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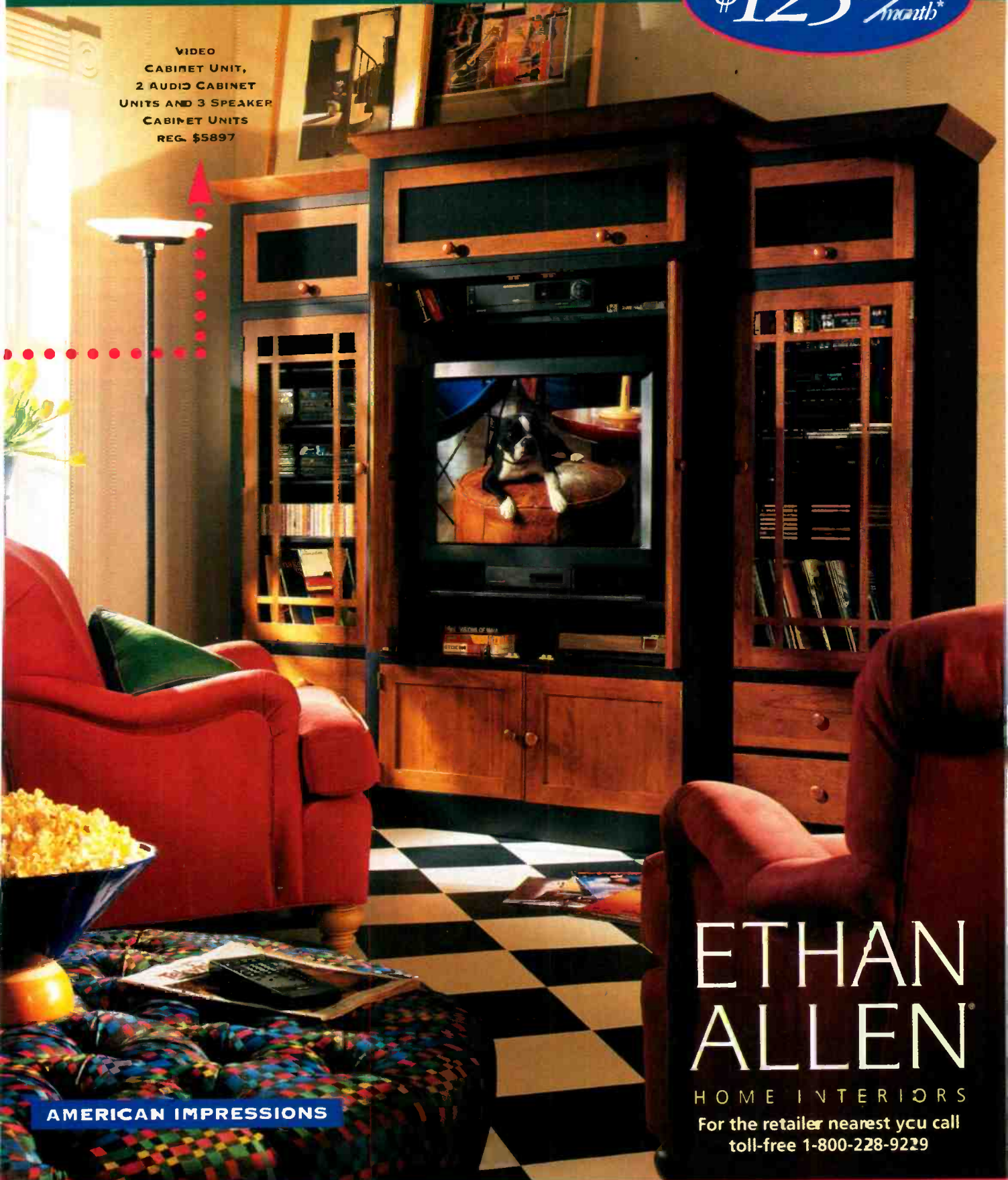
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# BULLETIN

BY WILLIAM LIVINGSTONE  
AND BOB ANKOSKO

## VOLCANIC MUSIC

Remember Mount St. Helens, the volcano in Washington State that blew its stack? Well, last fall Alan Hovhaness's "Mount St. Helens" Symphony on Delos zoomed into the Top 10 on *Billboard* magazine's chart of best-selling classical recordings, right up there with Górecki's Symphony No. 3, Cecilia Bartoli, and "The Three Tenors."

If you want a little whiff of it before buying, there's a 5-minute excerpt from the symphony on the Delos sampler CD offered to STEREO REVIEW readers back in July. The 70-minute sampler also includes music by Dvorak, Copland, Wagner, Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky, and others. To get a copy, send a check for US\$4 (made out to Delos International) along with your name and address to Delos International, Attn: TA20, 1645 N. Vine St. Suite 340, Hollywood, CA 90028.

Also still available is Legacy's special CD sampler "The Beauty of the Blues," 54 minutes of great blues by such legendary figures as Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, and Big Bill Broonzy. For a copy send a check or money order for US\$4 (made payable to Sony Music) to Music Fulfillment Number 2037, Legacy Blues, P.O. Box 4000, Carrollton, GA 30117.

## HDTV ALLIANCE GOES DOLBY

The Digital HDTV Grand Alliance, a consortium of manufacturers and research concerns jointly developing a new digital high-definition TV broadcast system for the

## KAZOO FACTS

We are indebted to *Modern Maturity* magazine for pointing out recently that the kazoo capital of the world is Eden, New York, site of the Original American Kazoo Company Museum. The magazine also informs us that there are 15,000 kazoo bands in the United States, and the song kazoo players are most frequently asked to perform is *Far Away*.

U.S., has announced that the system will deliver CD-quality surround sound based on the AC-3 digital coding technology invented by Dolby Labs. The AC-3 process, which provides six audio channels, is also the basis for the Dolby Stereo Digital soundtracks being used in a growing number of motion pictures. The latest word is that HDTV broadcasting could begin in 1996. We're not holding our breath.

## MUSICAL NOTES

The noted materialist Madonna has plummeted from eighth place in *Forbes* magazine's list of entertainment millionaires to fifteenth as her income dropped from \$24 million for the 1992 list to a paltry \$13 million last year. (Oprah Winfrey leads the pack with \$98 million over two years.) Born in 1983 with the advent of the CD, Rykodisc is celebrating the completion of its first ten years in business. This month the Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame will induct the Animals, the Band, Duane Eddy, the Grateful Dead, Elton John, John Lennon, Bob Marley, and Rod Stewart. The prestigious four-volume *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, which contains 10,000 articles and 1,300 illustrations, normally lists for \$850, but it is available through January 31 for a special holiday price of \$695.

## AUTOSOUND

Pioneer is making a foray into ultra high-end car stereo this month with the Optical Digital Reference System.



## RECORDABLE CD FLAP

The idea of recordable CD (CD-R) is not new—professional "write-once" machines costing thousands of dollars have been around for a few years. But word from Japan has it that some big-name companies—including Pioneer, Marantz, TDK, and Yamaha—are planning to market CD-R machines and blank discs to consumers in that country. Reports say recorders priced at about \$5,000 could go on sale soon, with prices eventually falling to under \$1,000. The new consumer machines would also be of the write-once variety, meaning that you can't erase or record over recordings made on them. Blank 60-minute discs are expected to sell for about \$28 apiece. Whether this development will spark renewed interest in recordable CD here remains to be seen. One thing's certain: In its current, nonerasable form, recordable CD is not a consumer-friendly format. Erasable CD is another story. But when such a format might become available is anyone's guess.

Highlights include the choice between a DIN-size CD- or cassette-based controller/tuner, a twelve-disc CD changer with a 100-disc title memory, a digital front/rear thirty-one-band equalizer, a digital preamp/processor, a 30-watt-per-channel pure Class A integrated amplifier with a digital crossover, and a complete line of speakers. Fiber-optic digital connections are used throughout except from the amplifier to the speakers. A computer analyzer that performs an impressive automatic equalization/time-alignment routine will be made available to retailers.

McIntosh is venturing into car stereo with a full line of custom-install-oriented components including amplifiers and speakers. Blaupunkt's new Velocity power amplifiers feature patented Rocktron circuitry, which is said to prevent clipping at high volumes, and an adjustable noise-muting circuit.

## FOR LASERDISC FANS

A complimentary copy of *The Laser Disc Newsletter*, a monthly periodical featuring reviews and videodisc news, is available to anyone who calls 1-800-551-4914 and requests one.

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## them

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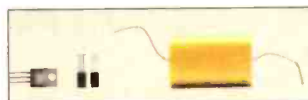
Potentiometers costing less than 1/10th the price of laser trimmed potentiometers.

Molded plastic made to look like aluminum.

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# LETTERS

## Digital Radio

I enjoyed Peter Mitchell's "Digital on the Air" in November, but when I called my local cable company they said they have no plans to carry Digital Cable Radio or Digital Music Express. Would you please print these companies' addresses? Perhaps if I write them they will actively solicit my local cable operator.

Also, the article claimed that digital radio is commercial-free, like HBO, but that is deceptive. HBO has far too many HBO commercials; premium movie channels are not truly interruption-free. Is that the case with digital radio on cable? **SCOTT OLSON**  
Clearwater, FL

*You can write to Digital Cable Radio at 2200 Byberry Rd., Hatboro, PA 19040, and to Digital Music Express at International Cablecasting Technologies, Inc., 11400 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 1100, Los Angeles, CA 90064-1507. Both services do, in fact, offer continuous music with no promotional or commercial interruptions.*

## CD Prices

Ian Masters's "Do CD's Cost Too Much?" in November presented arguments on both sides with a minimum of prejudice. His conclusion was basically that of the record companies: that CD prices are what they are because the market has determined they're fair. As record-company executives are such lovers of the free market, they should be overjoyed at the free-market response to their inflated prices: used-CD stores.

