than 90 dB. Its instruction manual is complete and clearly written and includes interconnection diagrams that cover any likely application.

We measured the SW Four's frequency response with close microphone spacing at each of the marked crossover frequencies — 40, 80, 120, and 180 Hz. The response from the cone was broadly peaked, with its maximum level occurring between 60 and 100 Hz at the higher settings and dropping to the range of 60 to 80 or 90 Hz as the crossover frequency was reduced. The output level from the speaker also fell off rapidly as the

PARADIGM SETS THE STANDARD IN AFFORDABLE HIGH-END SOUND!

crossover frequency was reduced, measuring 10 dB lower with the 40-Hz setting than with the 180-Hz setting.

Although that behavior may seem odd, it is actually of little significance to the user. The adjustment of these controls must, in any case, be done by ear, so one will normally turn up the level control to compensate for any reduction in output when the crossover frequency is lowered.

We also measured the output from the port, which proved to be very strong and had the effect of flattening out and extending the system's low bass range.

Using the 180-Hz crossover setting and with the output set for a 90-dB sound-pressure level (SPL) at 1 meter from the cone (with the subwoofer upside down), the SW Four's distortion was between 1.2 and 2.5 percent from 55 to 450 Hz. At lower frequencies the distortion increased, reaching 9 percent at the subwoofer's effective lower limit of 40 Hz.

These results have to be interpreted in light of the SW Four's intended function, which presumably is to obtain a worthwhile low bass output in a system whose main speakers lack that ability. We operated the SW Four in conjunction with a pair of small, inexpensive speakers whose response fell off below about 70 Hz. When we adjusted the subwoofer level and crossover frequency by ear, the results were quite satisfactory, with a respectable degree of low-end "body."

The other side of the coin (as with any subwoofer) is that the SW Four can easily be misadjusted to produce the kind of boomy bass often associated with speakers having inadequate woofer systems. The calibrations of its controls are rough approximations at best, and they may even be worthless for establishing the desired system response with some main speakers. Also, as a general rule, a subwoofer crossover frequency in excess of 100 Hz may cause undesirable effects, such as localization of the subwoofer position.

Bearing those cautions in mind, however, we found the AudioSource SW Four subwoofer to be an inexpensive, versatile, and effective means of enhancing the low bass performance of a modestly priced speaker system. □

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Sensible Sound Issue #52

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**"an excellent
choice"**

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PHOTO BY DENNIS POLLOCK

SURROUND

How to choose 'em and use 'em by Daniel Kumin

SPEAKERS

Like extras in a Stallone or Schwarzenegger flick, surround speakers are easily overlooked, even though they play a critical role in bringing movie soundtracks to life both in the theater and at home. Surround speakers actually accomplish two tasks. First, without calling attention to themselves, they must deliver the ambience cues — acoustic reflections, echoes, and environmental noises such as crickets and wind — that help pull us into the illusion of “being there.” And, second, they must also occasionally reproduce louder, discrete sound effects, like the roar of a Klingon cruiser as it zooms directly toward the audience and overhead.

Energy's RVSS surround speaker (\$550 a pair) uses two 5¼-inch woofers and two ¾-inch soft-dome tweeters in a configuration said to provide dipolar radiation above 400 Hz for good diffusion and bipolar output below 400 Hz for extended bass response.



Meanwhile, the front speaker trio is left to handle most of the music, the dialogue, and just about every imaginable kind of sound effect.

Consequently, a surround speaker's job is very different from that of a home theater's front speakers, which must provide auditory localization precise enough to track the on-screen action. A surround speaker's primary

The Sonance AiS500 (\$499 a pair) is one of the few in-wall speakers designed expressly for surround-channel reproduction. Its 4-inch woofer, 3½-inch midrange driver, and ½-inch dome tweeter are arrayed on angled baffles to disperse their output into the room.



mission is to produce a diffuse sound field — one that excels in creating a sense of ambience and sonic envelopment rather than pinpoint imaging, and in which the speakers themselves are not easily localized. Placement requirements are very different, too. Depending on the room and type of speaker, surrounds can be located high on the side walls about even with the seating area (the most commonly recommended ideal), suspended from the ceiling, splayed outward on the rear wall, placed on the floor in the back corners firing toward the ceiling, or positioned elsewhere as space dictates and ingenuity devises.

Considering the important role sur-

The Definitive Technology BP1 (\$350 a pair) is a small bipole loudspeaker designed to mate well sonically with the company's other speakers. It uses two 4½-inch polypropylene-cone woofers and two ¾-inch soft-dome tweeters and is available in black or white.



Atlantic Technology's 254 SR (\$299 a pair) can be mounted on a wall or, with an optional kit, recessed into the wall. It has a single 4-inch woofer for good bass response and two 3½-inch tweeters operating in a quasi-dipole configuration on angled baffles.



round speakers play in the overall performance of a home theater system, it's surprising how little discussion (let alone debate) there is on the topic. One reason for this may be that many of us already have a pair of orphaned Small Advents, Dynaco A25's, or similar Sixties-era bookshelf speakers salted away in the attic or garage that we gleefully resurrect when it's time to find a pair of speakers to assume surround duties in an expanding A/V system.

Fortunately, that approach usually works reasonably well, because the surround-channel demands in a conventional Dolby Pro Logic system are *relatively* modest. The Dolby Surround standard calls for the monaural surround signal to be rolled off below 100 Hz and above 7 kHz, so speakers handling surround duties need not deliver deep bass, extremely high frequencies, or particularly high acoustic output. (You may nonetheless come across a few movies that exhibit deep bass in the surround channel, which is one reason some people advocate full-range surround speakers.)

The basic requirements for a good surround speaker include decent mid-range performance, good dispersion (the wider the better), and adequate sensitivity (the ability to achieve moderate sound levels with a modest power input). That's about it. While many older bookshelf designs may fall down a bit on the dispersion question, most meet the other criteria quite well.

"Quite well" doesn't necessarily mean optimally, however, so speaker manufacturers have been quick to introduce a variety of specialized surround speakers, tailor-made to repro-



The Polk LS 1/x (\$549 a pair) has two 4½-inch woofers working in phase with each other (bipolar) and two 1-inch dome tweeters that can be switched for either bipolar or dipolar operation, depending on where the speaker is placed. The enclosure's sides are angled to reduce box resonances.

duce ambience and sound effects. A major impetus in this flowering has been the influence of Lucasfilm's Home THX certification program, which calls for surround speakers that are dipole systems. (THX technical refinements are intended to enhance the reproduction of movie soundtracks at home.) Consequently, many of the surround speakers on the market use a dipole design, which achieves a figure-eight-like radiation pattern by joining two opposite-facing driver complements, wired out of phase, in one cabinet. Other speaker makers opt for a variation on the dipole theme known as a bipole (or bipolar) speaker, in which two driver "halves" work *in phase*, resulting in more of an omnidirectional radiation pattern (see "Poles Apart: Dipoles and Bipoles Decoded" on the facing page).

At the same time, some manufacturers issue conventional speakers in *identical* quartets or quintets (including a center speaker), on the theory that all of the speakers in a home theater system (except the subwoofer) should be the same in order to provide integrated sound throughout the listening area. Still other surround systems rely on multiple drivers in various arrays to disperse sound as evenly as possible throughout the listening area.

Which sort of surround speaker is

The Boston Acoustics 575x (\$500 a pair) is a Home THX certified dipole surround speaker with a single front-mounted 5¼-inch woofer and two 2½-inch tweeters, one mounted on each side of the shallow enclosure. It is available finished in white or black-ash vinyl.



right for your system? Without coming over and personally auditioning your setup, it's hard for me to say. But getting to know the specifics of the different designs will help you narrow the playing field. The primary advantages of dipole speakers are that they are difficult to localize (when properly situated) and deliver spacious sound. The downside is that placement requirements are somewhat limiting: Ideally, dipoles should be spotted on the side walls about 5 to 7 feet off the floor, approximately even with and equidistant from the listeners. Of course, you can get away with some deviations from these rules.

Most THX-certified dipole surrounds come with expensive home theater speaker suites and may cost as much as \$1,000 a pair or more if available separately. On the high end of the scale is the Fosgate Audionics SD 180 (\$1,850 a pair), which offers extensive flexibility and configurability. When the SD 180 is biamplified (two channels of power per speaker) and used in conjunction with the company's flagship Model Three surround processor, for example, it works as either a conventional (monopole) speaker or a dipole, depending on the surround program selected. At the other end of the spectrum is Boston Acoustics' Model 575x (\$500 a pair), which saves money by employing a single 5¼-inch woofer in conjunction with two 2½-inch midrange/tweeters in a dipole configuration.

A number of less costly, non-THX-certified dipoles have also become available in the past year or so. The onslaught has prompted Lucasfilm, holder of several patents relating to di-

pole speakers, to attempt to work out a royalty-payment plan. No one is saying much about the matter in public, so it remains to be seen how — if at all — the issue will affect the pricing and other aspects of such speakers. Meanwhile, non-THX dipole or quasi-dipole surround speakers are available for less than \$400 a pair from a number of companies, including Altec Lansing, Atlantic Technology, NHT, and PSB, to name a few. The Surround II from Cambridge SoundWorks, for example, combines a 3½-inch woofer with a pair of 2½-inch dipole mid-range/tweeters in a package that sells for \$249 a pair.

For rooms in which side-wall or ceiling placement is impractical, a dipole may not be the best solution. Bipole speakers, on the other hand, may be less sensitive to placement. Proponents of this design say that bipoles can be placed with equally good results on side walls or on the rear wall facing outward, or even asymmetrical. Though the concept has several boosters, the bipole-surround layout has been promoted principally by Definitive Technology and Mirage.

Definitive offers the BPI (\$350 a pair), a compact surround speaker that creates a bipolar array using pairs of 4½-inch woofers and ¾-inch dome tweeters. Mirage's MBS, also \$350 a pair, is similar except that it uses smaller (½-inch) tweeters. Both companies, which specialize in bookshelf and floor-standing bipoles designed for "any-channel" use, report that it's not uncommon for large, floor-standing bipoles to be used for both front and surround-channel reproduction in high-end home theater systems. (The limited rollout of the six-channel digi-

KLH's novel V-01 (\$200) is designed to handle all surround-channel chores on its own, mounted on the floor against the wall behind the listening area with its dipole drivers firing out toward the side walls. It has two 8-inch woofers and two 1-inch tweeters.



Poles Apart: Dipoles and Bipoles Decoded

Hold a couple of identical marbles 2 inches apart and drop them into a bathtub of very still water. What you'll likely observe — unless you're lucky and they hit the water at *precisely* the same instant — is a pattern of ripples shaped like a flattened figure-eight (∞), with relatively weak and confused ripples to the sides. That mirrors the principle behind dipole surround speakers, except that the medium is air instead of water and the waves acoustic rather than liquid.

The two marbles represent a pair of identical driver sets (usually a simple woofer/tweeter complement) squeezed back to back in a single enclosure. The driver complements are wired out of phase, so that the cones of one speaker set move inward as the cones of the other move outward, and vice versa. (Actually, the type of speaker discussed here is more accurately termed a "quasi-dipole" since a true dipole uses a *single* push-pull membrane rather than two or more back-to-back diaphragms.) Consequently, sound radiates freely forward and back, but to either side radiation is severely curtailed, thereby creating a dead spot, or null, especially at frequencies whose wavelengths relate to the spacing between the drivers.

This phenomenon is exploited by positioning the speaker so that the null of its figure-eight radiation pattern is oriented toward the listeners on one side and against the wall on the other. As a result, very little direct sound and few early reflections reach the listeners' ears. Instead, the sound bounces off the walls, ceiling, floor, and furniture before hitting their ears, which helps create that sense of sonic envelopment that brings movie soundtracks to life.

Bipole speakers, which are also commonly promoted for surround-sound use, are identical to dipole designs except that their back-to-back driver complements are wired *in phase* with one another. That produces a radiation pattern that's closer to omnidirectional, equally strong in all directions (though there is a mild reduction in certain frequencies to the sides). Going back to the bathtub analogy, it's the type of ripple pattern that would be created if you did, in fact, drop those two marbles with perfect synchronization.

Adherents of the bipole school claim an ideal balance of reflected *and* direct sound for the design, which they say makes it easier to localize discrete off-screen surround effects like gunshots, screams, etc. (Most favor using bipole speakers for the front left and right channels as well, citing their open, spacious sound and smooth power response.) Bipole surrounds are also claimed to be significantly less sensitive to placement than dipoles because of their near-omnidirectional radiation patterns.

—D.K.

tal Dolby Surround AC-3 system this year may prompt more folks to consider full-range surround speakers, although there are other ways to handle the bass from the new system's full-range surround channels — redirection to a subwoofer, for example.)

Then there are the hybrid surround speakers, which claim to offer the best of two worlds by combining dipolar and bipolar characteristics. Energy's multipointed RVSS (\$550 a pair), which teams two 5¼-inch woofers and two ¾-inch tweeters in an unusual hexagonal cabinet devised for wall or corner mounting, is said to work as a dipole above 400 Hz while maintaining bipolar output below that point to achieve deeper, more powerful bass.

Polk Audio's LS 1/x surround speaker (\$549 a pair) takes a different tack, allowing the listener to switch the tweeters between dipolar and bipolar operation while maintaining in-phase

operation for both woofers at both settings. Polk recommends the dipole setting if side-wall placement is possible, the bipole setting for rear-wall and

The magnetically shielded Celestion MP1 (\$199 a pair) can serve a variety of functions, including surround-channel reproduction. It has a 4-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter in a molded cabinet that can be pivoted in almost any direction on its integral stand.



most other locations. The quasi-wedge-shaped speaker has a conventional dipole layout with a 4½-inch woofer and 1-inch tweeter on each of its slanted baffles, and it can be mounted with its baffles facing up or down, depending on how close it is to the ceiling.

Beyond dipole and bipole designs, manufacturers have introduced dozens of multipurpose "A/V" speakers over the past couple of years. Some include clever brackets that accommodate shelf, wall, or ceiling mounting, and many are offered in five-speaker surround-sound suites. A good example is Celestion's CinemaStyle MP1 (\$199 a pair), which combines a 4-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter in a compact and very stylish molded cabinet featuring an integral bracket/stand with a pivoting stalk.

Finally, there are a number of surround-speaker designs that defy categorization, either by combining existing formats or by creating entirely new ones. KLH's unique V-01 (\$200), a single-point dipole design featuring a trapezoidal enclosure with an 8-inch

woofer and a 1-inch tweeter on each side, is an example of a speaker that creates its own category. It's intended to be centered on the floor directly behind the seating area, with its null aimed toward the listeners and each driver pair facing upward at a 15-degree angle. The result is said to be improved dispersion of surround effects, with the savings in cost and complexity of a single unit.

The zero space demands and near-invisibility of in-wall speakers make them a very tempting surround-channel option. But because in-walls tend to radiate sound straight out from the wall, it's nearly impossible to find a location that doesn't beam sound directly toward the listeners. It's tough to experiment with placement for an in-wall, too, and even tougher to change locations once a speaker is installed.

Despite those challenges, several makers offer surround speakers designed to be flush-mounted in a wall. Some of these, including models from Snell and Triad, to name but two, are relatively high-ticket, THX-certified



dipole designs that manage the trick by permitting an angled, dual midrange/tweeter array to protrude a few inches from the wall. A less expensive example is Sonance's AiS500 (\$499 a pair), an in-wall "ambient" speaker with three drivers on two angled baffles that claims broad, nondirectional dispersion.

On-wall speakers represent a viable compromise where in-wall appearance and space economy are welcome but conventional box-speaker convenience and performance are desired. Atlantic Technologies' 3-inch-deep Model 254 SR (\$299 a pair) is specifically designed for on-wall mounting and features a dipole midrange/tweeter array. Polk Audio's wedge-shaped M5 (\$300 a pair) splits the difference with a two-way enclosure that can be placed on a shelf or mounted on the wall.

After all is said and done — and the many specialized surround-speaker designs are taken into consideration — conventional compact bookshelf speakers (like the ones up in our attics) remain the most popular surround speakers of all. Besides having small size, low cost, and great flexibility on their side, bookshelves can work quite well if you're willing to experiment with unconventional placements: High on the side walls firing back toward the corners; on the rear wall firing up and outward into the ceiling/wall junctions (a reasonable alternative when side-wall placement is not possible); even on the floor in the rear corners playing up into the ceiling/wall junctions when wall- or shelf-mounting is out of the question.

The bottom line? If you can't find a surround speaker that suits your budget, tastes, and room layout, wait a few months. With the home theater boom rumbling along more powerfully than ever, new models are always popping over the horizon. □

Surround Speaker DO'S and DON'TS

Whatever sort of surround speakers you end up with, a few general rules apply to most setups. First, though, the biggest "do" of all: Experiment with placement. Play a movie scene with lots of ambient sound and some three-dimensional effects while listening to the surround channel alone (turn off or disconnect the front three speakers). Try different locations until you find the ones that produce smooth, well-distributed sound with a well-balanced midrange and upper bass that is free of "hot spots."

DO consider placement carefully, rather than simply putting the speakers on the floor or a back-of-the-room shelf. Higher is usually better (at least a foot or two above your seated ear level).

DON'T aim the speaker directly toward the seating area. When too much direct sound reaches the listeners' ears, it becomes easy to localize the speaker — the opposite of what you want to achieve.

DO try to arrange the surrounds more or less symmetrically relative to the listening area. If one surround is much closer to the listeners than the other, "precedence effect" will inexorably pull their attention to that side.

DON'T place surround speakers smack in a three-surface corner if you can help it. Though surround bass is usually limited, corner placement may exaggerate surround-channel midbass, subtly muddying the system's overall tonal balance.

DO look for surround speakers that are tonally similar to your front speakers. A perfect match isn't critical, but bright-sounding surrounds paired with smooth or even dull-sounding front speakers will stick out.

DON'T forget about sensitivity. A 3-dB increase in surround-speaker sensitivity is like doubling your surround-channel power. And while it's true that the surround channel's power demands are (usually) modest compared to that of the front trio, surround power from typical systems (especially A/V receivers) is also modest. Don't underestimate the value of ample, clean surround-channel dynamic range.

—D.K.

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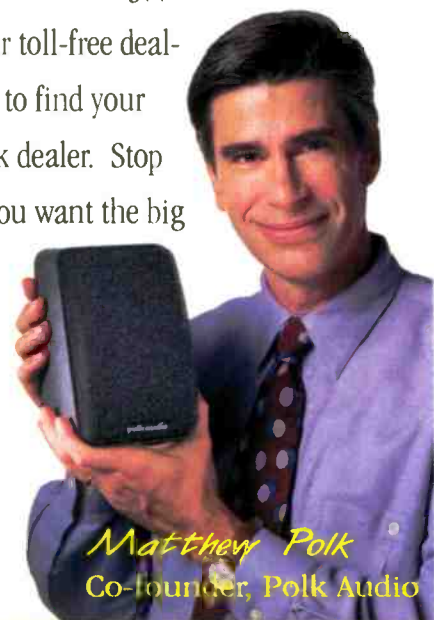


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BIG SCREEN BONANZA

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your home theater to life.**

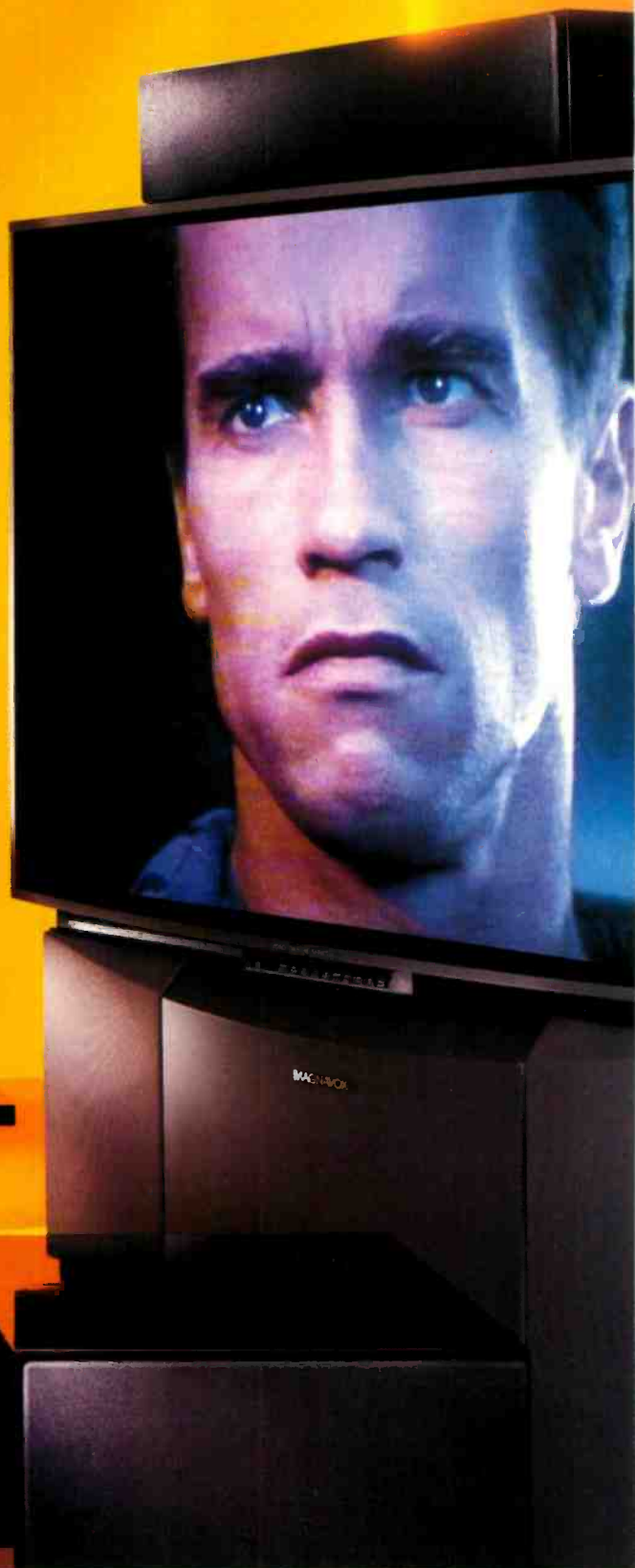
As recently as a decade ago, if you wanted a big-screen television your choices were few and, frankly, not very attractive. Projection sets were clunky and expensive, they produced fuzzy images, and the picture all but vanished if you walked too far to one side of the screen. The biggest tube set you could buy had just a 25-inch screen, often in a cabinet only grandma could love.