**BRICE A. WALZ**  
Wellington, MA

Do CD's cost too much? Yes! The last CD I bought was U2's "Achtung Baby." After taxes that sucker cost \$19. At those prices I cannot afford to buy new recordings on a regular basis, so I mostly buy cutouts, where I find very good music at a reasonable price. **JEAN-PAUL TERTOCHA**  
Warrensburg, IL

The reason for the inflated cost of CD's is *out-and-out greed!* The damn things shouldn't cost more than \$9.95. I continue to buy CD's, but not nearly as many as the LP's I used to purchase. **BIG AL JOHNSON**  
Austin, TX

While back I went through my father's old LP collection, from the early stereo days of 1958-1959 through about 1970. Many still had original price stickers of around \$4. In 1959 you could buy a very decent new car for \$2,995; today it would cost around \$14,995. At that rate, CD's

should cost five times as much as 1959-1960 LP's did, or \$20. But the sonic improvements of CD's over LP's are far greater than the "improvements" that EPA and "safety" mandates have made in our cars. So maybe, just to keep things "fair" and our apples vs. oranges comparisons "relative," CD prices should be raised to about \$25.

**TIM FERN**  
Henderson, KY

That only one out of every ten CD releases is profitable is a good reason to lower prices. Prices are so high that consumers don't want to take a chance on anything new. And if expensive videos are what's driving up the cost of a CD, I suggest the record companies quit making them. I don't want to pay more for CD's so that recording artists can exercise some fantasy of being a movie star. **DAVID F. TOONE**  
Tucson, AZ

Where do you guys go to buy CD's? I agree that they're overpriced, but come on—\$16.98 apiece? I never pay more than \$13 for a CD, and even that is rare at the "mom-and-pop" stores I buy from.

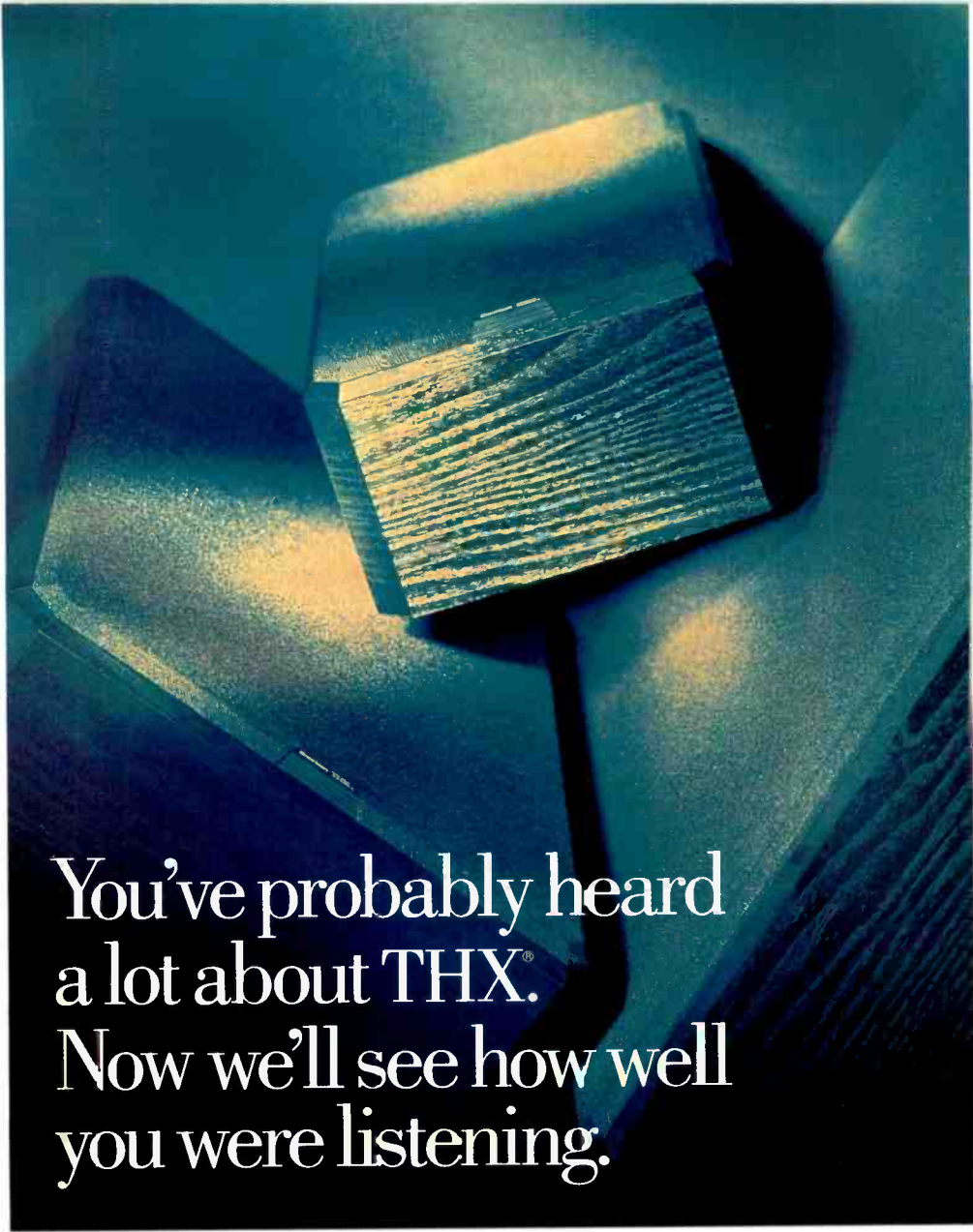
**TIM ENGLE**  
Schererville, IN

Recently I bought three used CD's for much less than if they were new—CD's I never would have bought at full or sale prices. Two were by new artists I'd heard of but had never purchased before. They were excellent, and I'll probably buy more of their music someday. So hats off to Wherehouse. They are doing the public a favor—and helping the music industry by encouraging us to try music we might otherwise ignore. **RICHARD W. EVON**  
Concord, CA

While Ian G. Masters assessed "today's CD prices" at retail outlets, he ignored savings available from the large mail-order record clubs. **BERNARD A. DUPONT**  
Putnam, CT

## Edison's Failure

Ken Pohlmann's October "Signals" column on "Edison's Failure" really opened my eyes. Tomorrow I'm trading in my B&W speakers, Adcom amplifier, and CD of Simon Rattle conducting Mahler's Symphony No. 2 for a Super Nintendo Entertainment System and a "Mortal Kombat" cartridge. Of course, it must follow that I should let my subscription to STEREO REVIEW run out and begin reading *Video Game Review*. Now, if I can only find someone who will accept my Wurlitzer baby grand



You've probably heard a lot about THX. Now we'll see how well you were listening.

What the heck is this THX thing? A running shoe? A dessert topping? Misconceptions abound. But here's the skinny. THX is a system designed by the folks at Lucas Entertainment. Its aim: to make a film sound just as impressive from your easy chair as it did from the director's chair in his fancy high-tech dubbing suite.

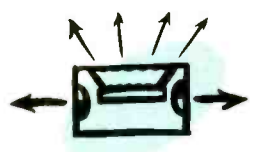
**MISCONCEPTION #1.** Most people think THX uses a new and different encoding method. Not so. In fact, at its heart, the THX controller has a Dolby ProLogic decoder, so it accepts any Dolby-encoded TV program, video tape or laser disc (unfortunately, that includes *Ishtar*). We like to think of it as Dolby ProLogic, refined.

**MISCONCEPTION #2.** Some folks think you need to buy the entire system all at once. But, in fact, the pieces of the Boston THX system are available separately. You can even power them with your existing Dolby ProLogic receiver and upgrade to the THX electronics later.

The system consists of six THX speakers, and a THX controller/amplifier combo. Boston Acoustics THX speakers offer a great deal more than conventional speakers when it comes to home theater. Specifically, dialog is clearer, effects are more readily localized

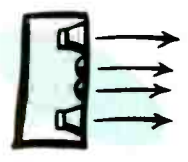


on and off screen, and panning is more natural (a horse galloping across the screen sounds as such, with a smooth transition from side to side). All of this thanks to the 555x speaker's narrow vertical dispersion pattern. Sound travels to your ears without ricocheting off the floor or ceiling, which can blur crucial dialog and effects. Another advantage: a sense of



**MISCONCEPTION #3.** A surround is a surround. Nope. By firing sound forward and rear, the dipole 575x surround washes your walls with sound. Thereby transporting you to the middle of a canyon, a city street, or the forest planet Endor (please don't feed the Ewoks). In fact, we believe the 575x is the finest surround speaker ever built.

true space is achieved with Boston 575x surrounds. These dipolar speakers, unlike conventional ones, use walls to reflect sound several times before it reaches your ears. So the sound envelops you and you feel like



**MISCONCEPTION #4.** THX is electronics. Actually, most of what THX is lies in how the speakers are configured. Take our 555x front speaker. We had one aim in building it: your ears. Sound disperses horizontally, but is limited vertically. Since the sound you hear hasn't bounced off of the floor or ceiling first, dialog is incredibly clear, effects are crisp.

you're right in the middle of the scene. And finally, what's a movie without an explosion or two? So we built the tight, powerful Boston 595x subwoofers to deliver the visceral side of a movie's sound effects and music. All of which can be heard at your local Boston dealer. Stop by for a demo. Now that you know what you're listening to.

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piano as a trade-in for that fantastic virtual-reality simulator featured in the movie *Lawnmower Man* . . .

ORSON WANG  
Ann Arbor, MI

## Confidence Levels

I have decided not to renew my subscription because I have little confidence in what you print. For instance, in November "Technical Talk" Julian Hirsch trivialized the differences between loudspeakers, and in "Amplifiers for Surround Sound" Michael Riggs said all power amplifiers sound alike.

Specifically, Riggs said, "Except in particular circumstances modern high-fidelity power amplifiers operating at levels below overload are sonically neutral devices." Nothing could be further from the truth. I recently listened to four different power amplifiers in my system after deciding to replace my current one. Each of the four sounded different from the others and from the one I had been using. The amp I bought is more open and more detailed, and it images better than the others. It has a wider and deeper soundstage and better bass, midrange, and treble. It is more musical.

How can STEREO REVIEW print such nonsense as that all high-fidelity power amplifiers sound alike?  
MICHAEL T. SALIBA  
New Orleans, LA

*Michael Riggs replies: Julian Hirsch was not trivializing the differences between speakers. His column was about how difficult it can be to decide which among com-*

*peting loudspeakers is "the best," given how many uncontrolled and subjective factors are involved. He went on to express surprise at finding three loudspeakers that sounded almost identical and to point out that there may still be reasons a person might prefer one over the others based on characteristics other than their sound. Nothing in what he said should be taken as suggesting that differences between loudspeakers are not important.*

*As for amplifier sound . . . well, twenty years ago I would have agreed with you. But I never said all power amplifiers sound the same. What I would say is that all power amplifiers with low enough noise and distortion, the same frequency response into the load over the audio band (within a small fraction of a decibel), the same polarity, and levels matched to within 0.1 dB will sound the same so long as none of them is driven into overload. That has been proved over and over again in controlled listening tests with a wide variety of auditioners, and it is further supported by measurements indicating differences between input and output that are well below scientifically established thresholds of audibility.*

*With the vast majority of modern transistor amplifiers driving the vast majority of loudspeakers at reasonable volume, all that's required to achieve the same result is level matching and a blind comparison technique. Unfortunately, human beings are both very suggestible and loathe to admit it, even to themselves. In the absence of proper controls or real differences, the imagination has plenty of room to take over and of-*

*ten does. And without tight level-matching, for example, there may be genuine audible differences (including apparent differences in tonal balance, detail, and stereo imaging) attributable solely to a level difference rather than to anything inherent in the designs of the amplifiers being compared.*

## Recording CD to MD

Ken Pohlmann said in his August 1993 review of the Sony MDS-101 MiniDisc recorder that he tested it by recording digitally from a CD. How did he do it? I tried to get a Toslink optical connector for my MDS-101 and was told that it was "still under development."

PHILL SCHWEIZER  
Pittsburgh, PA

*Technical Editor David Kanada replies: In order to give the digital jacks on the MDC-101 the ability to accept both coaxial and optical digital signals, Sony chose to make the jacks incompatible with the industry-standard Toslink/EIAJ optical cables. Instead, it offers an optional optical connector—the POC-MZ1—that can hook up the MDC-101 with a Toslink input or output on another component. Ken Pohlmann used one of those connectors in his tests.*

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Unforgiven (1992)	★ 1084003
Dances With Wolves	★ 0805200
The Last Of The Mohicans (1992)	★ 1071406
The Sound Of Music	★ 0003905
The Abyss	★ 0881102
Lawnmower Man	1014505
The Wizard Of Oz	0001404
The Blues Brothers	0211706
A League Of Their Own	★ 1078005
Back To The Future	★ 0211409
Back To The Future II	★ 0921304
Back To The Future III	★ 0497008
Batman (1989)	★ 0642504
Batman Returns	★ 1029909
Far And Away	★ 1046507
Hook	★ 0854307
Goodfellas	★ 096980H
Dune	0211102
Jaws	0100004
Boomerang	★ 1064005
My Cousin Vinny	1033109
Home Alone	★ 0104208
Bugs Bunny Classics	0297705
National Lampoon's Animal House	0211508
Conan The Barbarian	★ 0220509
Under Siege	★ 1077908
Die Hard	★ 0367607
Die Hard 2	★ 0041806
The Hunt For Red October	★ 0825000
Terminator 2: Judgment Day	★ 0233205
Backdraft	★ 0559005
Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves	★ 0976803
The Silence Of The Lambs	0805309
Patriot Games	★ 1051309
Alien	0000208
Aliens	0360909
Alien 3	★ 1042506
Top Gun	0426908
Predator	★ 0364901
Predator 2	★ 0104307
Basic Instinct	★ 1033208
Ghost	★ 0826008
2001: A Space Odyssey	★ 0844308
E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial	0681106
Lethal Weapon	0630806
Lethal Weapon 2	★ 0642702
Lethal Weapon 3	★ 1051507
Fried Green Tomatoes	1005404
North By Northwest	★ 0844209
Always	★ 0921502
The Man Who Would Be King	★ 0085803
The Empire Of The Sun	★ 0633206
Benny & Joon	★ 1108307
Scent Of A Woman	★ 1121300
The Last Boy Scout	★ 0779108
Field Of Dreams	0920306
New Jack City	0971507
Chinatown	★ 0202507
Henry V (1990)	0403003
Madonna: The Immaculate Collection	0983403
Reservoir Dogs	★ 1106905
The Prince Of Tides	★ 0847103
Death Becomes Her	★ 1071505
Raging Bull	★ 0050005
Universal Soldier	1059104
Patton	0788703
Madonna: Truth Or Dare	★ 0232900
Pink Floyd: The Wall	★ 0258004
Eric Clapton: Unplugged	1038405
The Hunger	★ 0255505
Hard To Kill	0953505
King Kong 60th Anniversary Edition	1021005
Return Of The Jedi	★ 0354704
The Addams Family	★ 1000900
The African Queen	0051102
Beetlejuice	0633008
Star Trek—The Motion Picture	★ 0203505
Star Trek II—The Wrath Of Khan	★ 0201301
Star Trek III—The Search For Spock	★ 0201608
Star Trek IV—The Voyage Home	★ 0430603
Star Trek V—The Final Frontier	★ 0448605
Star Trek VI—The Undiscovered Country	★ 1001007
Passenger 57	★ 1087709
Scarface (1983)	0216804
Sneakers	★ 1071604
The Godfather	0000802
The Godfather Part III	0842302

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# NEW PRODUCTS



## ▲ ADS

ADS's AW4 two-way speaker (top, \$350 a pair), designed for indoor or outdoor use, is 7¾ inches tall and rated down to 85 Hz. Two companion powered, servo-controlled subwoofers are offered: the 85-watt, 30-Hz-capable MS2 (\$795, bottom left) and the 65-watt, 38-Hz-capable MS1 (\$570). All come in black or white. ADS, Dept. SR, One Progress Way, Wilmington, MA 01887.

• Circle 121 on reader service card



## ▲ YAMAHA

Yamaha's AX-470 integrated amplifier features a wireless remote control, six inputs, a variable loudness control, tone controls, and a selectable direct signal path that bypasses the preamp controls. Power output is

rated as 65 watts per channel with no more than 0.015 percent distortion from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. Price: \$399. Yamaha, Dept. SR, 6660 Orangethorpe Ave., Buena Park, CA 90620.

• Circle 120 on reader service card



## ▲ BANG & OLUFSEN

B&O's BeoSound 2000 system combines a CD player, tuner, cassette deck, and pair of powered two-way speakers in a sleek 30 x 15 x 4-inch cabinet with a glass door that opens automatically at the approach of a hand. The system features a remote control and an FM antenna

that doubles as a carrying handle. Frequency response is specified as 70 Hz to 20 kHz +4, -8 dB. Several grille colors are available. Price: \$1,995. Bang & Olufsen, Dept. SR, 1150 Feehanville Dr., Mount Prospect, IL 60056.

• Circle 122 on reader service card

## ▼ MARK LEVINSON

The No. 38 is Mark Levinson's first remote-controllable preamplifier. Computer driven, it features fully balanced electrical operation, six line-level inputs (two balanced), balanced and unbalanced main outputs, two unbalanced recorder outputs, and a surround-sound processor mode

that effectively removes the preamp from the component loop. The unit's control software is contained in a plug-in chip for easy updating. Price: \$3,995. Madrigal Audio Labs, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 781, Middletown, CT 06457-0781.

• Circle 123 on reader service card



# Introducing The Next Best-Selling Loudspeaker Of All Time.

**IT'S NOT TOO LATE!**  
Order by Dec. 23  
for Xmas delivery.

More than 30 years ago, Henry Kloss designed the now-legendary KLH Model Six, the first speaker to fully exploit the potential of two-way design. By using the then-new principle of the acoustic suspension woofer, as well as creating a new type of long-throw integral-dome tweeter, he was able to make a speaker that provided outstanding performance at a moderate cost. A decade later, he took these principles still further with the Advent loudspeaker, one of the best selling speaker models of all time. Both speakers were considered industry benchmarks for price/performance.

We are now pleased to announce Cambridge SoundWorks' Model Six, a two-way system named in honor of Henry Kloss' first ground-breaking two-way system.

## Not An "Extension Speaker."

Model Six is not an "extension speaker." It's a serious *main* speaker with sufficient frequency range and power-handling to satisfy serious listeners. Model Six speakers, when combined with a good receiver and CD player, comprise a music system for \$500-\$600 that seriously outperforms typical pre-packaged "shelf" or "rack" systems.

## Two-Way Design Advantages.

We believe that when lowest cost is not the ultimate consideration, the best speaker design is a subwoofer-satellite system like our Ensemble® and Ensemble II systems. But a properly designed subwoofer-satellite system requires three-way design, which entails the cost of two more drivers and a third cabinet. While neither Ensemble system is "high end" in price, a complete stereo system starts at about \$800, still too much for music lovers on a budget.

**"...the Model Six is truly a high-quality speaker...It has an 'all there' sound quality that belies its amazingly low price and does credit to its heritage...At only \$119 each, the Model Six is an exceptional value."**

**-Stereo Review**



Model Six continues a long tradition of best-selling, high performance, high value, two-way speakers by Henry Kloss. Very natural, accurate, wide-range sound—only \$119 each!

What does Model Six give up compared to our Ensemble systems? With big amplifiers in large rooms, Ensemble and Ensemble II can play louder, and they have greater low-bass extension. They also give you tremendous room-placement flexibility, which allows you to optimize performance, with little impact on the decor of your room.

## Costly Components. Thoughtful Design.

At the heart of Model Six are its drivers, a 1 1/4" cone tweeter with center 5/8" dome (the same tweeter we use in Ensemble), and a newly-designed 8" acoustic suspension woofer. While classic in their simplicity, these drivers differ greatly from other moderate-cost speakers.

Model Six's crossover frequency is 2,000 Hz, much lower than many other two-way designs. This makes it possible to ensure smooth, uncolored upper midrange with wide dispersion. Such a low crossover frequency would not work with conventional tweeters. But Model Six's tweeter uses a suspension that allows the "long throws" necessary to reproduce music in this range.

The 8" woofer cone is larger than those usually found in speakers of Model Six's size and price, allowing it to move substantial amounts of air at low frequencies. And Model Six puts emphasis on very low frequencies instead of the mid-bass "rise" common in many speakers. The result is bass that is more accurate and extended than similar systems.

But most important is how Henry Kloss went on to "voice" the system—painstakingly

fine-tuning the octave-to-octave balance. This is the most important factor in determining the overall sound of a speaker.