Boy, have we come a long way! Today, spurred by the nation's growing love affair with home theater, big-screen TV's — tube sets and projection sets alike — represent the fastest-growing segment of TV sales, while the entire category continues to post record sales. More than 26 million color TV's were sold in the U.S. last year, an astonishing figure when you consider that virtually every home already has at least one TV, and many have two or more.

If you're in the market for a new television, one with a screen large enough to make it the centerpiece of an awesome

by James Barry

PHOTO BY ROBERTO BUCALAN



Boasting a 60-inch screen in a cabinet that's only 24 inches deep — some 30 percent slimmer than previous-generation sets — RCA's rear-projection P60752EB (\$3,299) features an on-screen menu system, a channel-guide mode that displays snapshots of twelve channels simultaneously, and a picture-in-picture mode with an adjustable inset window for viewing a second video source. A universal remote control is included.



home theater the whole family can enjoy, you're in for a treat. Today, there's a host of screen sizes, models, designs, and features to choose from, regardless of your tastes or the heft of your wallet. No matter how much you spend on your home theater system, you'll be disappointed if the TV picture isn't big, bright, and beautiful, so you'll want to consider your purchase carefully.

And there's a lot to consider, beginning with how and where you're going to use your new set — the size of the room, the type and source of programs you and your family watch most, and the number of audio and video components you already have or are planning to purchase and use in your home theater setup.

Color television — even at its biggest and most expensive — remains one of the best values around for your hard-earned dollars. The new generation of big-screen TV's use digital circuits to enhance picture quality, create on-screen setup and diagnostic menus, and deliver nonvideo information (like closed captions for the hearing-impaired). Some even provide access to on-screen program guides so that you can keep track of all those channels. And on the audio side, a stereo decoder is standard equipment.

How Big Is Big?

First let's talk about screen size. Just how big is a "big screen"? It's difficult if not impossible to realize a theater-like experience at home — that combination of big picture and big sound that puts you right in the action — with a tiny screen. A 27-inch screen (all measurements are diagonal) is really the bare minimum for home theater, and even that will suffice only in a relatively small room. The rule of thumb is that for optimum viewing you should sit a distance from the screen that's approximately two-and-a-half times its diagonal measurement. With a 27-inch screen you should be about 5 feet away, with a 35-inch screen about 7 feet away, and so on. That suggests a pretty big room once you start talking about projection TV's with screens 50 inches or larger.

Conventional direct-view sets, those that have a glass picture tube, come in screen sizes up to 40 inches. The most widely available big-screen tube TV's are 31- and 35-inch models from many different manufacturers; Magnavox,

Hitachi's 46-inch rear-projection 46UX17K (\$2,499) is said to be capable of delivering 950 lines of horizontal resolution and features an artificial-intelligence processor that monitors conditions such as signal quality and ambient light and automatically adjusts color, brightness, and other parameters to improve the picture. Housed in an oak cabinet, the set is also equipped with a Dolby Pro Logic decoder and a remote control with illuminated keys.



At \$5,995, the 66-pound TGS 200 HP is Vidikron's least expensive video projector. It projects images of between 5 and 15 feet (measured diagonally) and has three A/V inputs (one S-video) and line-level stereo audio outputs. A remote control and ceiling-mount brackets are included.



Sony, Toshiba, and Zenith market 32-inch sets, and Toshiba also offers a pair of 30-inch models. With price tags ranging from roughly \$1,000 to \$3,000, these sets will satisfy the needs of most homeowners and apartment/condominium dwellers.

If you have a *really* large room, you can choose from rear-projection TV's with screen sizes from 45 to 80 inches, the latter a brand new leviathan from ProScan that carries a suggested retail price of \$8,499. Unlike direct-view TV's, in which the face of the picture tube is the screen, rear-projection sets use three small cathode-ray tubes (red, green, and blue) and a series of mirrors to project images on the inside surface of a translucent screen.

Two-piece front-projection systems represent yet another option, albeit typically a very expensive one. Comprising a relatively compact projector, often mounted on the ceiling, and a separate screen that is usually larger than even the largest rear-projection screens, these systems are not really TV's in the traditional sense because they're designed primarily for use with high-resolution sources like a laserdisc player and don't include a TV tuner. Front projectors start at \$3,000 (for Sharp's least expensive LCD projector) and run to well over \$10,000.

It's almost impossible to find a truly poor television these days, especially in the higher-ticket big-screen category. The top sets from most brand-name manufacturers offer consistent picture quality and similar convenience features. That's not to say that all high-end sets "look" the same — they don't. Each has its own distinct character. It's just that differences in picture quality are not as pronounced as they once were. There was a time when the difference in picture quality between projection sets and direct-view TV's was dramatic, but the gap has narrowed considerably in recent years. In some cases it's all but imperceptible — many retailers even display the two types side by side. The decision to buy projection or direct-view is increasingly one of taste, style, and room size. But individual impressions of picture quality are especially subjective, so focus on TV's that suit your particular taste.

Mitsubishi, a pioneer in big-screen technology and marketing, was an early leader in the projection-TV market



Designed to be set on a table or mounted on the ceiling, Sharp's 24-pound XV-H35U LCD video projector (\$4,695) features a remote-controllable zoom lens (back-lit remote included) that can be adjusted to project a 16-foot (diagonal) image.

One of three widescreen rear-projection sets in Pioneer's Elite line, the Pro-107 (\$5,500) has a 55-inch screen with a 16:10.7 aspect ratio, making it slightly wider than the 16:9 screens in widescreen sets from other makers. The set features a horizontal-expansion mode that delivers 5 percent more picture area than a standard 4:3 TV image. Horizontal resolution is given as 830 lines.



Proton's 27-inch NT-299 (\$1,700) features dual-tuner picture-in-picture, which allows two TV programs to be displayed at once, on-screen menu programming via the supplied remote control, and three audio-effects modes. The A/V connectors include three rear-panel inputs and outputs, a rear-panel S-video input, and front-panel A/V and S-video inputs. Horizontal resolution is given as 600 lines.

Zenith's 35-inch SM3589BT (\$2,099, shown with optional stand) is equipped to receive the StarSight on-screen program guide, which for a monthly subscription fee provides a continuously updated seven-day list of programming, one-touch VCR recording, database-like search capabilities, and a host of other features. The set has an on-screen menu system and comes with two remotes, one of them streamlined for everyday use.



JVC's 31-inch AV-31BX5 (\$1,599) features a black-level expansion circuit to improve picture contrast and a universal remote control with a help button that displays operating instructions on screen. The set also has a picture-in-picture mode said to deliver a sharper image than previous JVC TV's and a child timer (for limiting daily exposure to Barney and Baby Bop).



Never again will you have to tear your couch apart in search of that #@* remote control thanks to the Remote Locator feature offered on Magnavox's 32-inch TP3290B (\$1,099). Simply press the power button and the remote beeps for 30 seconds, or until you find it and press one of its keys. The set also has a Smart Sound mode that automatically subdues those annoying volume spikes that often occur when a broadcast or cable station cuts to a commercial.

Fans of the Late Late Show will appreciate Sony's inclusion of a pair of infrared wireless headphones with its 32-inch KV-32XBR37 (\$1,799, shown with optional stand). The set features dual-tuner picture-in-picture for displaying two TV programs at once, a "stand-up" universal remote control, an "orchestra seat" audio-effects mode, and several A/V jacks, including three rear-panel inputs (one S-video), a front-panel input, and a variable-level audio output.



two decades ago and has pushed the direct-view size envelope with 35-inch (1986) and 40-inch (1992) sets in recent years. The company continued its penchant for innovation last year by introducing 45- and 50-inch "tabletop" rear-projection sets.

Still the only 40-inch direct-view set on the market, Mitsubishi's CS40503 carries a suggested retail price of \$3,399 and includes among its features "Super Quick View," which lets you create a hit list containing up to ten of your favorite channels.

First introduced in Japan, where living space is at a premium, Mitsubishi's tabletop projection models are compact enough to be placed in an entertainment cabinet or on an optional base, if not on a table. The 45-inch TS-4553 (\$2,699) weighs just 110 pounds and is only 21 inches deep, making it slimmer and lighter than many direct-view sets with smaller screens (bulky glass picture tubes account for most of their weight). For example, Mitsubishi's 40-inch direct-view set weighs a whopping 250 pounds.

Skinny Space Savers

In fact, slimmer, lighter, and smaller, with more screen and less cabinet, are the watchwords for projection-TV designers. Today's sets use compact cathode-ray tubes (CRT's) and lenses with shorter focal lengths to save space. RCA's newest projection sets, for example, are only about two-thirds as deep as their predecessors. The company also offers sets, like the 46-inch P4677OCK (\$2,799), featuring fuller-figured cabinets with component-storage compartments under the screens as well as sets that are designed to be flush-mounted in a wall.

The slim-line projection sets in Sony's S series use redesigned optics and CRT's to achieve brighter, sharper images in a compact cabinet. The series includes the 46-inch KP-46S55 (\$2,699) and the 53-inch KP-53S55 (\$3,099), which are 21¼ and 25¾ inches deep, respectively.

You'll also hear a lot about flatter, squarer screens in direct-view sets and black screens in both projection and tube models. Black-tinted picture tubes are nothing new, but recent innovations in high-powered electronic chassis now make it possible for sufficient

light to penetrate the tinted screen and produce a bright picture with good contrast, color, and sharpness. Flatter tubes provide wider viewing angles with less distortion in the corners and along the edges of the picture. Panasonic made a big splash several years ago with its SuperFlat tube, now offered in several models, including the 31-inch CT-31SF22 (\$1,299). Sony has long maintained that its Super Trinitron tubes, like the one in its 32-inch KV-32XBR96S (\$2,599), are the flattest on the market, while Toshiba claims that the FST Perfect tube in its CX35D70 (\$2,599) has the flattest 35-inch screen you can buy.

Widescreen Wonders

Widescreen sets with a movie-theater-like 16:9 aspect ratio (instead of the standard 4:3) were introduced to much fanfare a couple of years ago, but they have proven slow to catch on in the U.S. although they are enjoying robust sales in Japan. Billed here as a precursor to high-definition TV (HDTV), the sets have been encumbered by high price tags and a lack of programs beyond existing letterboxed films on laserdisc and videocassette.

On the direct-view side of widescreen TV, RCA's G34170AT 34-inch set carries a suggested retail price of \$4,499 and Sharp's 34W1000 34-inch Wide Vision TV lists for \$3,995. On the projection side, Toshiba's 56-inch TW56D90 Theaterwide set lists for \$4,999 and JVC's 55-inch NV-55BX4 for \$4,499, and Pioneer offers three models that boast a slightly wider 16:10.7 aspect ratio, including the 50-inch PRO-97 (\$5,000).

Like most high-end TV's, these widescreen sets include S-video jacks that separate the luminance (black and white) and chrominance (color) portions of a video signal to deliver the best possible picture quality from high-resolution sources like laserdisc players and Super VHS VCR's. The sets also offer picture-expansion modes that stretch standard 4:3 TV images to fill the wider screen.

Keep It Simple

Despite their increasing technological sophistication, today's televisions are fairly easy to operate. Remote controls are becoming less complicated, with fewer buttons, and control routines are becoming more intuitive. And graphic on-screen interfaces that provide an easy-to-follow menu of op-



The PanaBlack picture tube used in Panasonic's 35-inch CT35S31 (\$2,099) is said to achieve a 40-percent improvement in contrast compared with other Panasonic TV's. The set also features a switchable artificial-intelligence circuit that automatically adjusts color and contrast, a menu system that displays easily identifiable icons, picture-in-picture, and a favorite-channel memory for up to twenty channels.

Toshiba's rear-projection 56-inch TW56D90 (\$4,999) squeezes a movie-theater-like 16:9 screen into a cabinet that's only 25 inches deep. It features three picture-expansion modes, a vertical image adjuster, dual-tuner picture-in-picture, and a universal remote control. On the audio side, it packs a Dolby Pro Logic decoder and a four-mode digital ambience processor and comes with a pair of stand-alone surround speakers.



Hailed as one of the most compact rear-projection sets on the market, Mitsubishi's "tabletop" 50-inch TS-5053 (\$3,099) is less than 24 inches deep and weighs about 143 pounds. The slim design was made possible by a shortened focal-length lens, down-sized CRT's, and a new electron gun. The set is equipped to receive text from extended data service (EDS) broadcasts and features a single-tuner picture-in-picture mode.

tions are common. Some sets even allow you to choose the "color temperature" you like best. Four new 32- and 35-inch Toshiba FST Perfect models include three color-temperature modes — cool, medium, and warm. The cool setting makes reds slightly more prominent, and the warm setting gives the picture a bluer tint.

The ProScan line from Thomson, RCA's parent company, includes an on-screen graphics menu with text and icons that help you adjust color temperature and much more. Setup instructions include detailed full-color renderings of the back panels of a VCR and TV to show you exactly where to connect each wire. If you're setting up a surround system, you can access an on-screen graphic display of a typical living-room scene, and a menu walks you through the adjustment options.

Some sets come with two remotes, a simple unit that controls only basic functions, like channel selection and volume, and a more sophisticated one with lots of buttons. Several of Zenith's big-screen TV's, like the 52-inch PV5269BT projection set (\$2,699), include a multibrand remote that oper-

ates other brands of TV's and VCR's and an "everyday" remote that has only seven buttons.

If your primary problem with remote controls is simply finding the darn things, Philips offers a Remote Locator on some of its Magnavox and Philips sets. Push the TV's power button and the remote beeps for 30 seconds — or until you locate the device and touch one of its buttons.

All Those Channels

The best new TV in the world isn't going to help if you can't find the programs you want to watch (or record). It's easy if you're using a VCR or laserdisc, but what about those 500 channels that will be coming in through your cable, over the air, or by satellite? How are you going to find your favorite needle in that electronic haystack? A growing number of TV's are equipped to receive the StarSight on-screen program guide, a service available for a monthly subscription fee from StarSight Telecast of Fremont, California, and cable/satellite TV operators. In addition to displaying a grid listing seven days' worth of programming details for every channel your TV receives, the service also provides one-touch VCR recording capability,

one-button access to on-air programs, and many other features. StarSight is now offered on a number of sets from Zenith and Mitsubishi and is expected to be available from Sony, Goldstar, RCA, Samsung, and Philips/Magnavox in the near future.

Another hot feature is picture-in-picture (PIP), which comes two basic ways — dual-tuner, which allows you to watch two broadcast programs at once, and single-tuner, which requires another video source such as a VCR. Some systems let you adjust the size and position of the inset picture and switch the sound between the main picture and the inset.

Of course, today's TV crop offers countless other features. One company is even considering adding an instant-replay mode to some of its sets in the hopes of exciting sports fanatics. So the sooner you get off the couch and hit the shopping trail, the sooner you'll be able to find that perfect big-screen TV — the one that will bring the theater home. □

James Barry, a Boston-based writer specializing in home video and consumer electronics, has been covering the field for twenty years.

TV Audio: What To Expect

Home theater means big sound as well as a big picture, so TV makers have gone out of their way in recent years to enhance the audio performance of their most sophisticated big-screen models. Nowadays, almost all such sets incorporate much better-sounding drivers than the tiny squawkers used in TV sets of yore, and some have built-in surround-sound processors.


Of course, chances are your home theater plans include an A/V receiver or a discrete surround-sound processor, so you should probably focus on sets that don't go overboard on the audio side. Why pay for a built-in surround decoder when you already have one? In any case, be sure to take into account the A/V equipment you're going to use with the set. Examine the TV's rear jack panel to make sure it can accommodate the kind of hookup scenario you envision, and consider how the set will mesh with your center speaker, which will more than likely rest on top of it. Also check the power ratings of the set's onboard amplifiers. The more oomph the better, because there are plenty of TV viewing opportunities that just don't require the support of a whole surround-sound system.

Some sets, like Toshiba's 56-inch TW5600 widescreen projection model, come with a built-in Dolby Pro Logic decoder. The TW5600 also includes a "subwoofer" and comes with two stand-alone

surround speakers; total power output is 68 watts. Other TV's incorporate digital signal processors that simulate the ambience of various venues, like a jazz club or concert hall. In addition to both digital ambience and Dolby Surround processing, Sony's XBR² sets — the 27-inch KV-27XBR96S (\$1,699) and 32-inch KV-32XBR96S (\$2,599) — feature side-mounted component speakers that can be detached to add realism and dimension to the sound.


RCA's Home Theater series big-screen TV's include the Hughes Sound Retrieval System (SRS), which provides a three-dimensional sound effect using only the set's built-in speakers. Hitachi offers what it calls a Spatially Equalized Sound (SES) system in its 31-inch 31UX5B (\$1,099) that uses acoustic chambers to project sound through thin grilles next to the picture tube. Zenith calls its version of digital sound processing Spatial Equalization (Seq). The system is said to improve bass response and high-frequency clarity as well as widening separation to enhance the surround-sound effect.

So even if you don't need it, a built-in audio system of some sort is part of the package when you buy a big-screen TV today. And for watching the soaps, most can deliver decent sound. But for serious home theater, stick with the outboard surround-sound system you probably already own, or are planning to buy. — J.B.



As virtually every speaker manufacturer rushes to deliver "home theater" speakers to the marketplace, M&K amasses nearly twenty years of experience in the field—dating back to Hollywood screening-room installations in the 1970s.

M&K engineers have spent well over a decade studying the varied aspects of surround



sound—including encoding and decoding; soundtrack recording; and the differences between reproducing sound in theaters and in homes.

M&K speakers excel in the reproduction of all source material. Accuracy, low coloration, pinpoint imaging, wide dynamic range, and deep-bass reproduction are all critical for music as well as film soundtracks. M&K Satellites and Subwoofers have been acclaimed for these attributes since the '70s.

And this is why M&K knows that any speaker that claims to be optimized for either music or film sound, one at the expense of the other, will never reproduce either one properly.

M&K Home Theater Systems

Conventional speakers make the music and effects on film soundtracks compressed and dull. But M&K's exciting dynamics and "quick" transients give you precise 3-D imaging and a lifelike presence.

M&K Satellites are *timbre-matched*, using virtually identical speaker drivers, crossovers, and frequency response, for a seamless 360° surround-sound performance. With an all-M&K home theater system, voices and effects do not change char-

acter when their sound moves from left to right or front to back in your room.

Even if you are just adding an M&K subwoofer, front/center, or surround




**M&K
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speaker to your present system, M&K's unique timbre controls allow you to "fine-tune" the sound of your new M&K speakers to achieve the closest possi-

ble timbre-match with your existing speakers—even if they are not M&Ks.

M&K Center Channel Speakers

Beware of inexpensive "center channel" speakers. In Pro-Logic, the center channel speaker is driven the hardest, and often reproduces as much sound as the left and right speakers combined.



Each one of M&K's six individually-available Satellites has exceptional dynamic range and high output to meet and exceed the tremendous demands of the center channel.

M&K Powered Subwoofers

Legendary for their massive output, exceptional detail, and articulation, M&K's thirteen internally-powered Subwoofers set the industry's standards for high-performance deep bass.

M&K's innovative Push-Pull Dual Driver subwoofers deliver a major improvement by virtually eliminating even-order harmonic distortion, and doubling efficiency (same as doubling amplifier power) with four times the output of single driver subwoofers.

Whether you choose our state-of-the-art Home THX® Audio speaker system, an add-on set of surround speakers, or anything in between, no other speakers will give you the exciting performance, sound quality, flexibility and compatibility of M&K's home theater component speakers.



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of system design
some new lessons

KICKER X-series Competition Power Amps...
all-out high current performance for serious
competitors

POP off the connector panel cover of a Kicker si-series or X-series amplifier, and you'll immediately see what sets these amps apart from the rest of the car audio world...an innovative module docking port that accepts and powers an amazing array of active signal processors. These modules become a part of the amplifier's circuitry, eliminating the need for expensive outboard processors, cables, and all the problems (like noise and ground loops) they can cause.

Where's the Box?

At the recent Consumer Electronics Show people were baffled (pun intended) by the AEE (Active Electronic Enclosure), a module that lets deck-mounted Kicker Freeair™ woofers perform like Kicker Competition™ woofers in sealed enclosures. We'll repeat that...**YOU DON'T NEED A BOX TO GET SUBWOOFER PERFORMANCE THAT USED TO REQUIRE A SEALED ENCLOSURE!**

But that's not all. The ACR (Active Center / Rear Fill) module creates center channel and/or rear fill signals which may be assigned to either or both amplifier channels. The AEQ (Active EQ) module adds an extra low bass "kick" for you

boomers out there. The ARG (Active Remote Gain) module lets you control amplifier gain from in the car, great for fine-tuning subwoofer volume.