## Elegant Cabinet Design.

We devoted considerable time and effort to making Model Six visually appealing. Convincing simulated wood finishes were chosen—in oak, teak and black ash. A subtly rounded "bullnose" molding frames a medium charcoal grey grill that was custom-woven for Model Six.

## Factory-Direct Price: \$119 each!

Because we sell factory-direct, Model Six sells for *far* less than it would cost in stores. At \$119 each, in your choice of three finishes, it is *the* value in today's loudspeaker market. If you aren't satisfied, you can return Model Six within 30 days for a full refund.

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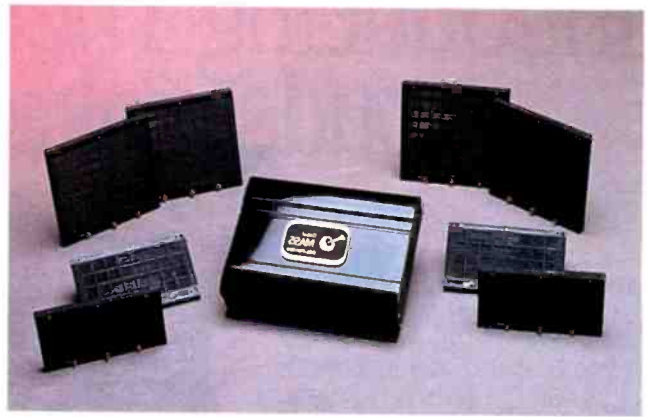
# NEW PRODUCTS

## ▼ AIWA

Aiwa's HV-FX1000 VHS-format VCR features VHS Hi-Fi and MTS circuitry for decoding stereo movie soundtracks and broadcast or cable stereo TV. The deck offers automatic head cleaning,

digital tracking, bilingual on-screen display, and front-panel camcorder inputs. Price: \$450. Aiwa, Dept. SR, 800 Corporate Dr., Mahwah, NJ 07430.

• Circle 124 on reader service card



## ▲ MASS ENGINEERING

Mass Engineering's ESL Series speakers are the first commercially available electrostatic transducers for automobile installation. Three systems are available, each comprising four electrostatic panels, a 1,200-volt power supply, and a wiring harness: ESL-3.5 (3 x 5-inch panels),

ESL-4.5 (4 x 5-inch), and ESL 5.5 (5 x 5-inch). All are rated out to 32 kHz  $\pm$ 3 dB, with respective low-frequency limits of 1,000, 80, and 400 Hz. Custom installation required. Price: \$910 per system. Mass Engineering, Dept. SR, 1647 Acme St., Orlando, FL 32805.

• Circle 125 on reader service card



## ► MISSION

Mission's 17-inch-wide Model 730C center-channel speaker has two 4 1/4-inch drivers and a 3/4-inch tweeter. Frequency response is given as 70 Hz to 20 kHz  $\pm$ 2 dB. Black satin finish. Price: \$249. Mission, Dept. SR, 400 Matheson Blvd. E., Unit 31, Mississauga, Ontario L4Z 1R5.

• Circle 126 on reader service card



## ▼ LIFT DISCPLAY

Lift's Discit Tower modular CD storage system uses snap-together plastic modules holding eighteen CD's each. A kit with three modules and a steel base (three bases shown) is available factory direct for \$50 (including shipping). Lift Discplay, Dept. SR, 115 River Rd., Suite 105, Edgewater, NJ 07020.

• Circle 128 on reader service card

## ▼ SOUNDOLIER

Soundolier's ThundraPro CXA 100-watt mono amplifier features a built-in active two-way crossover, a bass-level control, an infrasonic filter, and a

signal-sensing automatic-turn-on circuit. Price: \$831. Atlas/Soundolier, Dept. SR, 1859 Intertech Dr., Fenton, MO 63026.

• Circle 127 on reader service card







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Dwight Yoakam—This Time (Reprise) 456-913
Kenny G—Breathless (Arista) 448-142
Brooks & Dunn—Brand New Man (Arista) 429-969



Neil Young—Unplugged (Reprise) 460-972
Bryan Adams—Waking Up The Neighbours (A&M) 429-779

SNOW—12 Inches Of Snow (eastwest) 455-311
Alan Jackson—A Lot About Livin' (And A Little 'Bout Love) (Arista) 447-458

Mötley Crüe—Decade Of Decadence '81-'91 (Elektra) 429-316
Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble—The Sky Is Crying (Epic) 429-258

Red Hot Chili Peppers—Blood Sugar Sex Magik (Warner Bros.) 428-367

Ozzy Osbourne—No More Tears (Epic/Associated) 428-128
Barry White—Grt. Hits (Casablanca) 428-102

Silk—Lose Control (Keia/Elektra) 453-415
Eric Clapton—Unplugged (Reprise/Duck) 446-187
Boyz II Men—Cooley-highharmony (Motown) 424-754

Scorpions—Best Of Rockers 'N' Ballads (Mercury) 423-590
Bonnie Raitt—Luck Of The Draw (Capitol) 423-186

Alan Jackson—Don't Rock The Jukebox (Arista) 420-935
C & C Music Factory—Gonna Make You Sweat (Columbia) 416-933
Pearl Jam—Ten (Epic/Associated) 428-433

Bell Div DeVoe—Hootie Mack (MCA) 450-312
Alice In Chains—Dirt (Columbia) 445-833
INXS—X (Atlantic) 412-106

Garth Brooks—No Fences (Capitol) 411-587
Janet Jackson—Rhythm Nation 1814 (A&M) 388-918
Don Henley—The End Of The Innocence (Geffen) 383-802

Tom Petty—Full Moon Fever (MCA) 382-184
Proclaimers—Sunshine On Leith (Chrysalis) 382-036
Patsy Cline—Grt. Hits (MCA) 365-924

Taylor Dayne—Soul Dancing (Arista) 449-496
Spin Doctors—Pocket Full Of Kryptonite (Epic/Assoc.) 428-482
Guns N' Roses—Appetite For Destruction (Geffen) 359-984



Kris Kross—Da Bomb (Ruffhouse/Columbia) 463-703
Whitesnake (Geffen) 355-362

Madonna—The Immaculate Collection (Sire/Warner Bros.) 414-557
U2—The Joshua Tree (Island) 354-449

The Police—Every Breath You Take—The Singles (A&M) 348-318
Peter Gabriel—So (Geffen) 345-777

Bob Marley & The Wailers—Legend (Tuff Gong/Island) 337-857
Billy Joel@—Grt. Hits, Vols. 1 & 2 (Columbia) 336-396/396-390

George Strait—Pure Country (MCA) 448-753
ZZ Top—Grt. Hits (Warner Bros.) 438-010

Nirvana—Nevermind (DGC) 442-046
Guns N' Roses—Use Your Illusion II (Geffen) 442-038

Mariah Carey—MTV Unplugged (Columbia) 441-790
Billy Ray Cyrus—Some Gave All (Mercury) 441-451

En Vogue—Funky Divas (eastwest) 435-750
Tom Cochrane—Mad Mad World (Capitol) 435-685

CLASSIC ROCK

Yes—Yesstory (ATCO) 446-211/396-218
The Allman Brothers Band—A Decade Of Hits 1969-79 (Polydor) 430-439

The Byrds—20 Essential Tracks 1965-1990 (Columbia/Legacy) 426-940

James Brown—CD Of JB (Polydor) 425-025
Rod Stewart—Sing It Again Rod (Mercury) 423-822

Rush—Chronicles (Mercury) 423-780/393-785

The Very Best Of The Righteous Brothers—Unchained Melody (Verve) 423-772

The Moody Blues—Grt. Hits (Polydor) 423-756

Cream—Strange Brew (Polydor) 423-475
Eric Clapton—Time Pieces (Polydor) 423-467

David Bowie—Changes-bowie (Rykodisc) 412-247
John Lennon Collection (Capitol) 405-308

Lynyrd Skynyrd—Skynyrd's Innryds/Their Grt. Hits (MCA) 381-129



Jimi Hendrix—The Ultimate Experience (MCA) 458-034

Black Sabbath—We Sold Our Soul For Rock 'N' Roll (Warner Bros.) 404-632
Grateful Dead—Skeletons From The Closet (Warner Bros.) 378-406

Roy Orbison—The All-Time Hits, Vols. 1 & 2 (CSP) 377-945

The Who—Who's Better, Who's Best (MCA) 376-657

The Steve Miller Band—Grt. Hits 1974-78 (Capitol) 290-171

Marvin Gaye's Grt. Hits (Motown) 367-565

Best Of The Doors (Elektra) 357-616/397-612
Aretha Franklin—30 Greatest Hits (Atlantic) 350-793/390-799

Van Morrison—Moondance (Warner Bros.) 349-803

The Beach Boys—Made In The U.S.A. (Capitol) 346-445

A Decade Of Steely Dan (MCA) 341-073
The Cars Greatest Hits (Elektra) 339-903

Joe Cocker's Grt. Hits (A&M) 320-911
Motown's 25 #1 Hits From 25 Years (Motown) 319-996/399-998

Creedence Clearwater Revival—Chronicle-20 Grt. Hits (Fantasy) 308-049

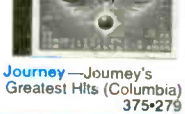
REO Speedwagon—HI Infidelity (Epic) 306-449

James Taylor's Grt. Hits (Warner Bros.) 291-302

Best Of The Doobies (Warner Bros.) 291-278
Supertramp—Breakfast In America (A&M) 291-021

Fleetwood Mac—Grt. Hits (Warner Bros.) 375-782

Steppenwolf—16 Grt. Hits (MCA) 372-425



Journey—Journey's Greatest Hits (Columbia) 375-279

Eagles—Grt. Hits, 1971-75 (Asylum) 287-003

Eagles—Hotel California (Asylum) 286-948

Jackson Browne—Running On Empty (Asylum) 286-864

Meat Loaf—Bat Out Of Hell (Epic) 279-133

Boston (Epic) 269-209
Chicago@—Greatest Hits (Columbia) 260-638



James Taylor—Live (Columbia) 463-687/393-686

MC Lyte—Ain't No Other (First Priority Music) 460-402

Little Texas—Big Time (Warner Bros.) 460-204

"The Bodyguard"—Original Soundtrack (Arista) 448-159

Gordon Lightfoot—Gord's Gold (Grt. Hits) (Reprise) 291-724/391-722

Little River Band—Grt. Hits (Capitol) 317-800

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# NEW PRODUCTS

## ▶ FOX ELECTRONICS

Dubbed the "No-Brainer Entertainer," the Fox 4 Record is a universal remote control for video components that can be programmed to start and stop VCR recording. It has a four-event

timer and is said to work with all infrared-controllable VCR's. Price: \$50. Fox Electronics, Dept. SR, 265 Eisenhower Lane S., Lombard, IL 60148.