Three 24dB/octave active crossover modules allow cascading amplifier/module combinations for bi-amp, tri-amp, or quad-amp systems. Crossover points are selected through the use of supplied chips. The ASW (subwoofer) comes with 60Hz, 80Hz, and 100Hz chips, the AMR (midrange) with 175Hz, 250Hz,



KICKER
Active Signal
Processing Modules...
redefining the art of system design

and 350Hz chips, and the ATW (tweeter) with 3.5kHz and 4.5kHz chips.

You can select sending either a processed or unprocessed signal through the host amp's module output connectors to another amplifier.

And, except for the \$65 ARG, all current modules only cost \$45 list.

Stillwater Designs is committed to de-

veloping additional modules to add more functions to the Kicker amplifiers...and more design flexibility for Kicker-equipped systems.

System design made simple

An integrated amp/module system like Kicker's makes perfect sense. You can start off with a simple mixed-mono system and gradually expand into a sophisticated four-way high performance all-Kicker system without losing any of your original investment. Instead of trading-in or selling amps as your system grows, you just plug in the appropriate module and add the new equipment.

The "Kicker" of car amplifiers

As remarkable as they are, modules aren't the only reason Kicker amps are taking the car audio world by storm. After all, they were designed to match the quality and performance of world-famous Kicker speakers.

A look inside the chassis tells you the incredible sound quality of Kicker amplifiers is the result of advanced design features more commonly found in only audiophile-quality home amplifiers and premium grade electronic components used throughout the design.

Pure, clean power

Distortion is virtually eliminated by using an ultra-clean regulated power supply with numerous noise-filtering and energy storage capacitors, a DC servo design to eliminate DC offset and the need for coupling capacitors, and a Triple-Darlington output section.

In the power supply, switching noise is eliminated by a toroidal inductor and by a large bank of premium grade energy storage capacitors...the audio circuitry is fed pure, clean DC power. The power supply is very efficient thanks to massive MOSFETs that switch the 12VDC battery voltage at high frequencies and feed a Litz-wound toroidal transformer. Litz windings (multiple strands of small gauge wire providing large amounts of surface area) take maximum advantage of the fact that high frequency current travels on the surface of a wire.

The power supply is regulated to deliver rated performance from 12.5 to 16VDC. Voltage sags won't mean sub-standard performance, a problem with conventional unregulated power supplies in the real world.

The signal path is among the purest you'll ever see...or hear. The DC servo eliminates all coupling capacitors (major sources of distortion in the bass and midrange) in the signal path except a high-grade DC blocking capacitor at the RCA input.

Warm Class AB biasing prevents crossover notch distortion, resulting in transparent midrange and treble response at all power levels. Cold biasing, used in many amp designs, can mean treble distortion at low output levels.

The final output stage is a Triple-Darlington configuration (multiple bipolar power transistors in three stages of current gain). Each stage successively shields the voltage gain section from the loud-speaker load. This means the amplifier has very high current capability, minus

the distortion found in less sophisticated designs.

No shortcuts here

Isolated grounds reject noise from the engine, alternator, turn signals, etc.. Isolating the audio and power circuitry with opto-coupled feedback provides a much cleaner audio signal than less sophisticated feedback methods used in conventional amplifiers.

Fast-acting protection circuits guard against overvoltage, speaker shorts, thermal overload, and reversed battery voltage. Timer logic muting adds protection from speaker-damaging on/off thumps.

Automatic bridging—stereo, bridged mono, or simultaneous stereo/mono three-channel modes—is selected with the speaker wiring scheme; no switching is needed.

An extremely wide input sensitivity range (250mV-5V) accommodates a broad variety of source units. High (22k Ω) input impedance allows driving up to ten amplifiers in a single signal chain, reducing the possibility of inducing noise (as often happens when using a splitter to run multiple amps).

Hidden connectors under a removable

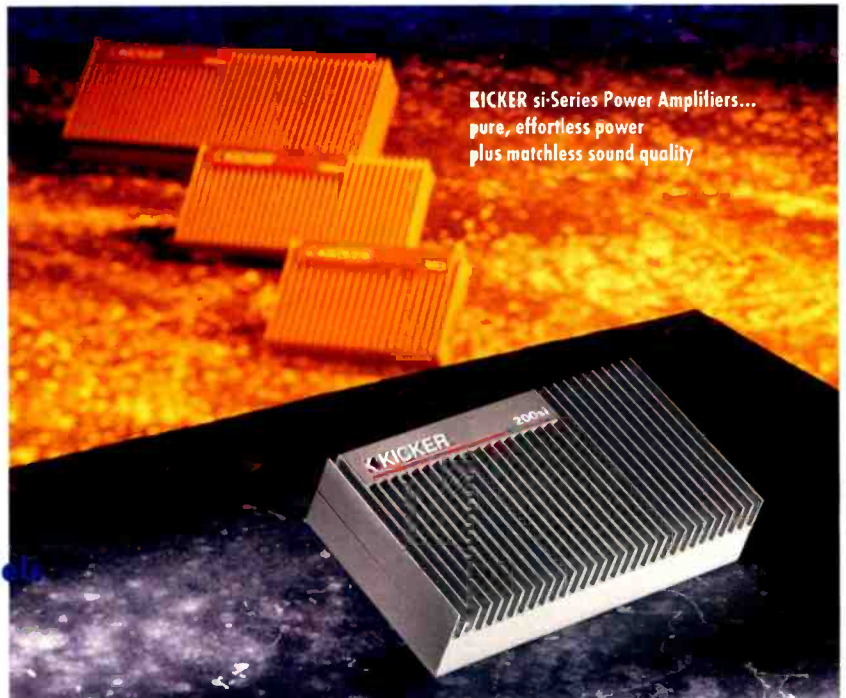
cover allow routing wiring out the back of the amplifier or through the bottom for stealth installation. Gold-plated RCA input and output jacks and nickel-plated custom power input, ground, remote turn-on, and speaker screw terminals mean easy, solid connections.

Stillwater Designs has always believed that its customers deserve every ounce of performance they pay for, so it's no surprise that before it's shipped every amp is burned in for three hours and thoroughly tested to make sure it meets specifications and Kicker's tough quality standards.

Quit looking, start listening

The bottom line is that Kicker has created an all-out, no-holds-barred approach to car audio amplification and signal processing that takes power, sound quality, and system design flexibility to the limit.

To find out more about Kicker amplifiers and active signal processing modules, call toll-free at 800 256-5425 or write to Stillwater Designs, P.O. Box 459, Stillwater, OK 74076. You'll get free color literature and a list of Authorized Kicker Dealers where you can experience America's Music Machines.



KICKER si-Series Power Amplifiers...
pure, effortless power
plus matchless sound quality

Specifications Common on all Models

Frequency Response: 10Hz-30kHz; +0, -1dB
Signal-to-Noise Ratio: greater than 100dB, unweighted, re: rated power
Input Impedance: 22k Ω
Input Sensitivity: 250mV-5V RMS
Total Harmonic Distortion: *less than 0.02% THD, ** less than 0.05% THD
20Hz-20kHz, 12.5-16VDC

si-Series

Model	Rated power per channel into 4 Ω	Rated power per channel into 2 Ω	Rated power bridged mono into 4 Ω	Damping Factor, @4 Ω	Slew Rate	Maximum current draw, 2 Ω stereo load	Width	Height	Depth
50s1	25W*	42.5W*	85W**	200	20V μ s	15A	9	1.75	6.125
100s1	50W*	85W*	170W**	250	30V μ s	30A	12.875	1.75	6.125
200s1	100W*	170W*	340W**	300	30V μ s	55A	12.875	3	7.2
500s1	250W*	425W*	850W**	350	36V μ s	130A	18	3	7.2

X-Series

Model	Rated power into 4 Ω	Rated Power into 2 Ω	Rated Power into 1 Ω	Rated into 1/2 Ω	Damping Factor @4 Ω	Max. Current Draw, 2 Ω stereo load	Width (in.)	Height (in.)	Depth (in.)
X100 (per channel, both channels driven)	50W*	100W*	200W*	400W**	>500	30V μ s	18	3	7.2
X100 (bridged mono)	200W*	400W*	800W**	Not recommended					
X50 (per channel, both channels driven)	25W*	50W*	100W*	170W**	>500	20V μ s	12.875	3	7.2
X50 (bridged mono)	100W*	200W*	340W**	Not recommended					

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CIRCLE NO. 26 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Loudspeakers may be the most controversial components in audio. Whereas electronic hardware should behave with steadfast consistency, speakers, because of complex interactions with their environment, always sound different from each other. Even identical speakers will sound different if located in different rooms, or even at different places in the *same* room. In addition, their behavior will be tailored to meet performance goals that vary from manufacturer to manufacturer.

So how well you like a speaker will depend on a number of factors, including (but not limited to) how it interacts with the room in which it is used, your tastes, the extent to which your preferences intersect with the sound the manufacturer is trying to achieve, and simply how good a job the manufacturer has done of designing and building the speaker to meet his own goals. That's a lot of variables, and in the end there is no substitute for your own ears. But setting some priorities will help you sort through all the promotion and evaluation you're likely to encounter in the process of choosing new speakers.

WHAT'S ALWAYS IMPORTANT

Smoothness. Although there is a degree of controversy about what exactly speaker "smoothness" means — with some considering on-axis behavior critical and others feeling that reverberant-field, total-power response is paramount — all agree that speakers should have a smooth, peak-free response (see graph on the next page). Many designers consider it desirable for a system to have slightly diminished output in the "presence" region (around 3 kHz) or throughout the treble range to offset recording practices that often produce sound a bit on the "hot" side. Competent designers will insure that the attenuation is gradual and uniform, however, with no abrupt variations or discontinuities.

Radiation pattern. Unlike any other component in an audio system, a loudspeaker does not have a single frequency response; its output is slightly different at every angle. A speaker's radiation pattern is the way in which its response varies as one moves off its forward axis (at high frequencies this characteristic is often referred to as dispersion or directivity). Because the wavelengths of low frequencies are large relative to the dimensions of normal speaker enclosures, speakers are typically omnidirectional in the bass range, having essentially the same response at all angles. It is at middle and high frequencies where the differences become significant.

In keeping with the smoothness dictum discussed above, it is important that the radiation pattern be smooth. That is, to the extent that the speaker's response changes as one moves off-axis (the horizontal axis especially), it should do



PHOTO BY CHIP SIMONS

LOUDSPEAKER DESIGN

What matters, and what doesn't

BY HOWARD FERSTLER

so gradually and in a way that yields smooth responses at all angles. With conventional box loudspeakers, that would normally mean a gradually steepening high-frequency rolloff at increasing angles off the forward axis, but very similar, if not quite identical, response from the lowest frequencies through the midrange and lower treble. That's most difficult to accomplish at extreme angles, with the greatest problems typically occurring where the gradually diminished off-axis output of a large driver approaching the top of its operating range dovetails into the more uniformly dispersed response of a smaller one.

Erratic off-axis behavior will adversely affect a system's power response and degrade its imaging characteristics, and for listeners sitting off-axis the direct response will be ragged as well. Although not every designer feels that strong response beyond 45 degrees off-axis is desirable, those who opt for attenuated radiation to the sides — and rear — need to make the rolloff as uniform as possible (see "Radiation Pattern" diagram).

Bandwidth. Flatness and dispersion notwithstanding,

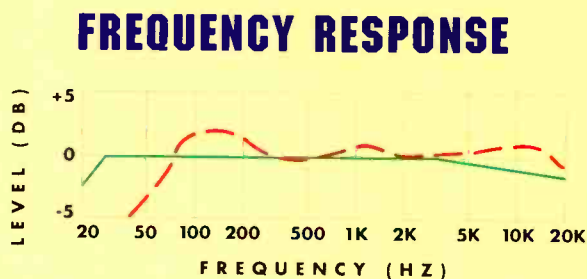
The most important factors are response and radiation pattern.

proper performance requires a decent reach into the bass and treble ranges — although listening tastes will also be a determining factor. If you favor Telemann, Haydn, and Mozart — or even rock or jazz — you will probably not need speakers with flat response extending below 40 or even 50 Hz. At the other extreme, there is little musical sound of any kind above 14 or 15 kHz, and many middle-aged and older individuals cannot hear much above those frequencies anyway. Many listeners will be satisfied with loudspeakers that uniformly cover the range between those extremes.

If your tastes include synthesizer music, however, or your speakers are part of a serious A/V system (and you play such low-bass or transient-heavy showpieces as *Batman*, *Terminator II*, *Gettysburg*, *Jurassic Park*, and the *THX Star Wars Trilogy*), or you take pipe-organ music and the *1812 Overture* seriously, you would do well to obtain a speaker system with the widest bandwidth possible, particularly in the bass range, or to invest in a good subwoofer.

WHAT MAY BE IMPORTANT

Efficiency. Although a speaker's electrical sensitivity (the amount of sound you get out for a given amount of signal in) may be important, it will become an issue only if you have limited amplifier power available or if your listening room is large enough that even a robust amplifier will have trouble driving insensitive speakers to adequate levels. Efficiency



Frequency response is a measure of how evenly a component reproduces the audio spectrum. Ideally, the output level should remain constant ("flat") across the entire audible band for a given input level. Speakers depart from that ideal much more than any other element in a conventional audio system, but the behavior represented by the solid curve above is certainly commendable. Yet, in some showroom comparisons the system exemplified by the dashed line might be preferred. The midbass hump would accentuate the bass punch of some pop recordings, the midrange rise would impose a sometimes impressive forward quality on many others, and the treble elevation would add "sizzle." Over the long haul, however, the instant-standout quality of the lesser system would become oppressive, particularly with good recordings. When auditioning speakers, be careful to listen for qualities of smoothness, transparency, and neutrality.

has little to do with actual sound quality, although a speaker system with fairly low sensitivity may be that way as a result of building formidable deep-bass potential into a modestly sized enclosure.

Output capability. The importance of a loudspeaker's maximum output (short of damage or severe distortion) will depend upon your listening habits. If you have a small listening room or your tastes are limited strictly to harpsichord, string quartet, or small-ensemble Baroque music, you should not require speakers that can shake your house. If, on the other hand, you like your film soundtracks and rock music *loud*, or if you want to approximate the sound of a live orchestra playing a Shostakovich symphony in your well-padded, expansive living room, then you should pay attention to the ability of your speakers to produce the required acoustic energy. Test reports like those in STEREO REVIEW can be helpful in this regard.

Impedance. Despite what you may read on the back of your receiver, most amplifiers will not have trouble driving reasonably low-impedance speakers unless two pairs are run in parallel. Most amplifiers deliver increasing amounts of power as the load impedance is reduced (to a point), and 4- or 6-ohm-rated speakers can use that increased output to advantage. Although the reactive (capacitive and inductive) elements of a speaker's impedance may adversely affect the performance of a substandard amplifier, and a very low average impedance may cause some amplifiers to run surprisingly warm or even shut down under some circumstances, impedance itself does not influence a speaker's inherent sound quality. What it does affect is a speaker's sensitivity (all else being equal, reducing impedance increases sensitivity) and, in extreme cases, what sorts of amplifiers will be comfortable driving it.

Woofer size. All other factors being the same, a large woofer will produce better (or at least more) bass than a small one. Other factors are seldom the same, however, and a smaller woofer of more sophisticated design will often outclass larger ones of poorer pedigree. When evaluating woofers, forget your eyes and let your ears — working in combination with a bass-plentiful recording and a listening room similar to yours — do the deciding.

Enclosure size. Larger systems often have the ability to play louder and reach further into the deep bass than smaller ones. Cabinet size will ordinarily have little else to do with a system's sound quality, however. There have been huge boxes holding only two or three drivers that did no better at producing high volume levels and smooth treble, midrange, and bass energy than good bookshelf systems.

Magnetic shielding. Although it will not affect sound quality, shielding will be important if you plan to locate your speakers within a foot or two of a direct-view television screen, where the fields from driver magnets might cause color distortion. Magnetic interference will not normally be a problem with rear-projection sets, because of their tube sizes and interior layouts, and it definitely will not be a factor if you have a front-projection setup.

Driver count. More drivers may mean more sound, but

The magazine that knocks you on your ear



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that does not necessarily mean *better* sound. Indeed, a system with a few good drivers may outclass one with a lot of lesser ones (consider the number of outstanding speakers over the years that have been simple two-way designs). Although extra drivers, properly configured, can be used to increase output capability or to shape a system's radiation pattern (witness the Allison IC-20 of a few years back or some current Home THX models), it is the quality of the drivers and how well they are integrated into a complete speaker system that primarily determine performance.

Crossover characteristics. Loudspeaker ads sometimes mention crossover frequencies and slopes or the number, type, and quality of crossover components involved. Although such information could be useful to engineers, what really matters is how the crossover works in conjunction with the individual drivers. But to those without a lot of other technical data (and the education to put it to good use), a sprinkling of information about the crossover may be more misleading than helpful. Some fine systems have elaborate crossover networks, but other fine ones have simple networks — or, like the Bose 901, none at all.

WHAT'S RARELY IMPORTANT

Ultra-wide bandwidth. Subwoofers that have powerful and flat output down to 10 Hz or tweeters that have response to well above 20 kHz may be interesting engineering exercises, but such capabilities have little to do with what you actually hear.

Driver materials. Exotic materials make good ad copy, but there are fine examples of drivers made with all sorts of materials, and no particular substance in general use has a big performance edge over any other, including good old paper. That's not to say that materials don't matter at all, because they do, but mainly to the engineers designing the drivers.

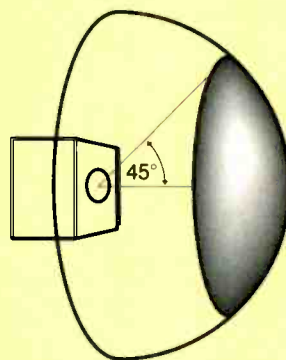
Woofer design. Some enthusiasts swear by the acoustic-suspension principle while others adhere faithfully to bass-reflex, passive-radiator, or any of a multitude of other approaches. From an engineer's standpoint, each configuration has its own set of advantages and drawbacks that must be considered in terms of specific design goals, but any of these configurations is capable of delivering exemplary bass, or even subwoofer, performance.

Weight. Some manufacturers install average-quality drivers and crossovers in extremely heavy, thick-walled speaker enclosures. Others produce drivers with magnets that weigh in like small manhole covers. But there is no solid correlation between weight and sound quality. A number of fairly lightweight systems are world-class performers, and at least one manufacturer, as a way to extend bass response downward, built woofers for his top-of-the-line system that had lighter magnets than those he used in some of his cheaper models.

Group delay. No research has proven that group delay — a measure of phase shift versus frequency, or "time coherence" — is, in itself, a significant factor in the sound of typical loudspeakers playing normal program material. That is not to say that it is necessarily always inconsequential, but the human ear is essentially insensitive to phase above approximately 1.5 kHz, and most good speakers have reasonably low group delay in the range where the ear is sensitive.

RADIATION PATTERN

Those who feel that an irregular frequency response at extreme off-axis angles is not critical may point out that the systems they admire have reduced output to the sides anyway, making the reverberant-field variations that result from such behavior inconsequential. Now, while there is no doubt that a speaker system that radiates a substantial amount of mid- and high-frequency energy beyond 45 degrees off-axis will sound different from one that does not, there is also no doubt that a system with erratic frequency response that far off-center will not perform as well as one that has a smooth output over the



same angular range, no matter how strong or weak their relative outputs at those angles. The diagram at left shows why even an attenuated off-axis signal, irregular or not, can have very audible consequences.

The full hemisphere indicates the forward radiation zone of any speaker system.

The shaded section is the

area covered by the on-axis to 45-degree-off-axis radiation. That is the angular spread many manufacturers consider to be by far the most significant part of a speaker's output into any kind of room. The unshaded area indicates the area of coverage from 45 to 90 degrees off-axis. Although the total *angular* coverage is the same as for the shaded region, the total *area* transcribed is much larger. Even if the off-axis signals radiating into this segment are lower in level than those spread over the more forward angle, the larger area affected amplifies their impact. Rough off-axis response can color the sound and degrade imaging.

OTHER FACTORS

Loudspeaker design also involves loudspeaker durability. That depends primarily on the use of well-made enclosures, rugged drivers, and appropriate crossovers, but some speakers also have protection circuits that reduce the chance of damage from amplifier overdrive or failure. Reputable manufacturers will have substantial warranties that reflect faith in their products. Unless you are a tinkerer or have lots of patience, it's best to be somewhat wary of designs based on exotic, unproven technology from obscure manufacturers. They may sound great, but with no track record to go on, it's hard to know how well they will hold up or what difficulties you will face in getting them repaired if they develop problems a few years later. □

Howard Ferstler is a free-lance writer and author of the books *High Fidelity Audio/Video Systems* and *High-Definition Compact Disc Recording* (McFarland, 1991 and 1994).

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Communism is gone, and Russian musicians are a hot property for Western record companies.

by Jamie James

The **R**ussians Are Coming

THE TUMULTUOUS EVENTS that brought an end to more than seventy years of Communist rule in the former Soviet Union caused profound repercussions throughout every stratum of Russian soci-

ety—not least in the world of music. For centuries the nation's pride and joy, Russia's musical institutions faced an uncertain future during the chaos that followed the fall of Communism in 1991. After foreign travel became freely available, some of the best players and singers emigrated to greener pastures in the West, and there were rumors that financial ruin was besetting even such great institutions as the Bolshoi and Kirov opera companies. People outside the country were beginning to ask the unthinkable: Was music an unaffordable luxury in democratic Russia?

PHOTOS: GERGIEV, KIROV ORCHESTRA/PHILIPS, MIPNIS, RCA VICTOR



Conductor Valery Gergiev, left, of today's Kirov Opera and Orchestra, St. Petersburg; photo at top, bass Alexander Kipnis in the 1940's as Boris Godunov.