• Circle 129 on reader service card



## ▲ NAD

The Model 910 surround processor from NAD packs a Dolby Pro Logic decoder, three synthesized-ambience modes, and a Super Stereo mode to enhance normal stereo listening by adding "carefully calculated"

center fill. It has inputs for one audio and three A/V sources and five outputs. Includes remote control. Price: \$599. NAD, Dept. SR, 633 Granite Ct., Pickering, Ontario, Canada L1W 3K1.

• Circle 130 on reader service card



## ◀ DESIGN ACOUSTICS

The CLW subwoofer from Design Acoustics is magnetically shielded and features a downward-firing 10-inch driver with dual voice coils and a black-vinyl-clad cabinet that consumes less than 1½ cubic feet of space. Bandwidth is given as 40 to 150 Hz, sensitivity as 88 dB, and maximum output as 105 dB. Recommended amplifier power is 15 to 150 watts. Price: \$250. Design Acoustics, Dept. SR, 1225 Commerce Dr., Stow, OH 44224.

• Circle 131 on reader service card



## ▲ MB QUART

MB Quart's Quart 500 speaker combines an 8-inch woofer and a 1-inch titanium-dome tweeter in a 17½-inch-tall cabinet. Its low-frequency limit is given as 38 Hz. Finish options include black or

white ash, hand-rubbed oak or walnut veneer, and raw oak veneer. Price: \$799 a pair. MB Quart, Dept. SR, 25 Walpole Park S., Walpole, MA 02081.

• Circle 132 on reader service card

## ▼ MINDICO

Ever forget which CD's are loaded in your changer? Mindico's Cartridge Cube (two are shown) is a modular storage case that holds six CD's and a standard six-disc cartridge. The top and sides of the plastic cube are notched so

that multiple units can be stacked or interlocked side by side. A two-cube nylon carrying pouch is available for \$12. Price: \$6 each. Mindico, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 38372, Pittsburgh, PA 15238.

• Circle 133 on reader service card



# NEW PRODUCTS

## ▼ NAKI

The Eliminator CD cleaning kit from Naki International includes a special CD with tiny brushes that remove dust and particles from the optical lens of any CD player or CD-ROM drive, a disc-washing mechanism that is

manually rotated, and a spray bottle of disc-cleaning solution. Price: \$15. Naki International, Dept. SR, 10100 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 1400, Los Angeles, CA 90067.

• Circle 134 on reader service card



## ▼ PIONEER

Pioneer's VSX-D2S A/V receiver boasts a Dolby Pro Logic decoder, an advanced digital signal processor with a host of adjustable ambience and EQ parameters, and a graphics-based on-screen user interface.

Power output in surround mode is 70 watts each for the three front channels and 45 watts each for the two surrounds. Price: \$2,250. Pioneer, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 1720, Long Beach, CA 90801-1720.



## ◀ SNELL

Snell's Type D speaker combines an 8-inch woofer, a 5-inch midrange, and a 1-inch titanium-dome tweeter in a 43-inch-tall wood-veneer cabinet with adjustable spiked feet. Frequency response is given as 36 Hz to 20 kHz  $\pm 1.75$  dB and the power-handling range as 20 to 200 watts. Price: \$1,699 a pair. Snell Acoustics, Dept. SR, 143 Essex St., Haverhill, MA 01832.

• Circle 135 on reader service card



## ▲ HDA ENTERTAINMENT

HDA's AP-7111 processor uses patent-pending analog technology that is said to enhance the spatial quality of recorded music. The 8 x 2 x 5-inch device has a bypass switch and a slider control for adjusting the level of processing.

A DIN connector with color-coded RCA plugs at one end is included. Price: \$100. HDA Entertainment, Dept. SR, 1966 Greenspring Dr., Suite 500 at Timonium One, Timonium, MD 21093.

• Circle 136 on reader service card

## ► SONY

Part of Sony's ES Series, the TA-F606ES integrated amplifier features a Class A MOSFET voltage stage, six inputs (including phono), and source-direct and mute switches.

Power output is rated as 80 watts per channel with no more than 0.008 percent distortion from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. Price: \$700. Sony, Dept. SR, 1 Sony Dr., Park Ridge, NJ 07656-8003.





**Entertainment.** The experience of watching movies at home has changed. Movie buffs are enjoying larger screens, clearer pictures and of course better sound. Over 90% of all

takes a very fine design to properly reproduce Dolby Pro-Logic surround sound. The AV81HT as the heart of the system boasts double sided glass-epoxy circuit boards, audiophile compo-



Cinema•System 3 starts with THX version of our AV81HT preamplifier, our audiophile Class A stereo amplifier, an additional amplifier for center and rear channels and of course our

## Entertain Your Family.

movies since 1977 contain additional Dolby encoded audio signals for dialogue, surround and bass. When decoded with the proper system, your living room, takes on the realism and dimensions of a great theater. Just you, your family and home cinema. Imagine watching Terminator 2, Eric Clapton's Unplugged Music Video or listening to Dolby Surround CD version of Isao Tomita Holst Planet's - all FREE with your purchase of AMC's AV81HT.



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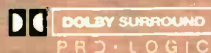
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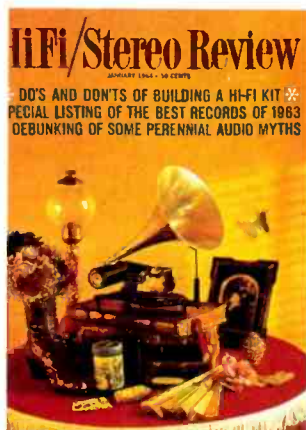


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# TIME DELAY



## 30 Years Ago

Swing Out Sister: In the January 1964 issue, *HiFi Stereo Review's* editors named Soeur Sourire's "The Singing Nun," on Philips, one of their favorite albums of 1963. Other faves were Glenn Gould playing Bach partitas, Bruno Walter conducting Mahler's Symphony No. 1, and "The Sound of Horowitz."

Among the new products noted this month were Fisher's KS-2 Stratakitt, a three-way speaker in kit form with frequency response from "35 cps [Hz] to beyond audibility,"

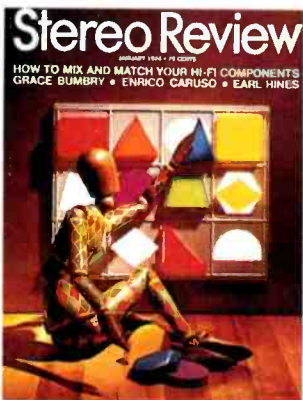


**Ferrograph's Super Seven tape deck, 1974**

RCA's MX-7 40-watt receiver with a remote balance control (\$349.50), and the Sony Superscope Model 500 stereorecorder with two external speakers and a frequency

response of 50 to 14,000 cps at 7½ ips. In test reports, Julian Hirsch examined the Fisher 500-C receiver ("one of the finest units of its type on the market") and the Dual 1009 automatic turntable.

Especially if it's Soeur Sourire? The French baritone Gérard Souzay told interviewer Harold Lawrence that "In some ways, listening to others sing is far more difficult than having to sing oneself."



## 20 Years Ago

In Best of the Month, David Hall was blown away by Leonard Bernstein's quadraphonic Columbia recording of Holst's *The Planets*. Igor Kipnis was equally enthusiastic about Raymond Leppard's new album of Monteverdi madrigals on Philips, and Peter Reilly got his dreadlocks in an uproar over "Unlimited" by reggae star Jimmy Cliff ("I was alternately stirred, delighted, moved, and enchanted"). Elsewhere in the review sections, a charitable Joel Vance, reviewing "Bear's Choice," a live album by the notoriously shambling Grateful Dead, noted that the band was "certainly well-rehearsed."



**Koetsu's Mark II tonearm, 1984**

New products this month included the Lafayette LT-D10 AM/FM stereo tuner with Dolby decoding circuitry, the Ferrograph Super Seven stereo tape deck with a frequency response of 30 to 20,000 cps [Hz] at 15 ips (\$1,125 with Dolby), and the Infinity 2000 AXT speaker system, which was 6 dB more sensitive than Infinity's previous model. Meanwhile, in test reports Julian Hirsch took a look at the Wollensak Model 4765 stereo cassette deck and the B&O 3000 semi-automatic integrated turntable.

Bad news for the Sex Pistols: Discussing the then-current vinyl shortage and its potential impact on the record business, editor William Anderson predicted that the biggest musical trend of the Seventies would be middle-of-the-road pop.

## 10 Years Ago

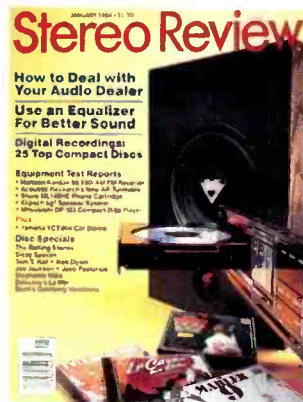
Through a glass, darkly: In Letters, reader L. Chorny, of the Bronx, New York, responded to a November article on the future of the

**Reggae star Jimmy Cliff, 1974**



compact disc by asking, "Will any CD's be released with reduced playing times, something like 45-rpm singles?" The editors' answer: "We know of no such plans, and it would hardly seem cost-effective."

New products this month included the B&W DM17 time-aligned speaker system, which had a computer-optimized fourth-order crossover, the Koetsu SA-1100D Mark II tonearm, with a tri-pivot lateral balance system, and the Soundcraftsmen A2801 power amplifier, which was rated at 140 watts per channel. In test reports, Julian Hirsch evaluated the new AR turntable ("the best-isolated record player we have ever tested"), the Klipsch kg<sup>2</sup>



speaker system ("We listened to it for extended periods without feeling any urge to switch"), and the Mitsubishi DP-103 CD player ("the performance of this second-generation player is even better than its predecessors").