But even to pose the question reveals a fundamental naïveté about the Russian character. As Valery Gergiev, the dynamic young conductor who has guided the Kirov through this difficult period of transition, told me when we spoke recently in New York, "Culture was always more important to the Russians than business. People could live with a very modest standard of living, but they always had thousands of books." Although the rules have changed radically in a short period of time, today it appears that the Russian music scene has stabilized and is even beginning to flourish—thanks in large measure to the investment of the biggest foreign record companies.

BMG, Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, and Sony all have major Russian orchestras on their rosters, and these cash-poor groups are recording and



Composer Dmitri Shostakovich

touring at a pace that puts their Western counterparts to shame. For example, the following releases are due in just the first months of this year: Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic conducted by Yuri Temirkanov (BMG), Tchaikovsky's "Manfred" Symphony and a set of Russian overtures from the five-year-old Russian National Orchestra led by Mikhail Pletnev (Deutsche Grammophon), and a collection of Russian orchestral showpieces, Rimsky-Korsakov's little-known opera *Sadko*, and Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony from Gergiev and the Kirov Opera and Orchestra, St. Petersburg (all Philips).

Sony is releasing eleven recordings, the second batch in its new line of St.

Petersburg Classics, that explore the whole gamut of music from the former Soviet Union, from Tchaikovsky's chamber music to contemporary music from the Baltics. One great find among the first set of releases was a CD of arias and folk songs featuring Zurab Sotkilava, a Georgian tenor whose brilliant, flavorful voice seems to embody the passionate soul of the Caucasian steppes.

It is a paradox that even while the Kremlin censored and suppressed the nation's composers and leading musicians, it strongly supported such centuries-old institutions as the Kirov, the Bolshoi, and the Leningrad Philharmonic. The oppressive Soviet regime used them as window-dressing to lend itself an air of intellectual legitimacy.

While anyone who resisted was cruelly punished or sent into exile—in-

Western collectors. The greatest Russian composer of the twentieth century, Dmitri Shostakovich, continued to write prolifically, but at the cost of great personal suffering and sacrifice, which were revealed only after his death (in the controversial book *Testimony*, published as his memoirs).

By the time of Communism's fall, the leadership of many of the country's venerable musical institutions had passed to a dynamic young generation of hip, nonpolitical musicians who were very much aware of the opportunities in the West. Foremost among them is Valery Gergiev, who took over the reins of the Kirov Opera just before the death throes of the old regime.

Gergiev, for one, exudes confidence and optimism: "I don't have any fears

"Culture was
always more
important to the
Russians than
business."

—Valery Gergiev



Conductor Mikhail Pletnev

cluding Russia's most famous musical son, the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich—those who were willing to play by Soviet rules enjoyed relative security and great artistic satisfaction. For instance, during the fifty years of Evgeny Mravinsky's iron-fisted leadership, from 1938 to 1988, the Leningrad Philharmonic—now once again known as the St. Petersburg Philharmonic—was very likely the greatest symphony orchestra in the world.

Yet Russian music was only able to develop during this period at the cost of nearly complete cultural isolation. Recordings of the great Russian orchestras on the state label Melodiya were often of execrable sound quality, and they were only fitfully available to

about the Russian musical tradition: It will never stop. For five years now, people have been saying, 'Oh, the Kirov is losing all of its good people; the good singers will leave. It will only last another year.' But that is not what has happened." Yet Gergiev has not allowed the Kirov simply to drift along, a captive to its tradition of greatness; he has taken a number of initiatives to establish the company as a key player on the international music scene today. He has established creative partnerships with Britain's Royal Opera and the San Francisco Opera and is in the process of forging such an alliance with the Metropolitan Opera.

Two years ago, Gergiev founded the White Nights international arts festi-

val, which presents, in addition to performances of the standard Russian repertoire, revivals of neglected Russian operas and new works by contemporary composers. "The reason we started the White Nights Festival," he explained, "was so that the best artists from around the world, not just Russia, would think it important to be there." By keeping St. Petersburg on the cutting edge, he reasons, Russian singers will have a more powerful incentive than mere patriotism to stay at home.

One of the boldest musical projects to emerge in the post-Soviet era was the founding of the Russian National Orchestra in 1990. When I asked its conductor, Mikhail Pletnev, how he managed to establish the first new orchestra in Russia since 1917, he replied, "If someone asked me to do it

mut Schmidt (West Germany), and Edward Heath (U.K.).

Another major breakthrough came in 1993, when Deutsche Grammophon offered the orchestra a recording contract. "We couldn't believe it," said Pletnev. "They are No. 1 in the world." The next big project is to build a new hall for the orchestra. The Russian government has donated a plot of land across from the Kremlin, and Pletnev is now hard at work raising the money.

Despite all the accomplishments of the past few years, there are still reminders of the bad old days. In 1993 Semyon Bychkov, a native of St. Petersburg who is currently the music director of the Orchestre de Paris, resigned as the principal guest conductor of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic be-

anism?" Of course, strong-willed music directors are found everywhere on the musical map; a player who publicly disagreed with, say, Riccardo Muti or Georg Solti might well find himself off his orchestra's tour roster.

The age-old problem of all arts institutions—finding enough money to support ambitious creative programs—has become ever more acute in Russia since *perestroika*. Yuri Bashmet, widely regarded as the leading viola player in the world today (he records for BMG Classics), has been working to establish a competition for his instrument in Moscow but has found it difficult to raise funds. He spoke candidly with me about that and other issues.

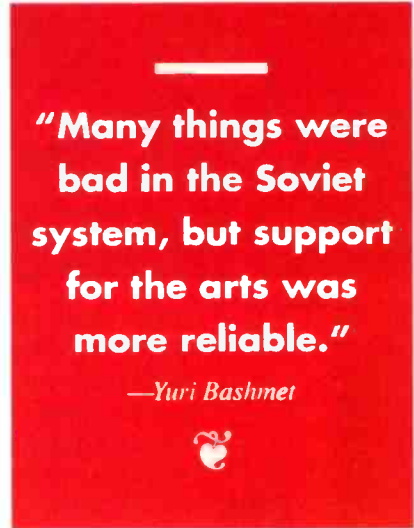
"Money is a very serious problem for all of us in Russia now," he said. "Many things in the Soviet system were bad, but government support for



Conductor Semyon Bychkov

again, I would say no. It was so, so difficult. It was absolutely impossible, but it happened."

The players came from the ranks of many Soviet orchestras; the violin section had six players who'd been concertmasters elsewhere. In the first year the musicians were paid very little, and much of that money, Pletnev said, came out of his own pocket. But he proved to be a genius at fund-raising: Today the Russian National Orchestra is sponsored by the Getty Foundation, Chase Manhattan Bank, Chevron, and Exxon, and its board of directors includes three former heads of government: Mikhail Gorbachev (U.S.S.R.), Hel-



Violist Yuri Bashmet

cause the orchestra's long-time concertmaster, Vladimir Ovcharek, was not permitted to participate in its tour of Europe and America. According to Bychkov, Ovcharek was barred from the tour because he had criticized certain policies imposed by Yuri Temirkanov, the orchestra's music director since Mravinsky's death in 1988.

Bychkov was outraged. When we spoke shortly after the contretemps, he said, "It goes against everything I believe, in both artistic and human terms. The orchestra didn't say anything because they were deeply afraid. It's so easy to instill fear: Once the big fist comes down, they know what that means." He asked incredulously, "Is this a country sliding back to totalitari-

the arts was more reliable." When it comes to the music itself, however, Bashmet has unqualified optimism.

"There is no problem with finding musicians in Russia now—in Moscow there were always too many musicians." He is particularly sanguine about the survival of the great Russian string-playing tradition. "It doesn't depend on a professor to teach you. It's in the blood, it's in the air. Russia is like the United States—it's a wide-open place. There's a feeling there that everything is possible."

Like many of his colleagues, Bashmet is in Russia to stay. "I don't say I am a great patriot, but my home is Russia. It's important for my music to be there, and it's important for me." □

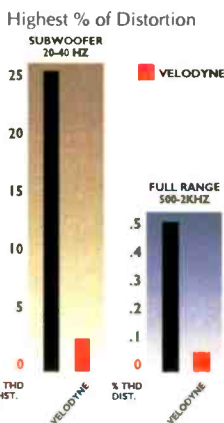
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 -David Clark, *Audio*, November 1987

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Home theaters designed around the six-channel Dolby sound system used in many state-of-the-art movie theaters, a new 5-inch videodisc, and a VCR that promises broadcast-quality images — just a few of the digital attractions poised to take us into the next millennium — were the talk of the 1995 Winter Consumer Electronics Show, which drew more than 103,000 retailers, distributors, manufacturers, and journalists to Las Vegas in January.

The show was a coming-out party for the digital Dolby Surround AC-3 system. Pioneer, JBL/Runco, Perreux/Monitor, Kenwood, Yamaha, Enlightened Audio Designs (EAD), and Audio Design Associates hosted demonstrations using AC-3-equipped components. Prominent among this new breed was Pioneer's VSX-DS3S audio/video receiver (\$1,925), slated to hit store shelves in August, EAD's \$5,950 TheaterMaster A/V preamplifier, and Perreux's \$4,495 AVP 6 A/V preamp, due out in May.

Meanwhile, demonstrations of the digital videodisc (DVD) system developed by Sony and Philips drew rave reviews for its picture quality (the rival Toshiba/Time Warner DVD system was endorsed by a number of companies just weeks after the show; see "Bulletin," page 8). It appears certain that DVD will, in one form or another, reach the market sometime next year. Sony also showcased the new digital videocassette (DVC) format, which has received the backing of more than fifty companies worldwide and also appears to be heading for store shelves in 1996. The system uses two sizes of cassettes, the larger offering up to 4½ hours of recording time.

Elsewhere on the bustling home theater front, Lucasfilm announced several new THX licensees — including Adcom, B&K, Energy, Jamo, Krell, Meridian, Nakamichi, and Rotel — and promised thirty new THX laserdiscs by the end of the year. Kenwood and Technics announced second-generation THX receivers, both expected to retail for \$999. ProScan, RCA's sister brand, introduced a colossal 80-inch rear-projection TV (\$8,499) with built-in Dolby Pro Logic that's slated to hit stores in the middle of the year. At the other end of the spectrum, Sher-

wood showed its \$279 RV-4050R Pro Logic receiver and Altec Lansing introduced its powered PHT5 Personal Home Theater system with built-in Pro Logic, featuring a pair of satellite speakers in mini-towers and a compact subwoofer — all for \$500.

The CD mega-changer boom continued with moderately priced 100-disc models from Aiwa, Kenwood, and Pioneer and a \$500 60-disc follow-up to Fisher's popular 24-disc Studio 24 changer. But Kenwood stole the scene with the DP-J2070, which can be connected to a computer keyboard if users want to streamline the task of keying in album titles and artist names. Cerwin-Vega demonstrated a prototype speaker system built around its CATA-12 point-source transducer, a woofer with a Heil tweeter folded-ribbon Air Motion Transformer in the middle.

Sunfire Corporation, Bob Carver's new company, stopped showgoers dead in their tracks with a remarkable

Hot new products from the 1995 Winter Consumer Electronics Show

CES SHOW STOPPERS

10-inch-square powered subwoofer that is said to use a 2,700-watt servo amplifier and a push-pull driver pair to achieve response down to 18 Hz. The mini monster is scheduled for delivery this fall with a target price of \$2,000 a pair.

Things were relatively quiet, if not somber, on the MiniDisc front — even though several MD players were reported stolen from the Sony exhibit. Citing low sales, Aiwa announced that it is "stepping back" from the MD market, but Sanyo unveiled a \$1,000 boombox that plays MD's, CD's, and cassettes. Sony introduced a new home MD recorder, and Sharp previewed the "world's smallest" MD recorder, the \$800 MD-M20 (due out this June). The only DCC news came from Philips, which said that its previously announced DCC951 home deck and DCC170 portable recorder would be available this spring.



CES SHOW STOPPERS

In video, RCA projected sales for its Digital Satellite System of 1.2 to 1.5 million units this year, and Sony is expected to jump into the market by mid-year. MPEG-1-based Video CD players were shown in a variety of configurations by Aiwa (part of a minisystem), Marantz (a dual-tray player), Sharp (part of a portable system), and Technics (a five-disc carousel changer). In another step toward its goal of producing "the perfect picture," Faroudja Labs demonstrated the \$20,000 VP400 line quadrupler to a houseful of dropped jaws. Samsung, Goldstar, and Zenith announced plans to sell VCR's equipped to receive the StarSight on-screen program guide, and Magnavox previewed its \$200 ImageLock system, said to dramatically improve TV reception plagued by multiple images, or "ghosts."

Navigation was the big story in mobile electronics, with more than a dozen systems on display, ranging from Alpine's simple-to-install \$650 CD-ROM-based voice-navigation system to Pioneer's \$2,850 video-map system, which uses Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites to determine a car's location and voice prompts to guide the driver, to the \$2,995 satellite-based video-map system Sony recently began selling in California. Sanyo introduced the \$570 MAX-9000 ten-disc changer, which at 9³/₄ x 6¹/₄ x 3¹/₈ inches is claimed to be the world's smallest, and Panasonic unveiled a \$300 cassette receiver with a CD-changer controller and a voice chip for recording short messages.

In computer multimedia, Philips and Sony announced that they have formulated basic specs for a new generation of CD's containing both graphics information and music. Dubbed CD Plus, the format was endorsed by software giant Microsoft. Creative Labs demonstrated its \$2,000 Digital Edge CD recorder, dubbed "a complete write-once CD authoring and data archival solution," and Panasonic introduced the \$400 FZ-10, a sleek, second-generation 3DO multiplayer. On these pages are some of the neatest products we saw at the show.

— Bob Ankosko



▲ Signaling the rebirth of Harman Kardon's Citation line and Harman International's decision to consolidate its Fosgate Audionics brand under the Citation banner, the Model 7.0 THX controller/preamp (\$3,150) is the successor to Fosgate's stalwart Model Three-A. The eight-input device boasts automatic input/output level calibration and twelve surround modes, including a new Six Axis setting said to improve separation and surround imaging.

▼ Audio Control's Rialto (\$579) — one of the very few dedicated home-theater equalizer/crossovers we know of — offers eleven EQ bands for the front left/right and center channels, seven for the subwoofer channel, and five for the surround channel plus a programmable active crossover.



▲ Although custom installers have been doing it for years, Pioneer is the first manufacturer to offer a subwoofer made to fit into the spare-tire well of many cars. The TS-WX50 (\$150) packs an 5³/₈-inch driver and is rated down to 35 Hz. There's just one catch: Now you'll need a cellular phone.



◀ Infinity's elegant Prelude speaker (\$3,000 a pair), the first in the new Compositions series, combines a seven-driver line-source column with a sculpted base containing a 12-inch woofer and a 100-watt bass amplifier. Finished in gray aluminum, the 54-inch-tall speaker is rated down to 25 Hz and claims an unusually high 96-dB sensitivity. Companion center and surround speakers are available for home theater use.

▶ Atlantic Technology's sleek System 350 home theater suite (\$2,998), its first THX outing, comprises two 42-inch-tall, five-driver front towers, a low-profile center speaker, two wall-mountable dipole surrounds (shown on optional stands), and a pair of 175-watt powered subwoofers. All are finished in black woodgrain vinyl.

▼ As if seven channels of power, nine digital surround modes besides Dolby Pro Logic, and inputs for an outboard AC-3 decoder weren't enough, Yamaha's RX-V2090 A/V receiver (\$1,499) also offers independent source selection for a second system. It delivers 100 watts across the front and 35 watts each to four effects channels.



▼ HTP International will supply a database CD (updated quarterly) with the 120-disc AcoustiVision CD changer it plans to market late this year or early in 1996. Pop the CD into the changer, hit a button on the remote, and the system cross-references all of the CD's in the changer against the database, storing catalog information for each disc in memory. Expected to sell for \$4,000 to \$5,000 initially, the changer offers extensive search and play-list capabilities.



▼ Polk Audio's Signature Reference Theater system (\$6,500) is designed to belt out 120-dB SPLs without flinching. It consists of two 26-inch-tall satellites that incorporate Polk's Stereo Dimensional Array technology, a center speaker, two surrounds, two 250-watt powered subwoofers that rumble way down to 16 Hz, and a control box with a music/video switch and other sound-optimizing controls.



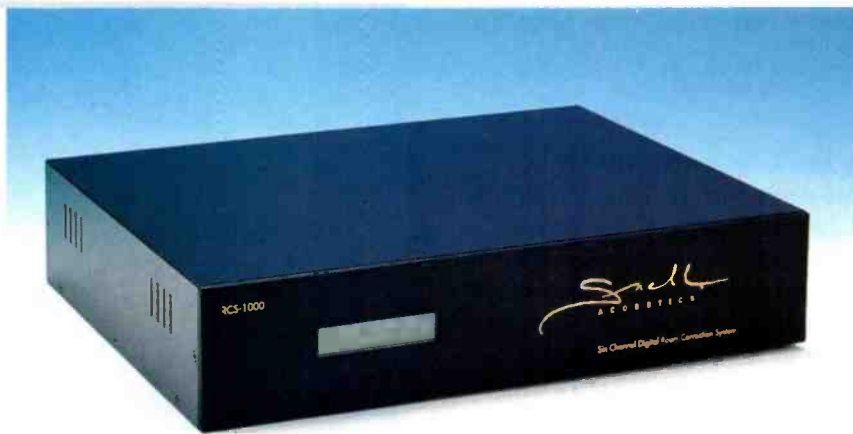
▲ Sony is offering an optional dubbing station and sampling-rate converter (not shown) with its second-generation digital micro recorder, the NT-2. Slated to hit store shelves this summer, the tiny device records in stereo on postage-stamp-size cassettes.



CES SHOW STOPPERS



▲ Take the 12-inch woofer used in NHT's flagship Model 3.3 speaker, put it in a 19-inch glossy black cube, team it with a 250-watt amp, and you get the SW3p powered sub (\$1,350), featuring 23-Hz performance and a very flexible crossover.

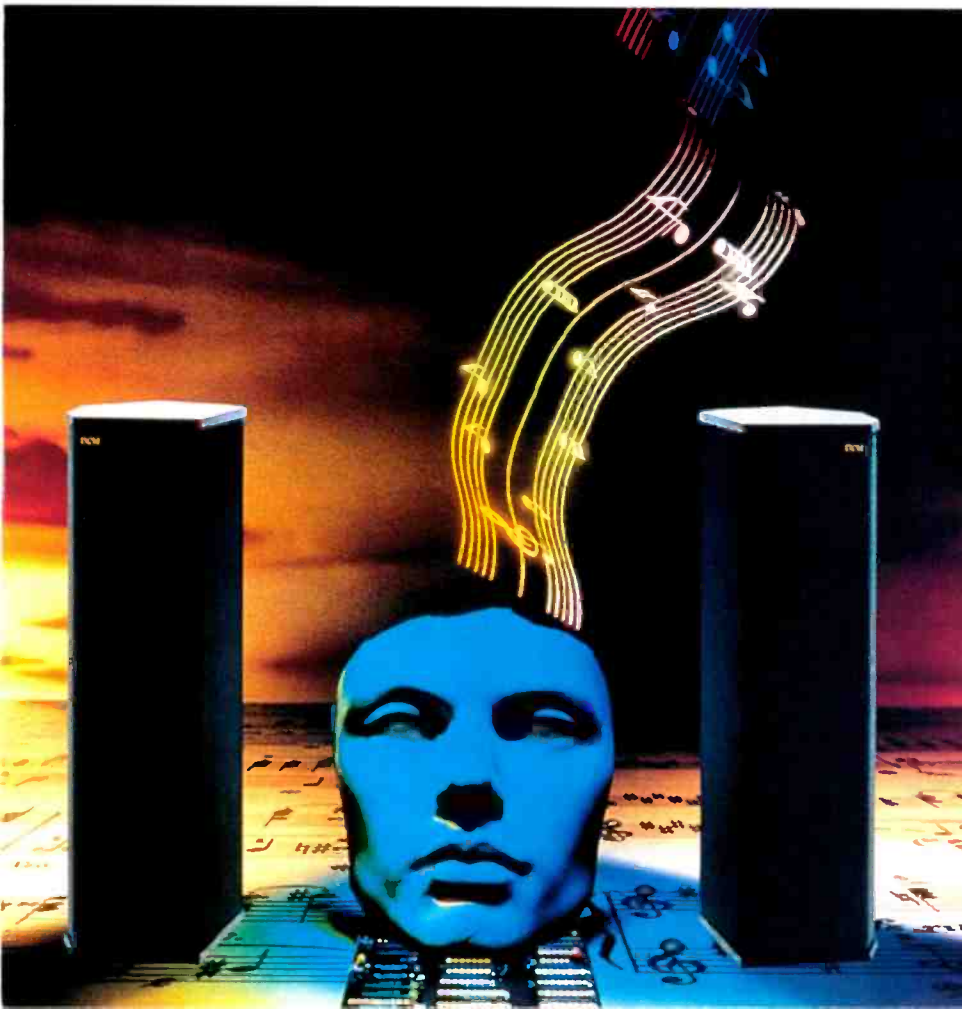


▲ Snell takes sound reproduction to the next level with its RCS-1000 room-correction system (\$11,999), a six-channel digital processor that individually "corrects" the early-arrival response of up to six speakers in a music or A/V system. The primary goal is to reduce room-induced coloration in the 5- to 500-Hz region where the effects of room acoustics are most pronounced. The system also optimizes the room's reverberant field.



▲ One of four AC-3-ready combi-players from Pioneer, the CLD-D604 (\$1,035) has a special AC-3 RF output that feeds the digital data stream from a Dolby Surround Digital-encoded laserdisc (a few are just now becoming available) to an outboard AC-3 decoder or a component, like Pioneer's forthcoming VSX-DS3S A/V receiver, that has one built in. The result: an awesome soundtrack with five discrete full-range channels plus a subwoofer channel.

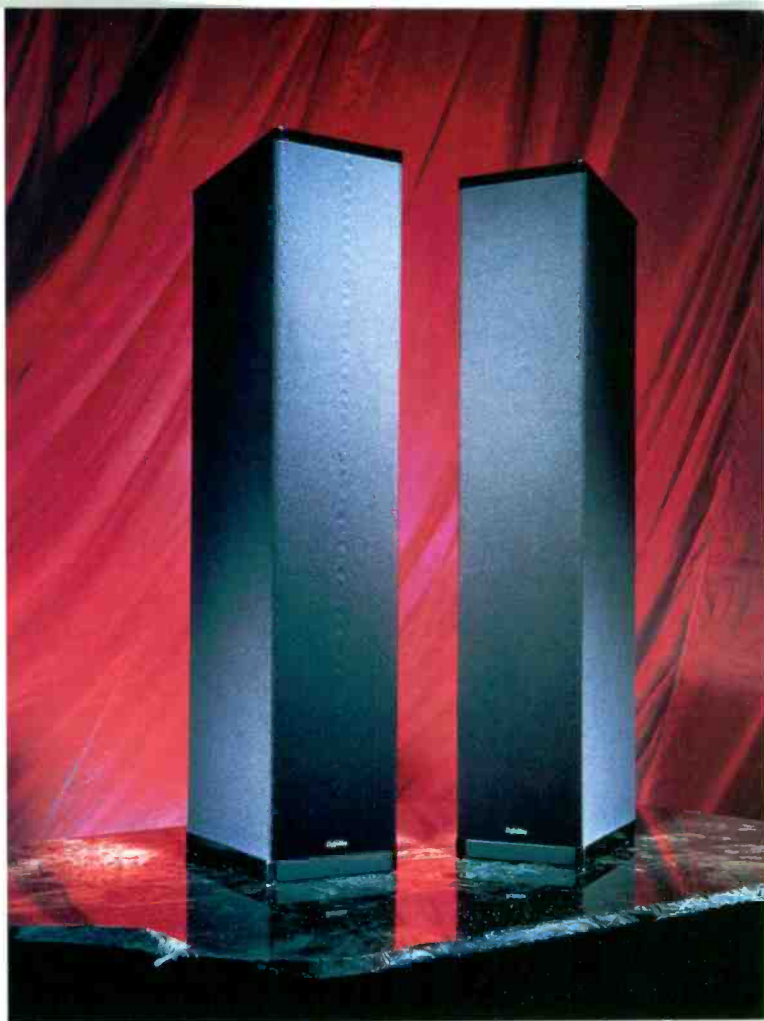
◀ Surround sound without the surround speakers? That's precisely the idea behind DCM's TimeWindow SurroundScape speaker (\$549 each), which uses a side-oriented 6½-inch driver and a carefully adjusted active crossover to project an ambient sound field. The hexagonal cabinet sports a black wrap-around grille and solid oak end caps finished in black.





▲ Pure and simple: The heart of NAD's Model 310 integrated amp (about \$200) is a "super-simple" circuit design that uses about half as many components as a conventional amplifier, including a unique output stage that pairs one MOSFET device with a bipolar transistor. Slated to hit store shelves later this year, the amp delivers a modest 20 watts per channel (with less than 0.05 percent distortion) but boasts 1-ohm stability and 3 dB headroom.

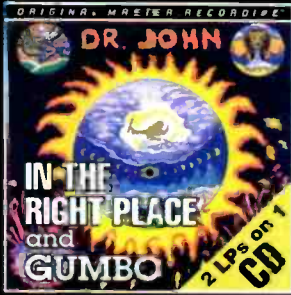
► There's no need for a separate powered subwoofer with Definitive Technology's BP 2000 bipolar speaker (\$1,499 each) — one's already built in. Definitive combines front- and rear-firing driver trios (1-inch aluminum-dome tweeters and pairs of 4-inch woofers) in D'Appolito arrays and a 15-inch side-firing subwoofer, with its own 300-watt amp and active crossover, in a 50-inch-tall cabinet that occupies 1 square foot of floor space. Bandwidth is 15 Hz to 30 kHz. Black-lacquer or cherry end caps complement the speaker's black wrap-around grille cloth.



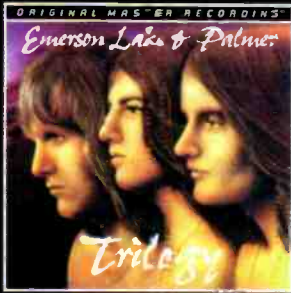
◀ Cocooning for the new millennium? Bio-Innergy Systems' NEST, for Naturally Enhanced Sound Transmission, provides a full-body holographic music experience in which you hear as well as feel the music. The aluminum "cuboctahedron" structure, a form chosen for the "way it transmits acoustical and body vibrations in harmony," features velour-covered cushions, four overhead satellite speakers, and a subwoofer and a subharmonic transducer under the main platform. The 156-pound apparatus, which has built-in amplification, will set you back a mere \$8,995.



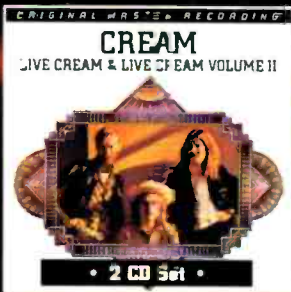
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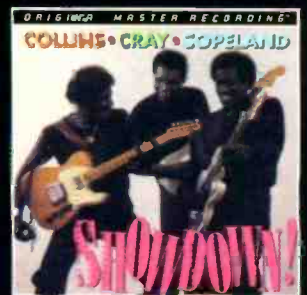
UDCD 2-625



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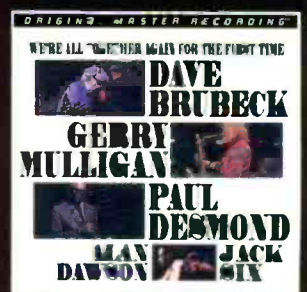
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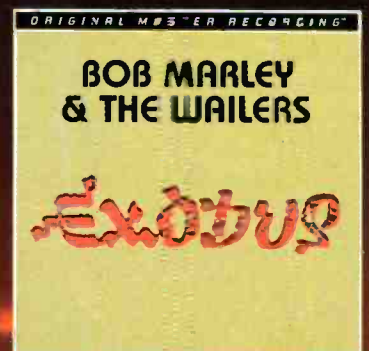
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BEST OF THE MONTH REVIEWS

STEREO REVIEW'S
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THE OUTSTANDING
CURRENT RELEASES

The Confessions of Martin Zellar

Martin Zellar used to be the leader of Minnesota's Gear Daddies, a vaguely rootsy bunch of late-Eighties wiseguys who recorded for PolyGram and came up with one of the great goofy album titles of all time — "Let's Go Scare AI" — before calling it quits. Since then, Zellar's apparently had, as they say, a lot of living to do. His new solo debut, "Born Under" (a bad sign?), is as moving a piece of confessional pop as you're likely to hear these days, a tuneful, lovely-on-the-surface song cycle of reflective country-rock musings that only barely conceal some rather world-class emotional turmoil beneath. Think of it, if you will, as a twenty-something's "Blood on the Tracks."

The album opens with a masterly sucker punch. *Lie to Me*, which in a better world would be on top of the country charts, has a sunny, instantly addictive melody and a chorus to die for, sort of like the Hollies with mesquite; it isn't until you decipher the lyrics that you realize the protagonist is a chronic depressive who probably ought to be medicated. The rest of the songs, which are equally lovely in a sort of austere, magisterial way, are a lot more upfront about their psychic underpinnings, reaching a truly creepy apotheosis in *Lay Me Down Gently*, a faux waltz in which Zellar intones, "The rage will come later" to a manipulative lover. Elsewhere he makes guilt palpable, be it emotional, as in *Something's Gotta Happen*, or pragmatic, as in the confession from *Cross My Heart* that "All our lives we've lived in debt / A jar of change our safety net."

These are obviously Post-it notes from somebody's real life, at times so nakedly emotional you almost feel like your eavesdropping is inappropriate. Fortunately, their innate catchiness notwithstanding, what keeps them from becoming Jackson Browne-styled whine-fests is Zellar's singing. His voice is a marvel. On the more rock-oriented stuff he can growl when he needs to, but basically he comes through with a sweetly quavery and appealingly mush-mouthed tenor that's as immediately distinctive (and sexy) as anything in current pop music. It's an almost otherworldly sound, but at



the same time it hits on a gut level; at the risk of going all Pauline Kael on you, I'd be remiss if I didn't say that hearing Zellar for the first time is like the first time you heard Hank Williams or Elvis or even Chrissie Hynde — you're amazed that something so unique still feels like it's been around your whole life.

Add to all that superb backup playing by various like-minded alternative types, including members of the Jayhawks and Soul Asylum (special kudos to producer Stephen McKinstry's gorgeously lyrical

Hammond organ contributions), and what you have in "Born Under" is, oh, just the most assured debut of the year so far. Gloom has rarely sounded so lilting.

— Steve Simels

MARTIN ZELLAR *Born Under*

Lie to Me; Something's Gotta Happen; East Side Boys; Falling Sky; Problem Solved; Cross My Heart; Lay This Down Gently; Summer Kind of Sad; Force a Smile; Let Go
RYKODISC 10318 (37 min)

BEST OF THE MONTH REVIEWS

Firkusny's Farewell Recording

For an artist so widely admired for his elegant playing, let alone one active so many years, the pianist Rudolf Firkusny, who died last year at the age of eighty-two, made surprisingly few recordings. His discography never hinted at the breadth of his repertory, but in his last two decades he was able to record more of the music of his Czech compatriots, whom he had championed so assiduously all his life. When he made his joyous return to Prague in 1990, after an absence of more than forty years, he made his fourth and final recording of the Dvorak Piano Concerto and rerecorded both solo and concerted works by his one-time teacher Leos Janacek. In New York he recorded solo works and (with Janos Starker) the cello sonatas of his friend Bohuslav Martinu, and now, by way of memorial tribute, RCA Victor has brought out his valedictory recording, of Martinu's last three piano concertos, taped in June 1993 with the Czech Philharmonic under Libor Pesek.

Martinu composed his Second Piano Concerto for Germaine Leroux, who introduced it in 1934, but he revised it substantially for Firkusny ten years later and composed No. 3 for him in 1948 and No. 4 (the tightknit two-part "Incantation") for him in 1955-1956. All three concertos fairly brim over with Martinu's characteristic vitality and drive, with his melodic and rhythmic inventiveness and imaginative coloring. It hardly needs saying that Firkusny brought to these performances not only his unique authority but also a commitment and vitality that remained undiminished. These concertos would enrich our concert life, and now younger generations of pianists have these superb performances as models of how to play them.

It is precisely because the significance of this release goes beyond that of a sentimental personal tribute that it is a truly worthy memorial — in all respects save one. RCA has come through with exemplary sound but has let us down in the documentation, which consists entirely of an appreciation of Firkusny and not a word about the music. These are not Beethoven or Mozart concertos, after all, but music virtually unknown to most listeners, who would surely have welcomed a few words of background and description

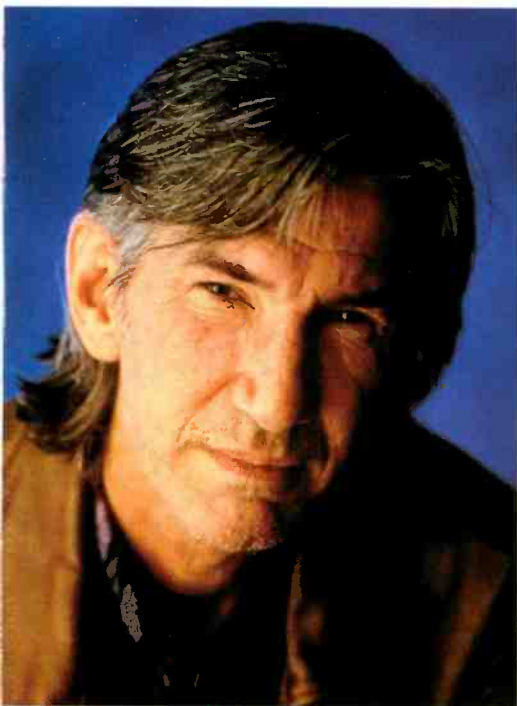


Pianist Rudolf Firkusny (1912-1994)

with such intriguing but unfamiliar material. Nonetheless, this recording is not to be missed. *Richard Freed*

MARTINU:

Piano Concertos Nos. 2, 3, and 4
Firkusny; Czech Philharmonic, Pesek cond.
RCA VICTOR 61934 (67 min)



Van Zandt: Irish-American Gothic

Townes Van Zandt Paints His Masterpiece

It's been so long since the Texas folk-country troubadour Townes Van Zandt turned out truly remarkable work that it seemed his glory days might be over. But in the nick of time, here comes "No Deeper Blue," his first studio album in eight years and the record he's always promised to make. Recorded in Ireland and produced by Philip Donnelly, "No Deeper Blue" resonates with the natural, shared qualities of both Celtic folk and American country, from a skewed, left-field sense of humor, to the melodic and rhythmic use of reels and rounds, to the occasional employment of such instruments as accordion and Uilleann pipes. In short, it's an inspired pairing.

As if deeply affected by the foreboding Irish history and the Irish obsession with myth and folklore, Van Zandt stocks his album with Gothic stories of death and spiritual redemption (*Niles River Blues*), ghost tales both chilling and humorous (*The Hole*, about a trip to hell compliments of a woman whose smile looked

"like the grave," and *Billy, Boney and Ma*), and harrowing sagas of unfathomable hardship and desperation (*Marie*, the story of a homeless man and his luckless traveling companion). In between, there's plenty of steaming, electric Memphis blues and acoustic, bottleneck Delta blues, and even a lullaby for Van Zandt's daughter.

Van Zandt has never been much of a vocalist, and his rough-road baritone gets fairly shallow in the lower register these days, but none of that gets in the way of his masterly storytelling. This is an album that sticks to the ribs and nestles in the soul. *Alanna Nash*

TOWNES VAN ZANDT
No Deeper Blue

A Song For; Blaze's Blue; The Hole; Marie; Goin' Down to Memphis; Hey Willy Boy; Niles River Blues; Billy, Boney and Ma; Katie Belle Blue; If I Was Washington; Lover's Lullaby; Cowboy Junkies Lament; BW Railroad Blues; Gone Too Long
SUGAR HILL 1046 (50 min)

Angelina Réaux Sings Weill And Berg

In 1933, the composer Kurt Weill got a call in the middle of the night advising him to get out of Germany; he piled what he could into the back of his car and drove to Paris. Lotte Lenya, his wife and his most famous interpreter, told the story all her life, but we now know that she was not with him because she was camping out on the French Riviera with a tenor.

Within ten days of Weill's arrival in Paris, he had a commission from George Balanchine for a new ballet score. Despite his having broken up not only with Lenya, but also with Bertold Brecht, he turned back to his two old collaborators, and *The Seven Deadly Sins* was the result. Brecht never seemed to place much value on this strange story about two sisters named Anna from Louisiana (!), whose family, played by a sort of Germanic barbershop quartet, urges them to avoid the seven deadly sins of bourgeois life and make lots of money. Weill thought it was his best score to date, and it has worn well over the years. It now has a rather impressive discography, but even so, the new Teldec recording conducted by Kurt Masur would have to rate near the top of anyone's comparison-shopping list.

Weill must have known that Lenya would sing in it, but he still wrote the dual role of Anna I and II for soprano, ar-



Réaux: operatic range, theatrical force

ranging it only afterwards for Lenya's much lower voice. The original high-voice version was not heard for years for the simple reason that there are very few singers that it suits. The new recording's star, Angelina Réaux, is very definitely one of that elite company. She is a rare example of a trained soprano who can sing theatrically in an operatic range with clarity and theatrical force, without sacrificing tone and projection and without seeming arty or diva-ish.

Réaux gets strong backing from four male vocalists — members of the remarkable and redoubtable Hudson Shad ensemble — as well as from the orchestra. The performance, recorded at a New York Philharmonic concert last year, has tremendous energy, with all the virtues of a live event, and a great deal of its bite and bounce is due to Masur, who seems to have had the time of his life directing this music.

Pairing Weill with Alban Berg's *Lulu Suite* might seem farfetched, but (as the noted Weill scholar Kim Kowalke points out in his album notes) these contemporaneous works, seemingly so different, really have a lot in common — they're two sides of the same coin, as the saying goes. Réaux's role is somewhat smaller here than in the Weill — she only sings Lulu's Song and the brief but exquisite final lines of the Countess Geschwitz — but she is hardly less convincing, and the rich orchestral performance and recording are suitably overwhelming. Next to the mocking smile and song-and-dance of Brecht-Weill, the masterpiece agonies of Berg seem heavy-handed, but they certainly provide contrast and are a tour de force for a singer who manages so well with both.

Eric Salzman

WEILL: *The Seven Deadly Sins*
BERG: *Lulu Suite*

Réaux; members of Hudson Shad; New York Philharmonic, Masur cond.
TELDEC 95029 (68 min)

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• **BRAHMS: *Symphony No. 3.***

SCHUBERT: *Symphony No. 5.* Chicago Symphony, Reiner. RCA VICTOR 61793. A well-filled CD (almost 70 minutes), recorded between 1956-1960, that also includes Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture*.

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POPULAR MUSIC

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

PHIL
ALVIN

County Fair 2000



PHIL ALVIN

County Fair 2000

HIGHTONE 8056 (56 min)

Performance: All over the place

Recording: Good

Phil Alvin, brother of Dave and lead vocalist for the Blasters, took eight years between his first and second solo albums, and the latter sounds as if Alvin tried to pack in everything under the stars just in case he never makes it to a third. "County Fair 2000" is an allegory for the amalgamation of "American music"—jazz, blues, gospel, country, and rock. With his guests, the Blasters, Chicago blues harmonica wizard Billy Boy Arnold, Pasadena street singer Jerome Bowman, and tap dancers Eddie Baytos and Fayard Nicholas, Alvin presents

quite a sideshow, drawing songs from the portfolios of such disparate songwriters and performers as Sammy Fain and Fats Waller and finding inspiration in Carl Sandburg's collections of gospel lyrics and the music of J. E. Mainer's Crazy Mountaineers. Alvin's freewheeling approach makes the whole thing both fun and somewhat disjointed and bizarre. "Speaking of sucking scum from the bottom of the tank . . ." says Billy Boy Arnold in a spoken introduction to a great low-down performance of *Wreck Your V-8 Ford*. Well, you get the idea. **A.N.**

CHARLES BROWN

These Blues

VERVE/GITANES 523 022 (60 min)

Performance: In peak form

Recording: Very good

Charles Brown, now seventy-four, was one of the pillars of R&B during its golden era of the Forties and Fifties. As featured pianist and singer with Johnny Moore's Three Blazers and later on his own, he influenced artists like Nat King Cole and Ray Charles with his brilliantly fluid piano statements and slithering, blues-drenched vocals. Then he lapsed into obscurity, a victim of changing popular tastes, until he was rediscovered largely through the efforts of Bonnie Raitt. It's good to have him back again.

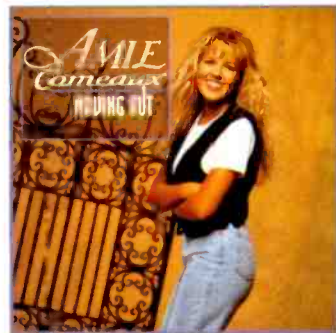
While Brown has released two superb recordings on Bullseye Blues since 1990,

"These Blues" marks his re-emergence on a major label. Appropriately, he has drawn from vintage material, working with a cohesive ensemble consisting of Danny Caron on guitar, Ruth Davies on bass, and Gaylord Birch on drums, with Clifford Solomon supplying tenor-sax solos. The effect is eerie, like slipping through a curtain of time into one of those cozy, moody, smoke-filled bars where friends would meet to listen to music back before overblown amplification made conversation all but impossible. Brown captures the essence of that time with thoughtful interpretations of such classics as Ellington's *I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)*, Louis Jordan's *Is You Is, or Is You Ain't My Baby*, and Brown's own ruminative *These Blues*. He caps the set with a remarkable rendition of *Amazing Grace*. It is a fitting conclusion to an album that demonstrates why Charles Brown is one of the genuine treasures of American music. **P.G.**

BEAUTY AND THE BEAT



Do Americans love stories of redemption? Apparently so—witness the success of porn-star-turned-legit-actress Trac Lords, these days all the rage on TV's *Melrose Place*. Personally, we've long been fans of Lords's *cuevre* (especially, to borrow from Woody Allen, "her early, funny films"), and so we're delighted to report that she's recorded her very own album. Titled "1000 Fires" (MCA/Radioactive 11211), it features the perpetually pouty blonde declaiming moderately suggestive lyrics over various industrial-strength dance beats. So what does she sound like? Believe it or not, kinda like a techno Katharine Hepburn—which is appropriate, actually, given that Lords got her *nom du cinema* from Kate's character in *The Philadelphia Story*. **S.S.**



AMIE COMEAUX

Moving Out

POLYDOR 523 710 (33 min)

Performance: A star in waiting

Recording: Good

When Polydor announced they'd signed a seventeen-year-old to sing country music, eyebrows went up all over Nashville. Record-company execs are tripping over themselves to find fresh-faced singers to tap deeper into country's growing youth market, but seventeen? In a genre once dedicated to venting the woes and sorrows of adult life?