50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong: A "Bulletin" item alerted readers to the release of "Elvis the Legend," a limited-edition CD retrospective about which an RCA press release claimed "Even Elvis fans without CD players will want to own this set."—*Steve Simels*



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# NEWS FROM JAPAN

BY BRYAN  
HARRELL

TOKYO—Tumult is the word that best describes the format battle in the digital audio arena. You've heard of future shock? Well, format shock may already be setting in here in Japan, where consumers are faced with a truly bewildering array of choices. And as the much-cooled economy has yet to bottom out, the buying public can be counted on to postpone buying decisions until the dust settles, which may take far longer than the Japanese consumer electronics industry is willing to admit.

The general consumer mood is so bad these days that many retailers have resorted to heavy discounting, and some have gone out of business. In September Hirose Musen, a decades-old retail bulwark of Tokyo's Akihabara electronic sales district, called it quits.

Sony president Norio Ohga, however, remains optimistic despite Japan's dismal economic climate. At a fall press conference called to announce the new MiniDisc lineup, he responded to a journalist's question about the economy by accusing the media of complicity in the consumer spending slump. "It's all the pessimistic articles [about the economy] in the media that are keeping people from buying. We know that [MD] software alone can't get this format off the ground, so that's why we're doing our best to make such appealing hardware."

While the U.S. audio market is be-



Panasonic's  
RS-DCM1  
DCC deck

ing driven by the fast-expanding category of home theater, housing standards in Japan are such that, although many Japanese could afford home theater equipment, a home or apartment with a room big enough to accommodate it is beyond the reach of almost everyone. Here, real home theater is still a luxury for the very well-off. Hence, all eyes remain fixed on the new audio formats.

**A**ny way you look at it, though, it's not a good time to launch a new format—let alone two competing ones like the Digital Compact Cassette and the MiniDisc. Still, despite the running joke among many Japanese that MD stands for "*mada dekitanai*" ("not ready yet"), MiniDisc is drawing more attention than DCC—especially now that Sony has announced an impressive lineup of second-generation hardware, including two new portables. The pocket-size MZ-E2

Walkman MD player (¥55,000, or about \$510 at an exchange rate of 108 yen to the dollar) is smaller than Sony's smallest analog Walkman thanks to a smaller circuit board and a thinner optical pickup assembly, and it has a new lithium-ion rechargeable battery that is said to provide up to 2½ hours of continuous playback. Joining the MZ-E2 is the MZ-R2 Walkman MD recorder (¥75,000, or \$700), 40 percent smaller and 45 percent lighter than its predecessor.

On the car side, Sony introduced the MDX-400 (¥120,000) MD changer, a dash-mountable DIN-size unit that boasts a four-disc cartridge, AM/FM tuner, digital preamp, and controls for an outboard CD changer. It features a buffer memory that reduces the silence gap between disc changes to about 5 seconds. The company also announced the single-play MDX-100 receiver (¥79,800), featuring a 25-watt × 4 power amp, AM/FM tuner, and CD-changer controls. On the new-car front, Nissan recently began offering a Sony MD player as an option in some of its luxury vehicles.

For home use, Sony announced the MDS-102 MD recorder (¥86,000), featuring optical inputs and outputs, and a dual-format miniature rack system, the DHC-MD1 (¥140,000), featuring an optical link between the CD player and MD deck for direct digital recording. Many of the new MD components are slated for release in the U.S. sometime in 1994.

Other new super-compact MD players announced here include Ai-

Sony's MDX-400  
car MD changer





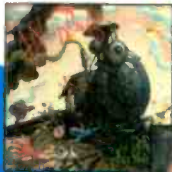




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George Harrison: Best Of Dark Horse, '76-'89 (Dark Horse) 80307

Jimmy Webb: Suspending Disbelief (Elektra) 80402

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Walter & Scotty: My Brother's Keeper (Capitol) 82403

George Strait: Pure Country/Soundtrack (MCA) 83064

Earth, Wind, & Fire: Millennium (Reprise) 83232

Toni Braxton (La Face) 00420

ZZ Top: Greatest Hits (Warner Bros.) 83411

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Natalie Cole: Unforgettable (Elektra) 83452

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Art Porter: Straight To The Point (Verve) 83688

Tanya Tucker: Greatest Hits 1990-1992 (Liberty) 83769

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

Carlene Carter: Little Love Letters (Giant) 83894

The Baddest Of George Thorogood And The Destroyers (EMI) 84002

Neil Diamond: 12 Greatest Hits (MCA) 84050

Billy Idol: Cyberpunk (Chrysalis) 84170

Billy Ray Cyrus: It Won't Be The Last (Mercury) 84179

George Lynch: Sacred Groove (Elektra) 84251

Mark Chesnutt: Almost Goodbye (MCA) 84518

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Beastie Boys: Check Your Head (Capitol) 92473

White Lion: Greatest Hits (Atlantic) 93654

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The Very Best Of The Everly Brothers (Warner Bros.) 03826

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Jane's Addiction: Ritual de lo Habitual (Warner Bros.) 10020

Paul Simon: The Rhythm Of The Saints (Warner Bros.) 10455

Tom Cochrane: Mad Mad World (Capitol) 11024

Jackson Browne: Running On Empty (Elektra) 11056

Steppenwolf: 16 Greatest Hits (MCA) 13453

The B-52's: Cosmic Thing (Reprise) 14742

Miki Helton: Femme Fatale (Giant) 21142

The Very Best Of Connie Francis (Polydor) 23434

America: History (Greatest Hits) (Warner Bros.) 23757

The Police: Outlandos D'Amour (A&M) 24159

Judy Garland: The Best Of The Decca Years, Vol. 1 (MCA) 10497

Sting: The Soul Cages (A&M) 25218

Derek & The Dominos: Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs (Polydor) 25249

Das EFX: Dead Serious (Atco/EastWest) 25328

Kenny Rogers: 20 Great Years (Reprise) 25449

Color Me Badd: C.M.B. (Giant) 25479

Hammer: Too Legit To Quit (Capitol) 25514

Eric Clapton: Timepieces, Vol. 2 - Greatest Hits (Polydor) 33448

The Big Chill/Sdtrk. (Motown) 33970

k.d. lang: Shadowland (Sire) 34567

SWV: It's About Time (RCA) 00151

Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers: Into The Great Wide Open (MCA) 35409

Alan Jackson: Don't Rock The Jukebox (Arista) 43877

John Mellencamp: Scarecrow (Riva) 44512

The Best Of The Spencer Davis Group (EMI) 44659

The Go-Gos: Greatest Hits (I.R.S./A&M) 50315

Northern Exposure: Music From The Television Series (MCA) 50550

INXS: Live Baby Live (Atlantic) 52528

The Brand New Heavies: Heavy Rhythm Experience: Vol.1 (Delicious Vinyl) 52857

CeCe Peniston: Finally (A&M) 53858

Bruce Hornsby & The Range: The Way It Is (RCA) 63918

Chris Isaak: Heart Shaped World (Reprise) 73735

Marc Cohn (Atlantic) 82983

Matthew Sweet: Girlfriend (Zoo) 83384

Simply Red: Stars (EastWest America) 90658

Dire Straits: Making Movies (Warner Bros.) 13341

En Vogue: Born To Sing (Atlantic) 14187

The Great Jazz Vocalists Sing The Gershwin Songbook (Blue Note) 00316

Donna Warwick: Greatest Hits (Arista) 00667

Johnny Gill (Motown) 00738

MTV Party To Go, Vol. 2 (Tommy Boy) 00755

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Mr. Big: Lean Into It (Atlantic) 24821

Kiss: Double Platinum (Casablanca) 25149

Styx: The Grand Illusion (A&M) 25245

Grand Puba: Reel To Reel (Elektra) 30262

Procol Harum: Classics (11 Greatest Hits) (A&M) 34445

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wa's AMD-50 (¥56,000), the Hitachi MDP-10 (¥62,000), and Sharp's MD-D10 (¥62,000).

As for DCC, the format that some skeptics have dubbed the "Dubious Cassette Concept," Matsushita, Philips, JVC, and Marantz have announced new hardware. Matsushita showed a Panasonic-brand "prototype" portable DCC recorder at the Japan Audio Fair that's no larger than an average-size portable CD player. In September Matsushita introduced the Technics RS-DC8 home DCC recorder (¥99,800), featuring MASH 1-bit analog-to-digital (A/D) converters, the Panasonic RS-DCM1 DCC recorder (¥69,800), and the Panasonic SC-CH505D miniature rack system (¥149,800), featuring a DCC recorder and a CD player. Philips has broken the DCC price barrier by offering its new DCC600 DCC deck for ¥69,800. (By the way, retail prices in yen ending with 800 are the equivalent of prices like \$399 in the U.S.)

JVC, with strong business links to Matsushita, recently decided to play both sides of the format fence and is running a local ad campaign with the tag line, "Whaddya want, MD or DCC? We got both." New are the ZD-1 portable DCC recorder (¥59,800) and the XM-D1 "palm-top" MD recorder (¥99,800 with remote), which appears to be designed for placement atop a component stack; it has a large control screen that tilts up to suit a wide range of viewing angles. Both products are slated for U.S. release.

**S**o, which digital recording format will win in Japan, MD or DCC? Although DCC has a strong presence here, MD might eventually prove to be more popular because of its distinctly 1990's feel and greater appeal among the under-thirty crowd (who provide a large part of the demand for such products). But, in general, Japanese consumers are more likely to make buying decisions based on what *seems* better, rather than on what sounds better. Besides, some see the difference between MD and DCC sound quality as a matter of taste. Who knows, a Japan-

ese/Western dichotomy may emerge—as in color film and speakers.

Meanwhile, as DCC and MD duke it out in the marketing arena, reluctant consumers were given yet another reason to wait when a group of four audio manufacturers (Kenwood, Marantz, Pioneer, and Yamaha) and four recording-media companies (Mitsubishi Kasei, Mitsui Toatsu, Taiyo Yuden, and TDK) announced in August the impending commercialization of home-use recordable-CD (CD-R) machines and discs.