The young artist in question, Amie Comeaux, a comely blonde from Brusly, Louisiana, turns out to be a poised, full-voiced singer that producer Harold Shedd has been watching for years. Her big, natural soprano can summon up grit when it wants or molasses when needed, and on

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POPULAR MUSIC

stage she can hold the attention and respect of a roomful of rowdy cowboys. Yet her debut album suffers from dull production, too many fluffly songs (beginning with K.T. Oslin's *Moving Out*, which makes the singer sound like a typical teenage airhead), and the occasional dumb line ("You bit the hand that held you," from *Takin' It Back*).

Still, Comeaux really shines on the ballad *I Want the First to Last*, which boasts a soaring chorus, and the honky-tonk shuffle *Who's She to You*, a grand, gutsy, old-fashioned girl-singer song Loreita Lynn would have killed for early in her career. She's got the pipes and the maturity to deliver the truth in her material. With the right kind of breakthrough song, like Faith Hill's *Wild One* or Trisha Yearwood's *She's in Love with the Boy*, she could connect with both her own generation and the charts. *A.N.*

CONTINENTAL DRIFTERS
 MONKEY HILL 6123 (39 min)
Performance: Assured
Recording: Good

THE DB'S
Paris Avenue
 MONKEY HILL 6122 (40 min)
Performance: Spirited
Recording: Good

On paper, it sounds untenable: a six-member band from (literally) all over the map geographically and musically. But an honest-to-goodness band chemistry emerges over the course of "Continental Drifters." It's not exactly what those familiar with the power-pop pedigrees of the group's most visible members — Peter Dinklage (the dB's), Susan Cowsill (the Cowsills), and Vicky Peterson (the Bangles) — might expect to hear. Dinklage, for instance, plays everything but electric guitar, the instrument with which he's normally associated, and his Garth Hudson-like organ flourishes impart a Band-like flavor to the Drifters' rooisy stew. Throughout the album, the voices of Cowsill and Peterson harmonize with a casual self-assurance; their mutual love of well-crafted late-Sixties pop is evident in the album's finest moment, a soulful reading of the Goffin-King chestnut *I Can't Make It Alone*.

The Continental Drifters are a democratic entity: four of them chip in a song apiece, drummer/vocalist Carlos Nuccio

adds two, and the rest come from sources as diverse as the Box Tops (*Soul Deep*), the Monkees (*Some of the Shelley's Blues*), and Gram Parsons (the album-closing *A Song for You*). Peterson's contribution, *Mixed Messages*, defines the emotional core of the album, which takes a long, mature look at broken (or breaking) relationships. All told, "Continental Drifters" is a record by and for adults; it will be interesting to see what happens when, as songwriters, these folks begin collaborating.

The range of Peter Holsapple's talent becomes apparent if you compare "Continental Drifters" with "Paris Avenue," the simultaneously released swan-song album by his former group, the dB's. "Paris Avenue" is probably not the place to begin trying to make dB's converts of your friends, but it includes some excellent material. The album is occasionally marred by gruff, raspy vocals — Holsapple practically gags his way through *Lines and Dots* — but it's an enjoyable romp nonetheless. *P.P.*

DAVID CROSBY
It's All Coming Back to Me Now . . .
 ATLANTIC 82620 (71 min)
Performance: Half and half
Recording: Live (and lively)

David Crosby's current clear-headedness, after a Phoenix-like rise from the ashes of crack addiction, is implicitly celebrated in "It's All Coming Back to Me Now . . .," which rebuts the stoned-and-proud title of his early-Seventies solo album "If I Could Only Remember My Name . . ." Recorded live in an L.A. club, the first half of the program offers some mesmerizing, elliptical new songs (*In My Dreams, Rusty and Blue*) and salvages a pair of decent tunes from the otherwise sodden "Thousand Roads," Crosby's most recent studio album. But then the amps get cranked up to eleven, and all subtlety flies out the window. Chris Robinson of the Black Crowes chimes in on a histrionic version of Crosby's early stoner anthem, *Almost Cut My Hair*, wherein the two attempt to out-shout each other. *Long Time Gone*, a thoughtful jewel from the first Crosby, Stills & Nash album, is attacked with a similarly heavy hand. Between the operatic overkill of his vocals and repeated cries to his fellow musicians to "hit it," summoning lengthy solos, Crosby sinks his best material with near-hysterical overstatement. Guess you just had to be there. *P.P.*

Continental Drifters: out standing in their field



MONKEY HILL RECORDS

RAY WYLIE HUBBARD

Loco Gringo's Lament
DEJADISC 3213 (53 min)

Performance: Surprisingly literate
Recording: Very good

Best known for writing Jerry Jeff Walker's *Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother*, the anthem for the Texas progressive-country movement in the Seventies, Ray Wylie Hubbard became something of a cult name if not a cult artist in the years that followed, so difficult was it to find his work. Now, after all those years, comes "Loco Gringo's Lament," a terrific little gem in which Hubbard proves he was a far more literate writer than his previous efforts suggested. In *Dust of the Chase* he presents the autobiography of a card shark and hustler who counts the wages of sin ("Patience is a virtue that I don't possess / And I can't deny that heaven lies beneath a cotton dress"). And in *Love Never Dies* he shows he's as hip as the next guy, comparing his beloved both to "Mother Maybelle Carter's wildwood flower" and to "Marianne Faithfull's broken English."

Hubbard fleshes out this collection of meditations on life and love with a dash of homicide blues (*Wanna Rock and Roll*) and a rocking glance at the parade of young guitar pickers who, like Hiram Hank Williams, traveled down that lost highway and never came back (*Loco Gringo's Lament*). And in one of the album's most arresting songs, *The Real Trick*, he takes a peephole look behind the locked doors of a mental hospital. At times reminiscent of the best work of Waylon Jennings, Joe Ely, or Kevin Welch, Hubbard's lyrics are at once poignant, spellbinding, and enlightening. After decades of obscurity, "Loco Gringo's Lament" should push Hubbard to the forefront of the Texas school of singer-songwriters. Maybe that's where he's belonged all along. *A.N.*

JASON AND THE SCORCHERS

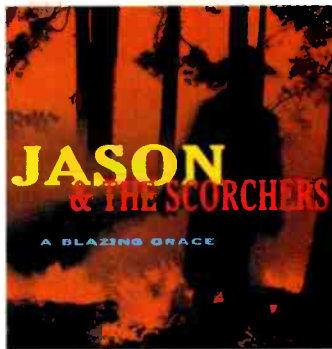
MAMMOTH 0101 (38 min)

Performance: Scorching
Recording: Big and boomy

This is Jason and the Scorchers as they were always meant to be — loud, proud, and kicking up clouds of dust around a proverbial Saturday-night juke joint of the mind. It's an effective mix of the two things they do best: rock unrepentantly hard, with their Southern roots showing, and tweak the heartstrings with ballads as pure as driven snow. Two numbers trade on honky-tonk humor while rocking with the kind of fierceness and abandon that more genre-bound "new country" acts only manage to pantomime. The opening *Cry by Night Operator* is sung in the voice of a character for whom hanging at the honkytonk has become a second job ("The jukebox is my time clock / Here's a quarter, punch me in"). Likewise, *One More Day of Weekend* contends that 48 hours of misbehavior isn't enough to shake off the work-week blues. It's hardly food for thought unless you're used to a diet of Vienna sausages and potted meat, but it rocks like crazy, and freewheeling delirium is what it's all about.

The Scorchers' sound and fury is bal-

anced by songs of a more contemplative stripe, such as *Where Bridges Never Burn*, wherein two bruised survivors come together, bonded by the desire not to repeat their mistakes ("We've both seen life come crumbling down / We've both lost loves we thought were true"), and *Somewhere Within*, a touching bit of country-folk introspection. The group's barnstorming, Van



Halen-with-twang version of *Country Roads* (yes, the John Denver song) is full of sassy Dixie pride. Guitarist Warren Hodges really gets in his licks here, treating the song more like a professional wrestling event than the pastoral canvas that Denver painted. All in all, "Jason and the Scorchers" adds up to the group's best work since they hit the ground running with "Fervor" more than a decade ago. *P.P.*

LITTLE TEXAS

Kick a Little

WARNER BROS. 45739 (39 min)

Performance: A little is right
Recording: Okay

Little Texas is one of a myriad of six-piece country-pop groups that have blitzed Nashville in the last couple of years, all hoping to be the Eagles of the Nineties. Alas, they'd never make it past Poco. They've got the layered vocals, the slightly country-ish instrumental lick sandwiched in-between the rock guitar and piano solos, and, of course, the hair. But on "Kick a Little," their third album, Little Texas once again proves they're long on commerce and short on imagination, settling for derivative themes, cookie-cutter riffs, and some all-too-mellow lyrics about estranged lovers (*Amy's Back in Austin*), self-esteem (*Kick a Little*), and folks less fortunate than the rest of us (*Inside*). For those who don't go for the ersatz California sound, Little Texas has included two cuts here aimed at aging Southern rockers (*Hit Country Song*, a heavy-handed tip of the Stetson, and *Redneck Like Me*). All bases covered, boys. And none too well. *A.N.*

MAC McANALLY

Knots

MCA 10992 (36 min)

Performance: Well intentioned
Recording: Good

Singer-songwriter Mac McAnally, perhaps best known for *It's a Crazy World*, his 1977 Top 40 single, is capable of crafting affecting, well-turned nuggets of every-



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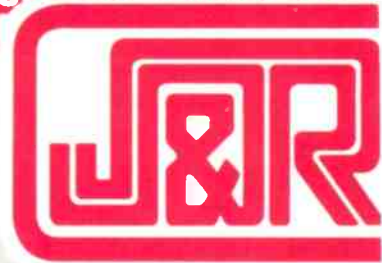
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 For Music Reviewed in this issue - CALL!

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RCA RP8593 •AM/FM 3-CD Changer, dual cassette, remote **\$229⁹⁵**
JVC UX-C7 •AM/FM, 6+1 CD-player, auto-rev cassette **\$359⁹⁵**
Bose Lifestyle* 5 •CD AM/FM powered 3-pc. Acoustimass* speakers **\$1299⁰⁰**
Denon D-200 •AM/FM, 6-CD Changer, Cassette, 40 watts x2 **\$899⁹⁵**
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AudioSource Specials

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AudioSource EQ-8/II •Graphic Equalizer, 10 bands/channel **\$99⁹⁵**
AudioSource EQ-11 •Graphic Equalizer, tape-to-tape dubbing **\$119⁹⁵**
AudioSource EQ-12 •Graphic Equalizer/Spectrum Analyzer **\$199⁹⁵**
AudioSource PRE One •Preamp, MM/MC phono, electronic switching **\$229⁹⁵**
AudioSource SS Five •Surround Sound Processor with Amplifiers **\$299⁹⁵**
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Teac P-595 •Semi Auto Belt-Drive Turntable w/cartridge **\$89⁹⁵**
Technics SL-BD20 •Semi-Auto Turntable, belt drive **\$109⁹⁵**
Technics SL-BD22K •Semi Auto Belt-Drive Turntable **\$129⁹⁵**
Audio Technica AT-331LP •Cartridge, universal mount, linear contact stylus **\$39⁹⁵**
Danton 680EL •Disc Cartridge w/extra stylus **\$69⁹⁵**
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New Jazz Releases

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 VER 523989 CD \$13.99
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Tuck and Patti: *Learning How To Fly*
 COL 64439 CD \$14.99
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GRP All-Star Big Band: *All Blues*
 GRP 9800 CD \$14.99
 Cassette \$8.99

Gerri Allen: *Twenty One*
 BN 30028 CD \$13.99

Jacky Terrasson: *Jacky Terrasson*
 BN 29351 CD \$13.99
 Cassette \$8.99

Marcus Roberts: *Gershwin For Lovers*
 COL 66437 CD \$13.99
 Cassette \$8.99

Gary Bartz: *The Red & Orange Poems*
 ATL 82720 CD \$14.99
 Cassette \$8.99

Loudspeakers

HIGHLY REVIEWED

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Yamaha NSA-635 •3-way, 8" woofer pair **\$99⁹⁵**
Pinnacle PN5+Oak •Compact Speakers, 2-way, 5.25" woofer pair **\$99⁹⁵**
Technics SB-LX5 •3-way, 10" woofer pair **\$119⁹⁵**
JBL SC305 •Center Channel Speaker, shielded, each **\$149⁹⁵**
Recoton W-440 •Wireless System individual controls pair **\$199⁹⁵**
Cerwin Vega AT15 •3-way, 15" woofer pair **\$599⁹⁵**

Loudspeakers

JBL 4312 Studio Monitor Loudspeakers
 •3-way with 12" low frequency driver, 5" midrange, and dome tweeter •Front panel controls •Black finish •8 ohms •100 watt capacity
 Mr. List Price \$899
\$499⁹⁵/pair (JBL 4312BK)

Design Acoustics PS8C-OA •2-way, 8" woofer, oak cabinet pair **\$149⁹⁵**
JBL Pro III •2-way Mini Speakers, shielded pair **\$149⁹⁵**
Atlantic Technology Pattern 100 •Powered 3-piece system **\$249⁹⁵**
Acoustic Research 570 •Powered Partners, 35 watts, 2-way pair **\$259⁹⁵**
Advent Legacy III •Floor Standing, 2-way, 10" woofer pair **\$279⁹⁵**
Cerwin Vega Q1 •10" way 10" woofer, SPECIAL 66% OFF pair **\$499⁹⁵**

Bose Speakers

Bose Acoustimass* 5 Series II Speaker System
 •2-cube speaker arrays provide direct & reflected sound in an ultra-compact size •Acoustimass module provides deep bass
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Bose VS-100 •Center Channel Speaker, shielded, each **\$129⁹⁵**
Bose 101 •Mini Speakers, indoor/outdoor pair **\$149⁹⁵**
Bose RM2 •RoomMate 2 with built-in amp pair **\$249⁹⁵**
Bose 301-III •Direct/Reflecting, compact, 2-way pair **\$318⁰⁰**
Bose 501 Series V •Direct Reflecting, Floor Standing, NEW pair **\$518⁰⁰**
Bose AM7 •Acoustimass* bass & cube array Theater System **\$899⁹⁵**

Audio Accessories

Niles SVL-6 Speaker Selector/Volume Controller
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Target BT1 •Tilt/Swivel Speaker Wall Bracket pair **\$29⁹⁵**
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Elite EL-38 •Audio Rack, 3-shelves, 40" high **\$79⁹⁵**
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Electronic Reference



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Sony SLV-720HF VHS Hi-Fi Stereo Recorder

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- Tape stabilizer
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- 8-event/1-month timer
- Remote with shuttle control

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- 4-heads, 1-month/8-event, universal remote
- Sony SLV-620HF \$329.95
- 4-heads, 1-year/8-event, unified remote
- JVC HR-VP606 \$349.95
- 4-heads, VCR+, 1-year/8-event, remote
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- Audio output
- Remote
- Clock, sleep timer, on/off timer

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- Frame synchronizer with dual Time Base Correction
- Digital special effects generator with over 200 effects
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- VCR Instant Programmer
- One-For-All URC-6885 \$29.95
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- Maxell DCC-60 \$6.99
- Digital Audio Cassette, 60 minutes, each
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- Digital Audio Tape, 120 minutes, 2-pk
- Maxell UD35-180 \$19.95
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- Teac PDP-30+ \$99.95
- Car/Portable CD Player, 110/220 volt, anti-skip
- Aiwa XP-66 \$129.95
- CD Player, rechargeable, wireless remote
- Sony D-830K \$159.95
- Car Discman anti-shock, 22-track programming
- Onkyo DXF-71 \$179.95
- Car/Portable CD, anti-shock, rechargeable
- Sony D-824K \$199.95
- Car Discman, anti-shock, DSP, surround sound

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- Sennheiser IS450 \$179.95
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- Nikon Lite Touch Kit \$129.95
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- Fuji DC-1000Kit \$179.95
- 35mm Camera Kit, multi-beam auto-focus
- Minolta Maxxum 300si Kit \$379.95
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- Olympus IS-3DLX \$599.95
- Zoom Lens Reflex, 35-180mm zoom lens
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day country and suburban life, usually revealing a layer of unspoken conflict. But while he's slavish in his admiration for James Taylor — the vocal tone, phrasing, and, to some extent, writing — he hits the bull's-eye far less frequently than Taylor did in his prime. Here, on a record of low-key subtlety, with songs about miscommunication in marriage, fanatical couch potatoes, and keeping your options open, he generally fails to come up with anything as emotionally provocative as the hits he's written for others — *Old Flame* for Alabama, *Two Dozen Roses* for Shenandoah, and *All These Years* for Sawyer Brown. One powerful exception: *Miracle*, a fifteen-year-old deliberation on love and faithfulness that closes the album. But the record never really gets off the ground. *A.N.*

LARRY STEWART**Heart Like a Hurricane**

COLUMBIA 66411 (37 min)

Performance: Runs the gamut**Recording: Very good**

Despite his soulful tenor, Larry Stewart, the former lead singer of Restless Heart, country's premier middle-of-the-road band, was often blamed for R11's cold-as-steel precision and essential blandness. On this, his second solo outing, he warms things up a tad, pumping his libido in the title tune, in which he recounts a whirlwind romance with an irresistible free spirit, and going for a secular gospel sound on *Rockin' the Rock*. Along the way, he dutifully plies his stock-in-trade — pretty but ultimately boring romantic ballads for the unappreciated housewife (such as *She Wants to Be Wanted Again*). But he also stops for a well-executed dance number (*One Track Mind*) and one song (*Mama Needs Someone to Hold Her*) with a story line Nashville hasn't yet worked to death — a fatherless son's plea that his mother will find someone who made her as happy as Daddy. Such subject matter is tailor-made for Music City's most

maudlin tunesmiths, from Porter Wagoner to Harlan Howard. But Stewart makes the Marc Beeson-James Dean Hicks song not only intelligent, but rather moving. That's one word rarely applied to Stewart's earlier efforts. *A.N.*

BARRY WHITE**The Icon Is Love**

A&M 540 115 (65 min)

Performance: Sensual**Recording: Polished**

Before the hip-hop generation, the term "rap" often brought to mind the sensual basso profundo of Barry White, a singer and champion sweet-talker who could create a virtual-reality bedroom without the aid of computers. Now, after nearly sixteen years, he's returned with an album that has recaptured the public's fancy. Of course, he's still in bed — by now, White has surely made it into Guinness as the world's longest-winded lover.

What's new this time out are the variations within his rap. The opening *Practice What You Preach* turns the tables by having White challenge his lady to make good on her boasts of sexual mastery. He hints at kinky pleasures in *Sexy Undercover* ("Baby, you know I'm nasty by nature") but remains discreetly playful — for all his talk, he does adhere to what used to be called good taste, avoiding profanity and literal references.

While still very much a one-man show (composer, arranger, singer, and keyboardist, as well as executive producer), White has freshened up his act by collaborating with younger writers such as Gerald Levert, Jimmy Jam, and Terry Lewis. Yet the overwhelming force throughout still lies in his romantic entreaties as he cajoles, comforts, and plays up to his baby, capping it all with the wistful reminiscence *Whatever We Had, We Had*. In a period when so much pop fare treats women as objects, Barry White's tender talk is welcome indeed. *P.G.*



Larry Stewart: new and improved?

FRANK OCKENFELS/SONY

Collections

THE BEST OF BROADWAY

RHINO 71885 (73 min)

Performance: Definitive**Recording: Klieg-light bright**

If you've ever been tempted to put together your own tape of favorite tracks from Broadway show albums released on different labels, forget it. Rhino has done the work for you, and it's a honey of a job. From *Oklahoma!* and *Guys and Dolls* to *Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Miz*, twenty hit shows since 1943 are represented in "The Best of Broadway," with an all-star roster that would take half-a-dozen marquees to accommodate — names like Ethel Merman, Mary Martin, Alfred Drake, Larry Kert, Murray Head, Michael Crawford, Patti Lupone, and so on. Most important, the songs themselves really do add up to the best of the past fifty years — and not just on Broadway. Rhino is also donating part of the proceeds to the Neil Bogart Memorial Fund for pediatric cancer, leukemia, and AIDS research. *R.H.*

SKYNYRD FRYNDS

MCA 11097 (52 min)

Performance: Hit and miss**Recording: Okay**

Pretty soon the tribute albums are going to be like Elvis records — laid end to end, they'll circle the globe twice. This salute to the kings of Seventies Southern rock features Alabama, Travis Tritt, Confederate Railroad, Sammy Kershaw, Hank Williams, Jr., the Mavericks, Steve Earle, Charlie Daniels, Terry McBride & the Ride, and Wynonna reprising Skynyrd's familiar songs. And while four performers — Kershaw on *I Know a Little*, the Mavericks on *Call Me the Breeze*, Steve Earle on *What's Your Name*, and Terry McBride & the Ride on *Saturday Night Special* — do something different or even inventive with the material (the Mavericks turn their cut into boogie-woogie swing, for example), most just update the production. The main problem, though, is that Skynyrd's stuff really hasn't held up very well; it sounds sophomoric, dated, and often just plain lackluster in a

Let Us Now Praise Famous Amos

Before Fats Domino, Little Richard, or Jerry Lee Lewis, there was Amos Milburn, rightly described (by Nick Tosches in his *Unsung Heroes of Rock 'n' Roll*) as "rock's first great piano man." Although he's best known for the 1947 hit *Chicken Shack Boogie*, Milburn made scads of records that were equally as good; unfortunately, most of them have never been on CD. Until now, that is. Enterprising indie-label Mosaic



THE COMPLETE ALADDIN RECORDINGS OF AMOS MILBURN

has just issued "The Complete Aladdin Recordings of Amos Milburn," a limited edition, seven-CD boxed set that collects every note the man recorded between 1946 and 1957, including a supersonic remake of his signature tune done in New Orleans with Little Richard's band. An essential and, in some ways, revelatory slice of rock history. [Available direct from Mosaic Records, 203-327-7111.] *S.S.*



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 PHILIPS CDC-935... 5 CD CHANGER REMOTE 229
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GEORGE CABLES

George Cables at Maybeck
CONCORD JAZZ 14630 (61 min)

Performance: Rich brocade
Recording: Excellent remote

Architect Bernard Maybeck died in 1957, his memory perpetuated by his work, not the least of which is the Berkeley, California, concert hall that bears his name. The latest live piano recital recorded there finds George Cables joining an impressive roster that includes Kenny Barron, Barry Harris, Hank Jones, Stanley Cowell, and Jaki Byard. Besides having been closely associated with Dexter Gordon and Art Pepper, Cables worked and recorded with some of the most celebrated jazz leaders and led the house band at San Francisco's Keystone Korner in the Seventies. As he lithely weaves his way through a program liberally sprinkled with standards, Cables emerges as a thoughtful, caring interpreter whose keen sense of dynamics, fanciful departures, and sensitivity combine to produce exquisite aesthetic nourishment. **C.A.**

MISHA MENGELBERG TRIO

Who's Bridge

AVANT 038 (60 min)

Performance: Not to be missed
Recording: Excellent

The Ukrainian-born and Dutch-based pianist Misha Mengelberg, a force to be reckoned with among European improvisers, is best known in this country for the recordings he made with Eric Dolphy and

more innocent times for rock-and-roll as well as the nation's collective spirit. In his offhand way, Bob Dylan does a magnificent job of bringing to life *Boogie Woogie Country Girl*, with Pomus's descriptive vernacular and rowdy high spirits rolling easily off Dylan's tongue (nobody knows the back roads, or what's left of them, like the endlessly touring Dylan). John Hiatt sounds like a rocker reborn on the kick-ass version of *Mess of Blues* that he delivers here. The Band, who were themselves slithering from juke joint to chicken shack back when Pomus was in his songwriting prime, lope through *Young Blood* with an easy familiarity. Dion, the prototypical rocker-with-attitude, turns Fabian's paper-tiger version of Pomus's *Turn Me Loose* into a growling feline with claws. Old soul and blues men like Solomon Burke and B.B. King sound right at home with *Still in Love* and *Blinded by Love*, respectively. And what a way to close the record, with Aaron Neville's fluttery falsetto weaving a magical spell through that timeless ode to incurable romantics. *Save the Last Dance for Me*.

Other contributors include Los Lobos (a hot-wired, dirty-sounding *Lonely Avenue*), Brian Wilson (an earnest, bubblegummy *Sweets for My Sweet* done in the manner of his Sixties classics), Lou Reed (*This Magic Moment*, with chunky, Lou-ish guitars), Irma Thomas (*There Must Be a Better World Somewhere*), Dr. John (*I'm on a Roll*), and Rosanne Cash (*I Count the Tears*). Only Shawn Colvin's mousy, humorless version of *Viva Las Vegas* fails to connect. Otherwise, this is one tribute album that transcends the genre, coming close to perfection with one magic moment after another. **P.P.**



decade lacking a lot of the social combustion that helped propel Ronnie Van Zant and company in the first place. If you're a dyed-in-the-wool Skynyrd fan, you'll have to have this. Otherwise, dig out your original records. If you must. **A.N.**

**'TIL THE NIGHT IS GONE:
A TRIBUTE TO DOC POMUS**

RHINO 71878 (52 min)

Performance: Worthy of its subject
Recording: Very good

The late, great Doc Pomus epitomized the craft of rock-and-roll songwriting as well as anyone who ever lived. Many of his fans, friends, and disciples contribute solid, heartfelt performances of some of Pomus's better-known songs on this exquisite tribute, one of the few that truly stands out from the crowd. To repeat a cliché that in this instance seems very apt, they don't write 'em like that anymore.

This is not (praise be) a modern-sounding album. Instead, the artists represented seem intent on rekindling the freewheeling spirit of the late Fifties and early Sixties —

George Shearing: Substance and Sophistication

I first discovered George Shearing on a 1941 English Decca release where he played boogie-woogie tunes of the day (I believe one was *Beat Me Daddy, Eight to the Bar*). But most people more accurately associate Shearing with a gentle, sophisticated form of jazz. It was a delicate, proprietary style that first endeared the English pianist to American audiences in 1949, when his MGM recording of *September in the Rain* put him on the map. Shearing's octaves played in unison with his vibist gave the group its signature sound, but there were other major ingredients, not least the leader's block-chord technique and stunning improvisatory skill.

By 1950, Shearing's records were ringing cash registers. But popularity has its price, and the jazz press was quick to accuse him of commercialism. "It's amusing," Shearing once told me, "because I was playing the same music that had previously elicited their praises

— the only difference was that my records were now selling very well." Still, by 1954, when he signed with Capitol, Shearing's group was one of the most sought-after attractions on the concert circuit. His ability to interact with an audience was as smooth as the group itself, and the live recordings he made on the West Coast from 1958 to 1963 have now been gathered into a limited-issue boxed set by Mosaic.



Listening to the nearly 5 hours of music here, one understands why a purist element regarded some of this highly accessible music as borderline jazz: At times it conjures up the image of martinis and manhattans being sipped in Fifties cocktail lounges. But most of these selections contain a healthy measure of the kind of substance that has earned Shearing his place in the jazz firmament. We also hear freshman performances from Gary Burton and Toots Thielemans, both of whom have since done rather nicely on their own. Yes, there are a few tracks that would have been omitted if not for the word "complete" in the set's title, but this is nevertheless a wonderful collection of work by a remarkable artist whose creativity remains undiminished. **Chris Albertson**

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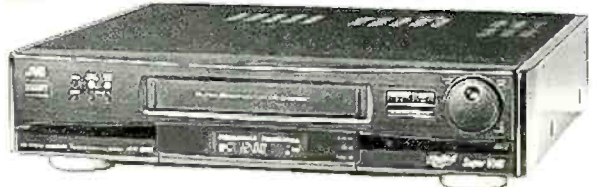
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CIRCLE NO. 31 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Steve Lacy. "Who's Bridge" is both his first American date and his first session (at least that I am aware of) with just bass and drums (Brad Jones and Joey Baron, respectively). Despite the conventional instrumentation, this isn't one of those discs you can gain an accurate sense of by hitting the scan button in order to sample the first 30 seconds or so of every track. In the case of the opening *Rollo II*, what starts off as a dark, Cecil Taylor-like assault gradually evolves into a happy little melody with obvious allusions to Thelonious Monk. *Romantic Jump of Hairs* likewise settles down into a ballad after a thunderous, scurrying beginning. Several numbers reverse the strategy, starting off relatively simple and growing almost comically complex with little advance warning (a jaunty blues called *Gare Guillemans* is a good example, but so are a stutter march called *Crocodile Tear* and a piece called *Rumbone* that sounds like the mordant theme of a kid's show on TV).

The album is full of quirks and twists, and although Mengelberg's touch and sense of internal rhyme frequently recall Monk, the playful compositions themselves suggest Herbie Nichols. Mengelberg has successfully absorbed these influences, and his American sidemen don't miss a beat. In an era of bland piano-trio recordings, this one joins Don Pullen's "New Beginnings," Cyrus Chestnut's "Revelation," and Myra Melford's "Jump" in reminding us of the format's barely tapped potential. *F.D.*

LEON PARKER

Above and Below

EPICURE 66144 (47 min)

Performance: Splendid
Recording: Excellent

Rhythm, as one might expect, is the main ingredient of percussionist Leon Parker's debut album, "Above and Below," but what really makes this gem of a CD stand out is its combination of taste and musicianship. It is a well-conceived journey through a colorful weave of mood swings, all neatly wrapped in strands of rhythm.

As a teenager, Parker listened to jazz — which was a staple in his home — as well as such brassy, jazz-influenced artists as Earth, Wind & Fire and James Brown. But he was also keenly interested in the Latin rhythms of Tito Puente and Mongo Santamaria. Sprinkled generously with inventive asides, "Above and Below" is an amalgam of these influences. On *All My Life* and *B.B.B.B.*, Jay McGovern's wordless vocals are gently sponged up and squeezed into the melody, the initial trickle becoming a flood of aural delights. On *It's Only a Paper Moon*, Joshua Redman's tenor has a sharp Rollinsian edge to it, and if *You Don't Know What Love Is*, David Sanchez's bedroom soprano sax will set you straight. The sensitive work of pianist Jacky Terrasson and bassist Ugona Okegwo contributes immeasurably to the artistic success of this release; other important contributors are saxophonist Mark Turner, the leader's wife, flutist Lisa Parker, and percussionist Adam Cruz. Together these players have produced a superb album about which I have but one criticism — it is far too short. *C.A.*

QUICK FIXES

THE BOILERMAKER JAZZ BAND

Don't Give Up the Ship

BIOGRAPH 133 (56 min)

Over the years, young musicians — mostly Europeans — have tried to recreate the original New Orleans jazz sound, but rarely does one hear a new American band that is as dedicated and true to the form as the Boilemakers. This is a wonderful, spirited album that could take into the next century an accurate reflection of the joyous sounds that launched the present one. *C.A.*

EMERSON, LAKE & PALMER

Trilogy

MOBILE FIDELITY 621 (47 min)

Personally, I've never forgiven these guys for "Trilogy"'s two-part *Endless Enigma*, but if you go for ELP's brand of Seventies pomp-rock, this ultra-hi-fi remastered version is clearly the way to experience it. Don't say I didn't warn you, though. *S.S.*



EPIC SOUNDTRACKS

Sleeping Star

BAR NONE 049 (45 min)

Wispy-voiced, minimalist, but oddly compelling Fifties- and Sixties-influenced pop from a former experimentalist/noise-maker gone singer/songwriter. Think a less sodden Alex Chilton, or a post-modern version of Bread, and you've got it. *S.S.*

JAZZ AT THE MOVIES BAND

One from the Heart:

Sax at the Movies II

DISCOVERY 77015 (57 min)

"One from the Heart" is the second recording this fabulous group has made of film music featuring the saxophone, and it would be hard to think of another kind of jazz that would appeal to a wider audience. The selections (including *The Way We Were*, *Last Tango in Paris*, and the love theme from *Pretty Woman*) are beautiful, suave, and upbeat, and the playing is simply gorgeous. *William Livingstone*

KODO

Nasca Fantasy

TRISTAR 67206 (48 min)

The percussion group Kodo (a.k.a. the Heartbeat Drummers of Japan) collaborates here with the noted synthesist Isao Tomita, abandoning the exotic allure of world music in favor of Tomita's brand of easy listening. The result sounds a little

trite at times, but it is highly polished, undemanding, and easy on the ears. *W.L.*

AL KOOPER

Soul of a Man: Al Kooper Live

MUSICMASTERS 65113 (74 min)

In which the deservedly legendary rock sideman and mensch does up spirited in-concert recreations of the work of the celebrated bands he once led (the Blues Project, Blood, Sweat and Tears), as well as various entertaining nuggets from his solo career. Aces all the way. *S.S.*

THE NOSES

A Pocket Lipstick, Now!

A&D 12578 (48 min)

On this young Washington power trio's second album you might hear echoes of Elvis Costello, the Police, Steely Dan, or even Todd Rundgren. But when they're really on (the opening *Circular Motion*), they evoke the spirit of the original, mod, pre-Tommy Who better than anybody in years. Underdone in spots, but mostly a knockout. *S.S.*



JUNE TABOR

Against the Streams

GREEN LINNET 3096 (45 min)

A characteristically lovely solo album by the veteran British folkie who nearly stole last year's Richard Thompson tribute. Best moment: *Beauty and the Beast: An Anniversary*, a strange, touching sequel to the classic folk tale, and unlikely ever to be made into a Disney movie. *S.S.*

TROPICAL RAINFOREST

NATURE RECORDINGS 20 (60 min)

Mother Nature's orchestra of birds, bugs, monkeys, waterfalls, and surf performs here (unhindered by human instruments) to give an authentic sound portrait of two rainforests. My cats responded more to Program I, the noisier South American Rainforests, with all those bird calls. I found the calmer South Pacific Island Rainforests of Program II more soothing. Both are beautifully recorded. *W.L.*

IKE TURNER

I Like Ike! — The Best of Ike Turner

RHINO 71819 (48 min)

Okay, so he may not be the nicest guy who ever lived, but the fact remains he's a world-class talent — pianist, guitarist, songwriter, bandleader, producer — responsible for lots of great rock-and-roll before he ever hooked up with you know who. Pick hit: *Prancing*, a lethal stop-time guitar shuffle, a copy of which the late Stevie Ray Vaughan probably wore out as a kid. *S.S.*

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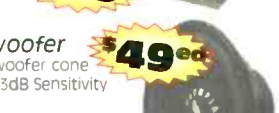
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BEETHOVEN:

Piano Concerto in D Major

BACH: Keyboard Concerto in D Major

Mustonen; Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie,
Saraste

LONDON 443 118 (54 min)

**Performance: Big and extroverted
Recording: Excellent**

Beethoven's D Major Piano Concerto, a transcription of his Violin Concerto, is periodically recorded, sometimes with an apologetic air, as if the piano soloist were treading carefully so as not to upset listeners' violinistic preconceptions. Olli Mustonen clearly can't be bothered with such worries: His big, muscular approach almost makes the concerto a virtuoso vehicle. That



may seem blasphemous, and some of the more personal, confessional moments in the violin version just don't happen here, but there's nothing shallow about his reading. He just gives the piano part bigger bones and a broader swagger than usual, in fascinating contrast to conductor Jukka-Pekka Saraste's clean, low-vibrato, historically informed approach to the orchestral part.

In the other transcription here, Bach's keyboard arrangement of his Violin Concerto in E Major (BWV 1054), the slow movement has an appropriately melting lyricism. It's less justifiable historically to play this concerto on a modern piano than the Beethoven, but Mustonen has such a big, absorbing musical personality that it's hard to resist his interpretation. *D.P.S.*

BRAHMS: Piano Trios

Ashkenazy; Perlman; Hanell
EMI 54725 (two CD's, 123 min)

**Performance: Full-blooded
Recording: Fairly close-up**

The all-star combination of pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, violinist Itzhak Perlman, and cellist Lynn Harrell gives us Brahms's three acknowledged masterpieces

in the piano-trio genre — Op. 8, in B Major, in its 1889 revision, Op. 87, in C Major, and Op. 101, in C Minor. In addition, we have the Trio in A Major attributed to Brahms, which dates from about the same period as Op. 8 but was published only in 1938. Certainly its musical language is in a similar warm, Romantic vein.

The broadly lyrical approach the performers take at the beginning of Op. 8 is sustained throughout all four works, though the playing is as alert as one could possibly ask when it comes to the scherzos. I'm used to a tauter handling of the first movement of Op. 101, but the players do make its harsher moments seem friendlier than usual. They excel in the two middle movements of Op. 101, the coyly hesitant presto and the beguiling andante, but my favorite parts of these performances are the meltingly lovely adagio of Op. 8 and the stunning middle movements of Op. 87.

The sound as such is clean but somewhat sterile, which may have something to do with the recording locales: EMI's Abbey Road Studio 1 in London for Op. 8 and the A Major and New York's Manhattan Center for Opp. 87 and 101. The necessary dampening of the acoustics of these big rooms for chamber music seems to have deprived the ensemble sound of warmth and sonic elbow room. If you like a close, crisp sound with good instrumental separation and delineation, you have it here. *D.H.*

HANDEL: Messiah

Soloists: King's College Choir, Cambridge;
Brandenburg Consort, Cleobury
LONDON 440 672 (two CD's, 143 min)

**Performance: Very good
Recording: Cloying**

In his note accompanying this set, sound engineer Simon Eadon says that this "was never going to be just another *Messiah*," but his justification for that claim, that the recording captures "the magical acoustic" of King's Chapel, Cambridge, will leave most nonengineers unmoved, especially when the work under consideration is already available in more versions than the Bible. In fact, the recording is ultimately the undoing of the set: After a while that luscious, echoey sound becomes wearisome and almost dizzy-making, bringing back childhood memories of squirming through *Messiahs* that seemed as if they would never end.

That said, this is a good run-through of the piece. The King's College Choir is excellent, and the soloists — Lynne Dawson, Hilary Summers, John Mark Ainsley, and

THE BRITISH ARE HERE

The BBC Philharmonic, familiar to Americans through its many excellent recordings on the Chandos, Collins, and Conifer labels, is on its first tour of the U.S. this spring. The orchestra, celebrating its sixtieth anniversary, is not inclined to travel light, bringing along not only its music director and principal conductor Yan Pascal Tortelier but also composer/conductor Peter Maxwell Davies. In gentlemanly fashion, the two share conducting duties, with Davies responsible for his own works and Tortelier in charge of the rest — music of Britten and Elgar as well as Beethoven, Debussy, Mendelssohn, Haydn, Mussorgsky, Ravel, and Tchaikovsky.

The twenty-city concert schedule includes the American premières of Davies's Trumpet Concerto in Los Angeles on March 19, his *Cross Lane Fair* in Las Vegas on March 23, and his Fifth Symphony in New York on April 9. Collins Classics, which has released recordings of all these works, also plans to record Davies's latest composition, *The Beltane Fire*, which will receive its world-première performance on April 3 in Boston.



**Tortelier (left) and Davies:
batons at dawn?**

PHOTO: HANVA CHALA/SHIELA PORTER

Alastair Miles — are about as good as could be assembled now. The set is well worth having if only for Ainsley's superb performance of the tenor arias. His rendition of "Every valley shall be exalted" is nearly ideal, its exquisite refinement suffused with spiritual warmth.

And what a pleasure it is to hear female singers again! For a while it seemed as though the soprano arias were irrevocably lost to countertenors, who are about as authentic for *Messiah* as synthesizers. Dawson, an English soprano who has turned in some fine performances on opera recordings, has a voice that seems at first too dark-hued and mezzoish for a rapturous aria like "He shall feed his flock," but she imbues every word with urgent conviction and ultimately wins you over.

Now, if only someone would reclaim *Messiah* for modern instruments J.J.

HAYDN: Symphonies Nos. 31, 59, and 73

Concentus Musicus Wien, Harmoncourt
TELDEC 90843 (78 min)

Performance: Boisterous
Recording: Colorful

Many of Haydn's symphonies have attracted nicknames, and Nos. 31, 59, and 73 are called the "Hornsignal," "Fire," and "Hunt" Symphonies, respectively. The horns here are four natural horns of the old, undomesticated hunting variety meant to be heard clear across Austro-Hungary. Fitting these primitive horns, with their few notes and rude sound, into the sophisticated scheme of a symphony at all was a challenge to the composer. But in their very crudeness, they also symbolize the out-of-doors, peasant life, the beauty of the countryside, and the power of the natural world, ideas that dominate these pieces. Nikolaus Harmoncourt, you can be sure, has located the loudest, brassiest, and most natural of natural horns to be found in Austria, and they kick off this disc with a blast in the

"Hornsignal." The later "Hunt" Symphony is subtler but no less out-of-doorsy, the horns somewhat less blatant (and that is certainly the right word) but still playing an important role.

While it is not hard to understand the picturesque programmatic associations of those two works, why No. 59 came to be called the "Fire" Symphony is obscure. But the music is Haydn at his most eccentric and colorful, with, among other things, a hopping presto opener, a slow movement that isn't slow, a mysterious and atmospheric minuet-trio, and a hornpipe finale led by — you guessed it — horns *au naturel*.

These performances not only make the case for period instruments in terms of color — the instrumental timbres imagined by the composer — but present the music with the boldest and liveliest of phrasing, dynamics, tempos, and general spirit. Harmoncourt's view is clearly that this is boisterous and even irreverent music, and he is not afraid to kick it; at the same time, there is a lot of affection and care. I can't imagine anything better. E.S.

MOZART: The Marriage of Figaro

Soloists: Monteverdi Choir;
English Baroque Soloists, Gardiner
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON ARCHIV
439 871 (three CD's, 178 min)

Performance: Exemplary
Recording: Live but excellent

MOZART: The Marriage of Figaro

Soloists: Netherlands Opera Chorus; Royal
Concertgebouw Orchestra, Harmoncourt
TELDEC 90861 (three CD's, 186 min)

Performance: Fascinating
Recording: Full and airy

Though it may be unwise to judge a CD by its program booklet, the ones packaged with these two new recordings of Mozart's ever-durable *Marriage of Figaro* say a lot: Nikolaus Harmoncourt's is thick and stuffed with all sorts of essays; John Eliot

Gardiner's is streamlined and to the point. So it is with the musicmaking, which in both cases is highly noteworthy even in a crowded catalog.

Although both are historically informed, they are so personal and individualistic that there isn't the slightest hint of pedantry. Among the many fine things about Gardiner's reading, recorded live, are a transparency and presence that make Mozart's wealth of ideas leap out at you in dizzying succession. Previously obscure details of orchestration can be heard, and Gardiner makes them dramatically relevant. He also



creates an arena in which the singers can make fresh approaches to their parts. The recitatives, for instance, are revelations; instead of stopping the musical momentum, as in most *Figaro* recordings, they speed the story along. Baritone Bryn Terfel's volatile, funny, sexy Figaro is all it's been cracked up to be. The rest of the well-chosen cast is mostly Gardiner regulars — baritone Rodney Gilfry as the Count and sopranos Hillevi Martinpelto as the Countess and Alison Hagley as Susanna.