In a press release, the companies

**Although DCC has a strong presence in Japan, MD might eventually be more popular because of its 1990's feel.**



Sony's new MD portables: the MZ-E2 player (left) and the MZ-R2 recorder

announced that although consumer-oriented CD-R machines would be able to make direct digital recordings from DAT, MD, DCC, and CD, they would contain the Serial Copy Management System (SCMS) copy-protection chip, which permits only one first-generation digital copy at a time and no digital copies of copies. There is a hitch, however: Although CD-R discs would be able to play back in ordinary CD players, the recording system on which they are based is "write-once," which means you can't erase a previous recording to make a new one. While that aspect should keep the recording-media manufacturers happy, hardware makers are already hinting that an erasable disc is in the cards.

It should be, since the technology necessary for erasable recordable CD (CD-E) is already here in the form of Sony's MiniDisc and could theoretically be adapted to the 4¾-inch CD format. Sony, however, is unlikely to support such a move itself now that it is both an audio-hardware and a music-software giant.

The Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ) responded angrily to the CD-R announcement, calling for additional negotiations for a CD-R-specific royalty-claiming system (Japan's digital audio recording law covers only DAT, MD, and DCC). At this point, it doesn't look like the RIAJ will let CD-R slip through the law's loophole without a fight. And if what happened with DAT is any indication, royalty issues could delay product releases for quite some time.

Nonetheless, an optical-disc recording format, MD, is already here. And, all things considered, it's one nifty Sony format, which seems to have fallen between the cracks, is the NT (nontracking) digital tape system. It's the basis for a pocket-size recorder, called the Scoopman, that uses a postage-stamp-size cassette. The brochure for the NT-1 recorder talks about its excellent music fidelity and how it could be used for music on the go (despite a frequency response that tops out at 14.5 kHz), but Sony

hasn't made any moves to push NT as a music format, positioning it instead as a device for "voice" recording. While Sony might be chagrined if a simple voice format were used for music, a parallel could be drawn with our old friend the compact cassette, which was originally launched as a dictation format and went on to become the world's most popular audio format ever. At any rate, NT-1 sales are a mere trickle.

But if the NT format were to catch on as a music format (which is probably unlikely), Sony would have another headache on its hands: coming up with theft-proof packaging for the tiny prerecorded cassettes. Perhaps inventive vending machines that take tokens sold at the counter? □

# MUSIC MAKERS

BY ROBERT RIPPS,  
MARYANN SALTZER,  
AND STEVE SIMELS

## BUT WE WON'T WEAR THOSE SILLY PLATFORM SHOES AGAIN!

Partridge Family mania . . . Meat Loaf back on the charts . . . yes, the Seventies revival continues apace, and as further proof we give you "Grave New World," the new album by semi-legendary New York rocker Adam Bomb. Re-



leased on Rockworld, a Sony custom label run by David Krebs (discoverer of the quintessential Seventies group Aerosmith), Bomb's new platter sounds less like the heavy metal he purveyed previously (on a mid-Eighties Geffen release) and more like Seventies glam-rockers Marc Bolan and T. Rex. And while we're on the subject of Seventies glam, the first single from "Grave New World"—*Johnny in the Sky*—is an ode to the recently deceased guitarist Johnny Thunders of the New York Dolls, who more or less invented the whole business.

## THE WOODMAN COMETH

Everything seems to be looking up for Woody Allen. His legal problems have finally been resolved, his latest film (*Manhattan Murder Mystery*) has done well at the box office, and he has not one but two new CD's before the public. The first, Sony's "Woody Allen Classics," features some of the famous concert music that has graced his soundtracks over the years (Prokofiev in *Love and Death*, Gershwin in *Manhattan*, etc.). The second, representing Allen's recorded musical debut, is "The Bunk Project" (Music-



Masters), which finds him joined by fellow Dixieland jazz enthusiasts (including Eddy Davis on banjo) for an Impromptu jam session on tunes like *Burgundy Street Blues* and *Algiers Strut*.

## I'VE GOT A ~~CEN~~SH HAMMERLOCK ON YOU

And speaking of Woody Allen, we're suddenly reminded of his great line from *Hannah and Her Sisters*—"Imagine the mind that invented professional wrestling!" The reason? RCA's release of "Wrestlemania—The Album." Produced by the same team that earlier inflicted Rick Astley on an unsuspecting world, "Wrestlemania" features vocal turns by World Wrestling Federation superstars Randy "Macho Man" Savage, Hacksaw Jim Duggan, Tatanka, and (our personal favorite) Mr. Perfect.



## THE ACCIDENTAL TRUMPETER

When Sergei Nakariakov was nine years old, an automobile accident ended his "career" as a pianist. At ten, his father began giving him trumpet lessons. Now, at fifteen, the young Russian is a Teldec recording artist, and two CD's featuring his virtuoso trumpet playing have now been released. One of the CD's is a program of trumpet concertos by Haydn, Hummel, Tomasi, and Jolivet, the other a collection of short pieces—including an amazing performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The*



*Flight of the Bumble Bee* that suggests why the teenager has been hailed as "the Paganini of the trumpet."

Nakariakov first came to Teldec's attention when he joined his compatriot, pianist Evgeny Kissin, in a concert performance of Shostakovich's *Concerto for Piano, Trumpet, and Orchestra*.





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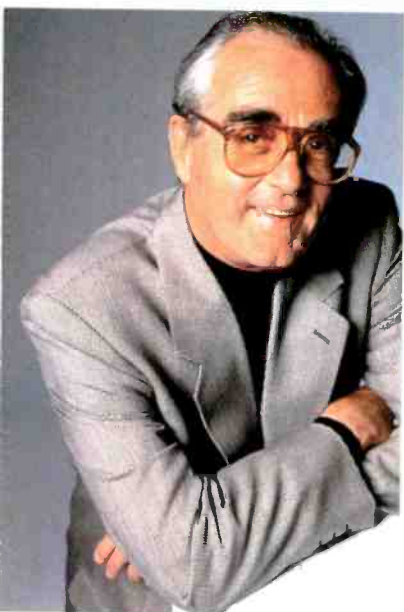
CIRCLE NO. 45 ON READER SERVICE CARD

# MUSIC MAKERS

MARIO MULLAS/THE CARSON OFFICE

## LE GRAND CROSSOVER

Michel Legrand's credentials as a jazz pianist and film composer (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *The Thomas Crown Affair*, and *Yentl*, to name a few) are well established with a total of three Oscars and five Grammys. Less well known is his interest in classical music. True to his Gallic roots, Legrand has chosen French classical music as



LARRY WHITE/IGI PHOTO THERRY COHEN/ELECTRA CLASSICS

his crossover vehicle. A CD titled "Michel Legrand Plays Satie" was released last fall on the French label Erato, and Legrand is pursuing his classical career by conducting new recordings of the Fauré and Duruflé Requiems, with soloists **Thomas Hampson** and **Barbara Bonney**, for a Teldec CD due in March.



## FATHERS AND SONS

The International Violin Competition of Indianapolis presented its 1990 gold medalist, the Russian Pavel Berman, in his debut recital at Carnegie Hall last October, accompanied by his illustrious father, the pianist Lazar Berman—the first father-son duo recital in the history of the hall. The twenty-three-year-old violinist, now studying at Juilliard with the renowned Dorothy Delay, has often performed with his father in Europe and the Far East, but this was their first joint appearance in New York. Koch International has released a CD featuring the younger Berman, with pianist Anne Epperson, in works by Shostakovich and Bloch.

## SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

Apparently those obituaries for the Decade of Greed were somewhat premature. Consider the following from Graham Nash, who back in 1971, the heyday of the counterculture, sang the immortal words "We can change the world, rearrange the world." Asked recently (by *Billboard* magazine) why he had rerecorded his Crosby, Still, Nash and Young hit *Teach Your Children* for a TV underwear ad, Nash sounded more like *Wall Street's* Gordon Gekko than the idealistic hippie of yore. "Fruit of the Loom approached me and wanted to pay me an outrageous amount of money," he explained. "A million and a half dollars, to use thirty seconds of a song I wrote a quarter of a century ago. I said, 'Absolutely.'"



## WRIST ACTION

To celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of guitarist **Christopher Parkening's** exclusive association with EMI Classics the company



CAMM

has released two commemorative albums. "The Artistry of Christopher Parkening" offers previously unavailable performances from his early LP recording sessions, and "The Great Recordings," on two CD's and featuring a twenty-eight-page booklet containing over two dozen photos, collects the guitarist's favorite short pieces, excerpts, and encores. Parkening's masterly "touch" is also apparent in the sport of fly-fishing, where he's won a number of awards, including a first place in the International Gold Cup Tarpon Tournament ("the Wimbledon of fly-fishing") held in Islamorada, Florida.

For over 83 years Denon has been producing sound faithful to the original. Whether recording and press-



ing records or Compact Discs; making the world's first com-

mercial digital recording; building professional recording and broadcast equipment or producing the CD Players ranked No. 1 in Consumer Satisfaction for two years in a row (*Verity Research, 1991/92*), the Denon name has been synonymous with high fidelity.



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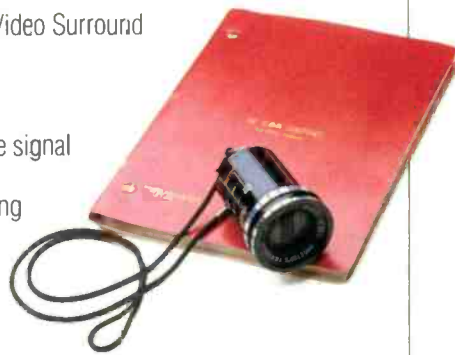


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# The Critics Love Ensemble And Ensemble II. What's The Difference, Anyway?

Cambridge SoundWorks changed the audio world when we began direct-marketing Ensemble\* by Henry Kloss. Ensemble is a revolutionary dual-subwoofer/satellite speaker system offering all-out performance, without cluttering up your room with huge speaker cabinets. Available *only* factory-direct from Cambridge SoundWorks, with no expensive middle-men, Ensemble is priced at hundreds less than it would have sold for in stores. *Audio* magazine says Ensemble "may be the best value in the world."