While Harmoncourt's slow tempos, thick textures, and deliberate manner were used to great effect in his *Don Giovanni* recording, the approach seems unduly weighty — at least at first — for Mozart's comedy. At times the wedding march takes on a militaristic heaviness. But you soon become ac-

Liberated from the Bastille

Despite his nasty, messy firing from the Paris Opéra-Bastille last summer, the forty-one-year-old Korean-American conductor Myung-Whun Chung remembers running Europe's most politicized opera company with great fondness.

"I have absolutely no regrets. All of these difficult moments [were] so minor in comparison to the rewards I've gotten from this experience," he told me in Philadelphia last November, buoyed by a sensational performance of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 4 with the Philadelphia Orchestra, which Deutsche Grammophon recorded for release within the next year.

Chung had managed to put the Bastille Opera on the recording map, as much by his studio savvy as his conducting talent,



Conductor
Myung-Whun Chung,
former music
director
of the Paris
Opéra-
Bastille

with highly acclaimed interpretations of *Samson et Dalila*, *Otello*, and, especially, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Unlike many musicians who pull back their performances to accommodate the sharp but cold ears of the microphone, Chung does almost

the opposite. "You must give more intensity moment by moment," he explained. "The most challenging aspect of recording is to make the emotional content strong enough to go beyond the electronic barrier."

Some of Chung's most successful recordings have been of the music of Olivier Messiaen, and last September, near the end of his Paris tenure, he was able to conduct the world premiere of Messiaen's posthumously discovered concerto grosso, *Concert à 4*, with the Bastille Opera Orchestra. Deutsche Grammophon recorded the performance and will release it in May, and Chung conducts the work's U.S. premiere this March with the Cleveland Orchestra.

David Patrick Stearns

customed to Harnoncourt's interpretive rules; while there aren't a lot of laughs, the recording is bursting with insights. Soprano Barbara Bonney is a winning, confiding Susanna, and baritone Thomas Hampson gives an accomplished if overly mannered portrayal of the Count. For the other principal roles Harnoncourt chose fresh but lesser-known singers. Baritone Anton Scharinger makes a satisfactory Figaro, and soprano Charlotte Margiono's Countess is unusually touching. The smaller roles are cast luxuriously, with Philip Langridge as Basilio, Kurt Moll as Bartolo, and Ann Murray as Marcellina. *D.P.S.*

PROKOFIEV: Violin Concertos Nos. 1 and 2

STRAVINSKY: Violin Concerto
Lin; Los Angeles Philharmonic, Salonen
SONY 53969 (69 min)

Performance: Infectious
Recording: Sumptuous

Cho-Liang Lin certainly hasn't been overexposed by Sony; everything he has recorded so far has fairly glowed with conviction and the most communicative sort of animation, suggesting that each and every item was a very personal choice on his part rather than a selection made in a marketing conference. That happy impression is more than upheld by this new CD, and so is that of a special rapport between Lin and the conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, which was so apparent on their disc of the Sibelius and Nielsen concertos a few years ago. All the elements are superbly integrat-



ed here, with wonderfully unfeigned passion, mystery, and earthiness by turn in the two Prokofiev concertos and an unexpected warmth in the Stravinsky that in no way contravenes its essential character. The same three concertos are performed at least as well by Kyung-Wha Chung with André Previn and the London Symphony Orchestra on a London recording from the early 1970's (now available as a midprice CD), but the sound is not as sumptuous. *R.F.*

RACHMANINOFF: Symphony No. 3; Symphonic Dances

Baltimore Symphony, Zinman
TELARC 80331 (74 min)

Performance: Splendid
Recording: Gorgeous

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STEREO REVIEW
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— from David Zinman and his Baltimore players. His readings, like those of Charles Dutoit and the Philadelphia Orchestra on a recent London CD, are free from exaggeration and fussiness, but they are decidedly warmer in tone and phrasing than Dutoit's, and he applies just the right touch of string portamento in the right places. The high points of the Third Symphony are the slow movement's opening and its concluding adagio, which are done with exquisite tenderness. The elaborately textured finale comes off with fiery brilliance, and it is a pleasure to hear the central lyrical episode

cohere with the movement as a whole rather than seem like a mere relaxation. The ending is superbly decisive.

While I would have liked a touch more rhythmic tension in the first two movements of the Symphonic Dances, the performance in its entirety is on the same high plane as that of the symphony. The hushed reprise in the central waltz movement is particularly haunting, and for my taste the ferocious dance-of-death finale has never come off better. Telarc's sound is full-bodied and splendidly balanced throughout the audible range. *D.H.*

SCHUBERT: Piano Sonata in B-flat Major (D. 960); Three Piano Pieces (D. 946)

Kyoko Tabe
DENON 78905 (71 min)
Performance: **Songful**
Recording: **Excellent**

Kyoiko Tabe's debut recording, twenty-five of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, was one of last year's most attractive piano releases and created a great deal of interest in the announced Schubert follow-up. Now that it is at hand, it once again suggests that Tabe is a thoughtful artist, totally concerned with finding the key to the essential character of the music without imposing or overlaying her own personality on it. And the key, once again, is songfulness.

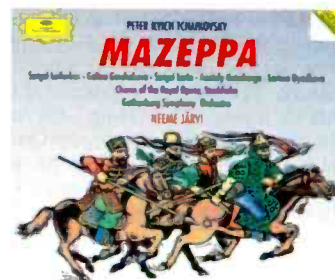
In the opening movement of Schubert's towering final sonata, Tabe quickly and surely establishes a mood of bleak pathos and then simply allows the song to pour out, without gratuitous underscoring. The natural momentum is so effortlessly achieved that one is not likely to stop and acknowledge it, or to think of the unself-conscious little revelations here and there as "insights" on Tabe's part (though they surely are). There is not a single perfunctory gesture, or a single one that gets in the way, throughout the utterly convincing four-part drama, and the three posthumous piano pieces — Schubert's final impromptus — are even more persuasive. Tabe is quite a musician, as well as a stunning pianist, and Denon has come through with exceptionally realistic piano sound. *R.F.*

TCHAIKOVSKY: Mazeppa

Soloists; Chorus of the Royal Opera, Stockholm; Gothenburg Symphony, Järvi
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 439 906
(three CD's, 167 min)

Performance: **Vital and involving**
Recording: **Excellent**

Patriot or traitor depending on whether one follows Ukrainian or Russian history, the figure of Ivan Mazeppa, the Cossack chief during the tumultuous reign of Peter the Great, inspired many literary and musical treatments. In what appears to be the first complete recording of Tchaikovsky's 1884 opera *Mazeppa*, the somewhat problematic work is splendidly captured by an



outstanding and thoroughly idiomatic cast. Tchaikovsky's compelling orchestral writing lends *Mazeppa* (written between his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies) a powerfully taut atmosphere, but it lacks the irresistible melodic appeal of *Eugene Onegin* and *Pique*

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Dame. Nonetheless, under Neeme Järvi's leadership the music has an unflagging momentum that sweeps it along, and he doesn't allow the few lyrical episodes to sink into sentimentality.

The title character is a complex figure whose feckless ambition casts him into political disgrace and personal tragedy. Baritone Sergei Leiferkus portrays him with a powerful authority that misses no dramatic points, though his instantly recognizable, somewhat bleaty tone requires some getting used to. By contrast, Anatoly Kotcherga voices the part of Kotchubey, Mazeppa's victim, in a rich and smoothly flowing bass-baritone, and soprano Galina Gorchakova, who debuts this season at the Met, is just about ideal as Kotchubey's ill-fated daughter Maria, destroyed by the enmity between her father and her lover Mazeppa. Sergei Larin, a cultivated lyric tenor, and Larissa Dyadkova, a high mezzo-soprano, make the most of their opportunities, as does baritone Monte Pederson in a supporting role.

Peter the Great defeated the Swedish army at Poltava in 1709, an episode memorialized in the opera by a noisy interlude. Under the circumstances, the financial support of this recording by Sweden's Volvo calls for special mention. *G.J.*

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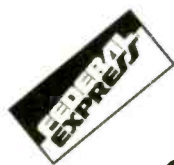
Performance: Excellent

Recording: Excellent

The six concert pieces for chamber orchestra by Astor Piazzolla, José Bragato, and Rodolfe Arizaga included here capture both the beauty and the threatening power of urban life in Buenos Aires along with the

pervading melancholy of the tango, which inspired all of them. Piazzolla's *Suite Punta del Este* for string orchestra with solo bandoneon (a relative of the accordion) is polished and expressive, and his Suite for Oboe and String Orchestra is even more poetic and affecting. The entire program is performed with the utmost idiomatic authority by Argentina's Camerata Bariloche, and this recording is a most worthy addition to Dorian's series of Music of Latin American Masters. *William Livingstone*

(Reviews continue on the next page.)



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R. STRAUSS: Four Last Songs
WAGNER: Wesendonck-Lieder; Tristan und Isolde, Prelude and Liebestod
Studer: Staatskapelle Dresden, Sinopoli
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

439 865 (60 min)

Performance: Moving
Recording: Excellent

Cheryl Studer brings intelligence and taste to the Four Last Songs, inflecting the texts to emphasize meaning and coloring her voice for effect (occasionally it takes on an oboe-like timbre). Her singing is interwoven with the orchestral texture, strengthening the impression that this composition is actually a concerto for voice and orchestra. For his part, Giuseppe Sinopoli conducts the lush score with attention not only to his soprano soloist, but also to individual instrumental voices.

The Wagner selections are likewise commendable. Studer again pays close attention to the texts and stresses their poetry rather more than is usual, and Sinopoli conducts with a similar concern while at the same time realizing the melodic richness of the music. His reading of the *Tristan* prelude is eminently satisfying. *R.A.*

VLADIMIR HOROWITZ

The Private Collection, Volume One
RCA VICTOR 62643 (63 min)

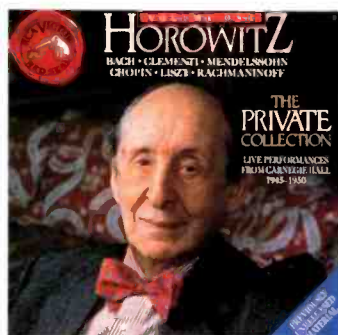
Performance: Of interest
Recording: Quite good

In the years 1945-1950 Vladimir Horowitz performed as many as six recitals a year in New York City alone — and all of those performances were recorded on 78's for his own use. Following his death in November 1989, his wife decided to make available to the public the material that had not been represented among his commercial recordings. There is enough to fill two CD's, and RCA Victor has now issued the first, comprising music by Bach, Clementi, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff.

The process of restoration and remastering was carried off with remarkable success; the sound of the piano is a good deal more than acceptable, allowing the listener to focus on the musicmaking without having to make any compromises or allowances. When we get down to musical considerations, though, we have to remind ourselves of the original purpose of these recordings, which preserve performances of works that Horowitz apparently did not find sufficiently stimulating or congenial to record commercially. The performance of Bach's C Minor Toccata from 1949, for instance, suggests little more than a dutiful gesture, and the other big piece, Chopin's F Minor Fantasy, is numbingly prosaic.

The shorter works fare better. Horowitz, alone among the great pianists of his time,

championed and clearly relished the Clementi sonatas, and the three offered here receive illuminating readings, as do Mendelssohn's *Song Without Words*, Op. 67, No. 3, and Rachmaninoff's *Étude-Tableau*, Op.



39, No. 7. Many piano fanciers will find these pieces essential even if they never return to the Bach or Chopin. *R.F.*

SEQUENTIA

Canticles of Ecstasy — Music of Hildegard von Bingen

DEUTSCHE HARMONIA MUNDI
77320 (73 min)

Performance: Ecstatic
Recording: Effective church acoustic

Sequentia, an ensemble specializing in medieval music, is marking the upcoming 900th anniversary of Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), the thirteenth-century

abbess of Rupertsberg on the Rhine near Cologne, by a projected series of recordings of her complete works. "Canticles of Ecstasy" is the third album to be released.

This amazing figure has had a remarkable renaissance recently with all the recent focus on the artistic achievements of women, the newfound popularity of Gregorian chant, and the contemporary interest in mysticism. She called the works here "harmonious symphonies of heavenly inspiration." In the modern sense, however, there are no symphonies, no harmony or counterpoint. Technically, the works here are monophonic antiphons, responsories, and sequences intended to be sung in a liturgical context.

Sequentia is directed by its co-founder, Barbara Thornton, who is also its principal singer. The women's voices, solo and ensemble, are occasionally "accompanied" (mostly in the form of drones) by medieval fiddle, harp, and hurdy-gurdy, and there is one independent instrumental number, not really a composition but a dancelike improvisation.

The performances are indeed highly ecstatic, bringing out the intensity and joy of hymns intended to express, verbally and emotionally, feminine principles of creation and faith. They are recorded in a way that makes effective use of the acoustics of Cologne's ancient Church of St. Pantaleon. There are some errors and inconsistencies in the program booklet, but full texts and translations are provided. *E.S.*

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BACH: Three Solo Cantatas

Argenta; Ensemble Sonnerie, Huggett
VIRGIN 45038 (62 min)

Bach's solo cantatas are one of the supreme tests for the vocalist: Intimate, often very sparsely accompanied, they leave the singer nowhere to hide. This is a fine recording of three of the most popular ("Ich habe genug," "Mein Herz schwimmt im Blut," and "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen"), and British soprano Nancy Argenta passes the audition with flying colors, accompanied with quiet good taste by a classy new ensemble led by Monica Huggett. *J.J.*



BARTOK: Concerto for Orchestra; The Miraculous Mandarin

City of Birmingham Symphony, Rattle
EMI 55094 (70 min)

Simon Rattle's drive and dynamism, combined with strong musicianship, particularly in twentieth-century repertory, suggest the influence of Leonard Bernstein; he is a little less flamboyant, and perhaps somewhat more disciplined, but similarly energetic and communicative. The pulse and color of these strong and popular works, vastly different in style but both with showcase orchestrations, are perfect for him. *E.S.*

POULENC: Stabat Mater SZYMANOWSKI: Stabat Mater

Soloists; Atlanta Symphony Chorus and Orchestra, Shaw
TELARC 80362 (58 min)

These two settings of the same medieval text provide a fascinating study in contrasts: The Szymanowski *Stabat Mater* is steeped in the Eastern mysticism that pervades several of his most remarkable large-scale works; the Poulenc is, in conductor Robert Shaw's words, "a suite of ensemble dances — from choreatic tarantella to stately sarabande." Neither composer could have asked for more heartfelt performances than the ones here. *R.F.*

SAINT-SAËNS: Symphony No. 3 ("Organ"); Violin Concerto No. 3

Zimmermann; Oslo Philharmonic, Jansons
EMI 55184 (63 min)

The opening moments of the "Organ" Symphony promise great things with their combination of crackling urgency, effortless grace, and an emotional connection

between score and conductor that has been all too absent from Mariss Jansons's work in recent years. Elsewhere, there's an infectious sense of sweep, with beautifully calculated and prepared climaxes and structural modulations. But in the final movement the grand organ chords are played with such bracing vulgarity that even Frank Peter Zimmermann's dignified reading of the Violin Concerto No. 3 is only partial compensation. *D.P.S.*



SCARLATTI: Sonatas

John Browning (piano)
MUSICMASTERS 67146 (71 min)

John Browning has so strongly favored Romantic and contemporary repertory that this recording of Scarlatti sonatas comes as a surprise, but a thoroughly delightful one. The elegance and vigor with which he enlivens thirty of these remarkable little works show his love for this music, and the exceptionally vivid sound makes the imaginatively programmed sequence that much harder to resist. *R.F.*

SIBELIUS: Violin Concerto

BRUCH: Scottish Fantasy
Midori; Israel Philharmonic, Mehta
SONY 58967 (63 min)

Midori responds more tellingly to the charm and color of the Bruch fantasy — a delightful performance — than to the rugged lyricism of the Sibelius concerto. Her initial solo entrance in that Finnish masterpiece can best be described as feline, and her treatment of the succeeding passage is rhapsodic rather than cohesive. The finale fares by far the best under her nimble fingers. Zubin Mehta and the orchestra provide strong and vital back-up, with better sound than usual from Tel Aviv's Mann Auditorium. *D.H.*

VILLA-LOBOS: Songs

Alexander; Chaplin; Heller
ETCETERA 1165 (59 min)

Of the nineteen songs by the prolific Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos on this CD, more than half are set to or arranged from folk texts or melodies; the others are art songs. The collection includes a version of the famous *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5* as well as a great old samba tune and a set of songs derived from the composer's score for the movie *Green Mansions*. This is wonderful music sung with a lot of feeling by soprano Roberta Alexander, though she falls a little short in matters of language and style. The capable pianist is Alfred Heller, president of the Villa-Lobos Society. The sound is boxy though. *E.S.*

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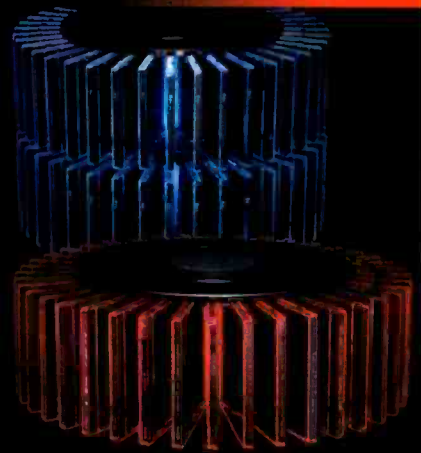
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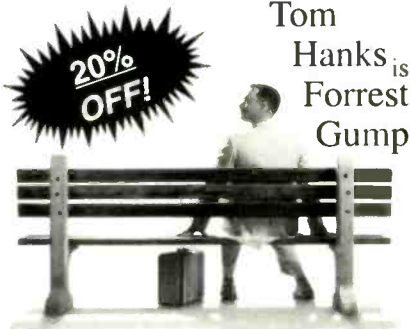
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TIME DELAY



30 Years Ago

In the April 1965 "Editorially Speaking," Furman Hebb turned over the editorship of STEREO REVIEW to William Anderson, using the occasion to sound off about the magazine's purpose. "Most important," he wrote, "we love music," adding that "a reader should not have to be a graduate of M.I.T. to understand our technical articles."

In the issue's lead story, Bernard Newman introduced specifications for fifty-two stereo receivers, including the imposing Electro-Voice EV-88 (height, 7 1/8 inches). New



The Electro-Voice EV-88, 1965

products included the Harvard Futterman H-3 stereo power amp (50 watts per channel) and three bookshelf speakers from Bozak. In test reports, Julian Hirsch evaluated the Scott 260 stereo amp ("The listener hears the music, not the amplifier") and the Magnecord 1024 tape deck, a \$600 semipro unit he called "an outstanding value."

Department of Unlikely Attributions: Reviewing a Columbia LP of Aaron Copland's piano concerto with the composer as soloist, critic William Flanagan, quoting the infamous gangster Frank Costello, wrote that the record would "refreshen our recollections."



20 Years Ago

Adventures in Literacy: In April's cover story, Canadian folk singer Gordon (Sundown) Lightfoot told Noel Coppage, "My reading habits are atrocious. All I read is the *National Lampoon* and *Time*."

Among the new products this month were the IAD Dynamic Volume Expander, which boosted gain by more than 15 dB, Tannoy/Micro's TM55DD direct-drive manual turntable, and the Bozak Monitor-C speaker, a more decorative version of a system originally designed for studio applications. Hirsch-Houck Labs tested Nakamichi's Model 500 cassette deck, a moderately priced (\$399) two-head version of its pricier three-head decks, and Sansui's QRX-7001 four-channel receiver (it decoded QS quadrasonic records), which Julian Hirsch called "the single most advanced four-channel receiver you can buy today."



Barry Gibb, 1985

In Best of the Month, Eric Salzman had "nothing but praise for the disarming loveliness" of Peter Serkin's set of Mozart piano concertos on RCA, and Chris Albertson raved about Circle's "Paris Concert," a live album featuring Anthony Braxton and Chick Corea ("in the vanguard of modern American music"). In other reviews, Richard Freed was knocked out by Wanda Wilkomirska's violin recital on Connoisseur Society ("fabulous fiddling!"), Steve Simels had dark thoughts about "Here's Johnny!," a two-LP set of highlights from the *Tonight Show* ("booze and whoopeecushion humor for the masses"), and Noel Coppage, confronted with Leonard Cohen's "New Skin for the Old Ceremony," observed that "it makes you want to give him an expense-paid month-long vacation in a cold shower."

In letters, reader Anne Marie Tilly, of Memphis, Tennessee, claimed that she'd just listened to a live version of Joni Mitchell's *Big Yellow Taxi* "for the millionth time and have come to the conclusion that I'm tired of it."

Dahlquist's DQ-20, 1985



10 Years Ago

The cover story featured technical editor Larry Klein's basic ground rules for adding extra speakers. He noted that if your amp overheats because the combined parallel impedance of your speakers falls much below 4 ohms, it may not cause permanent damage "but can certainly put a crimp in a Saturday night dance party." In "CES: 14 Show Stoppers," Gordon Sell described promising new products at the 1985 Winter Consumer Electronics Show, including Acoustic Research's ETL-1 turntable, with improved three-point suspension, Canon's VR-E10 8mm videocassette



recorder, and Dahlquist's DQ-20 phased-array three-way speakers (\$1,800 a pair). And in "Audio/Video Receivers," Fred Petras examined six competing A/V units, including the first of the breed — Jensen's AVS-1500 — and Sony's 80-watt-per-channel STR-AV760.

Those Fabulous Reagan Years: Reviewing Barry Gibb's "Now Voyager," Peter Reilly harumphed that "every aspect of this album is so glossy, so tailored to a known audience, that it might have been produced by a computer at the Harvard Business School."

— Steve Simels

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