## And Then There Were Two.

Now Cambridge SoundWorks has introduced Ensemble II, a more affordable version of Ensemble using only one cabinet to hold both subwoofer drivers. Ensemble II has joined Ensemble in the ranks of the country's best-selling speak-



*The real difference is in the subwoofer.*

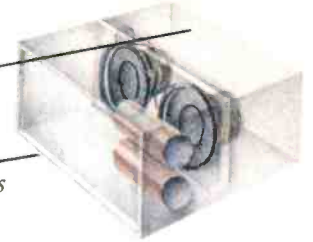
ers. We believe Ensemble II is a better system than its best-known competitor. And because we sell it factory-direct, it's half the price. *Stereo Review* said "Ensemble II performs so far beyond its price and size that it can be compared only with much larger speakers at substantially higher prices." We agree with the writer who said, "It's hard to imagine going wrong with Ensemble." The question is, which Ensemble system is right for *you*?

## The Same Satellite Speakers.

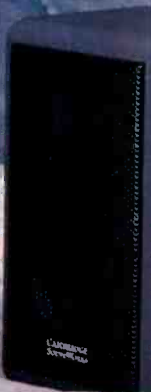
When you listen to either Ensemble system, almost 90% of the music you hear is being reproduced by the satellite speakers. Both Ensemble and Ensemble II use satellite speakers that are virtually identical.\* Unlike many competing systems, Ensemble's satellites are true two-way speaker systems, each containing a high performance tweeter and a 4-inch woofer. *Stereo Review* said, "The Ensemble satellites delivered a smoother output than

*True acoustic suspension, sealed subwoofer cavity.*

*Cavity acts as acoustic band-pass filter.*



"Ensemble may be the best value in the world."  
*Audio*



many larger and more expensive speakers."

Small (3½"×5¼"×4") and unobtrusive, they'll fit into the decor of any room. They're available in scratch-resistant gunmetal grey Nextel, or primed so you can paint them any color you wish.



*Ensemble satellite speakers are available primed for painting, so they can match your decor exactly.*

### The Same Overall Sound.

In many rooms, Ensemble II sounds virtually the same as Ensemble, especially when Ensemble's two subwoofers are placed right next to each other. The real difference between the two systems is that Ensemble, with its two ultra-compact subwoofers (12"×21"×4½"), gives you *ultimate placement flexibility*.

### The Same Attention To Detail.

Ensemble and Ensemble II are constructed with the very best materials and no-compromise workmanship. Their subwoofers use heavy-duty woofers in true acoustic suspension enclosures. The satellites are genuine two-way systems with very high quality speaker components. Individual crossover networks are

built into every cabinet for maximum wiring flexibility. Robust construction is used throughout, featuring solid MDF cabinets and solid metal grilles.

### The Same Factory-Direct Savings.

Cambridge SoundWorks products are available *only* factory-direct. By eliminating the middle-men, we're able to sell Ensemble and Ensemble II for hundreds less than if they were sold in stores.

### The Same 30-Day Total Satisfaction Guarantee.

Choosing a loudspeaker after a brief listen at a dealer's showroom is like deciding on a car after one quick trip around the block. So we make it possible to audition our speakers the *right way*—



*Stereo systems featuring Ensemble and Ensemble II speakers with Pioneer or Philips electronics start at only \$799, including CD player. Dolby Surround Sound systems start at only \$999.*

in your own home. You get to listen for hours without a salesman hovering nearby. If within 30 days you're not happy, return your speaker system for a full re-

fund. We even reimburse original UPS ground shipping charges in the continental United States.



*The only difference in satellites is that the original Ensembles use gold-plated connectors that allow use of even the heaviest gauge wire.*

### The Real Difference: The Ultimate Placement Flexibility Of Dual Subwoofers.

Placement of bass and high-frequency speakers in a room—and how those speakers interact with the acoustics of the room—has more influence on the overall sound quality of a stereo system than just about anything. As an alternative to spending hundreds (or thousands) of dollars on this or that "latest" amplifier or CD player design, you should invest some of your time experimenting with various speaker positioning schemes. Ensemble's two ultra-slim (4½") subwoofers give you more placement flexibility than any speaker system we know of (including Ensemble II), and is most likely to provide the performance you want *in the real world...in your room*.

### How To Order.

The dual-subwoofer Ensemble system is available in two versions. With handsome black-laminate subwoofers for \$599. Or with black vinyl-clad subwoofers for \$499. Ensemble II is priced at \$399. For more information or to order call our audio experts, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We'll send you our 64 page color catalog with stereo and surround sound components and systems from Cambridge SoundWorks, Pioneer, Philips, Denon and others. Because we sell factory-direct, eliminating expensive middle-men, you can save hundreds of dollars.

For A Free Catalog, Call

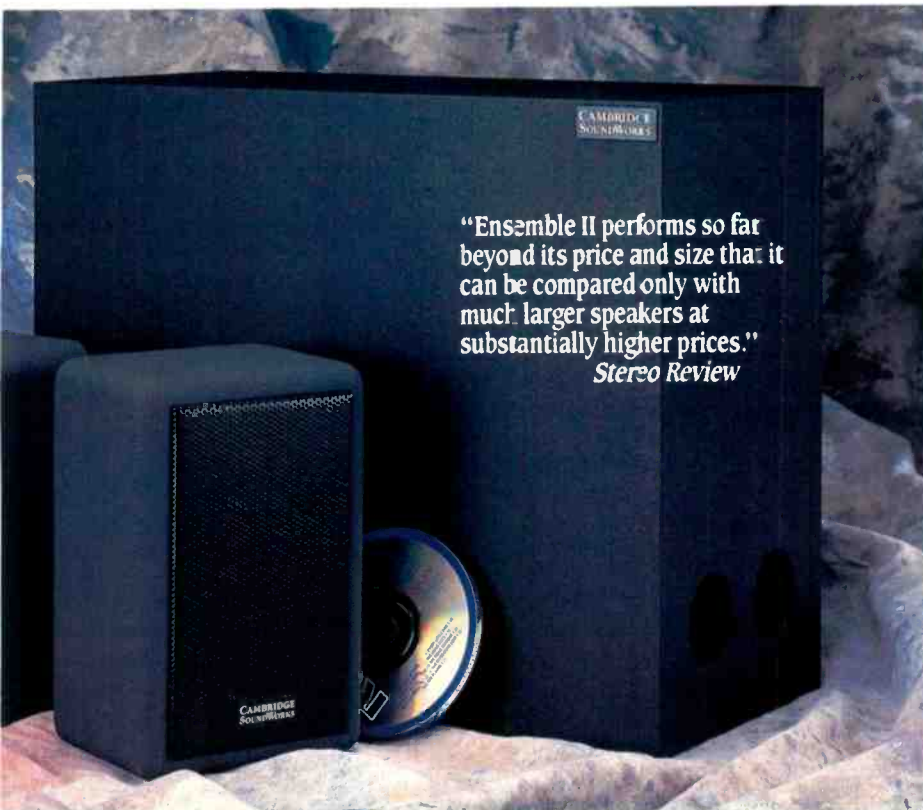
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CIRCLE NO. 6 ON READER SERVICE CARD



**"Ensemble II performs so far beyond its price and size that it can be compared only with much larger speakers at substantially higher prices."  
Stereo Review**



# SIGNALS

BY KEN C. POHLMANN

## Your Second-Worst Nightmare

Imagine for a moment that you are the chairman of an international audio corporation. Your hardware division is renowned for its innovative equipment, always six months ahead of the competition with products that span the market's breadth. Your software division owns a massive archive of recorded music and continues to produce new recordings at a ferocious rate. Your music releases bring in tens of millions in profits and fuel sales of your hardware. The whole thing fits together like a fist in a kid-leather glove. You lean back in your chair, hands clasped behind your head.

Of course, the power that feeds you, technological evolution, must be carefully controlled. It would be too easy to leapfrog your own inventions, making formats obsolete before they've had time to mature. That would only make consumers angry, and there's no profit in it, either. But, as you survey the current state of affairs, it is clear that a change is needed. Sales of analog cassettes are declining rapidly. What can replace them?

One possibility is a digital tape format, a logical replacement; to ease the transition, it could be designed to play existing analog cassettes as well as new digital cassettes. The other possibility is a recordable optical-disc format that is small and portable. Either way, you'll profit from a new stream of hardware sales and, most important, recorded-music sales. You put your feet up on your desk. Life is good.

Still, one thing troubles you: It's that pesky write-once recordable-CD (CD-R) technology, which lets people make nonerasable recordings they can play back on any conventional CD player. Those green-and-gold CD-R discs are appearing more and more frequently. The CD-R format was originally designed (and marginally

tolerated) as a professional tool; the price of \$20,000 for hardware and \$75 apiece for blank discs guaranteed that it would never threaten the consumer market. Then the prices started falling. Now the street price of professional CD-R recorders is under \$4,000, and blank discs are going for \$19, with no sign that the price plummet is about to end.

That could be a major problem. Whereas new incompatible formats provide profits from both hardware and prerecorded software, the CD-R format can yield only hardware profits. Even worse, availability of a CD recorder might damage conventional CD sales as people buy blank discs and make their own CD's. Sure, there's tons of money to be made by selling blank discs, but your company is not a major player in that market. You get some comfort from your foresight in helping to push legislation placing a consumer tariff on all sales of digital recording hardware and

You read on. They are not sure when they will launch, or at what price, or whether they will export from Japan. But another source says that the first consumer CD recorders could go on sale almost immediately, initially priced around \$5,000, later falling to less than \$1,000. A cold sweat breaks out on your forehead. The recorders will include the Serial Copy Management System (SCMS), which limits direct-digital dubbing to first-generation copies, but (your heart sinks) that also means they will allow direct digital copying from conventional CD players. Moreover, once recorded, the CD-R discs can be played in any CD player.

There's more. The Recording Industry Association of Japan has attacked the announcement—saying it violates the Athens agreement—yes! Without prior agreement between hardware and software companies, there will be hell to pay! Unlike the U.S. digital-recording law, which cov-

**You are the chairman of a renowned corporation that sells both audio equipment and music recordings—what's your take on recordable CD?**

blank media, but it's comfort the shareholders won't much like. Well, you smile to yourself, the 1989 Athens agreement will keep everybody in line; all the hardware and software companies (in your case, it's the same company, heh heh) agreed not to spoil the status quo. No one wants to get burned on CD-R.

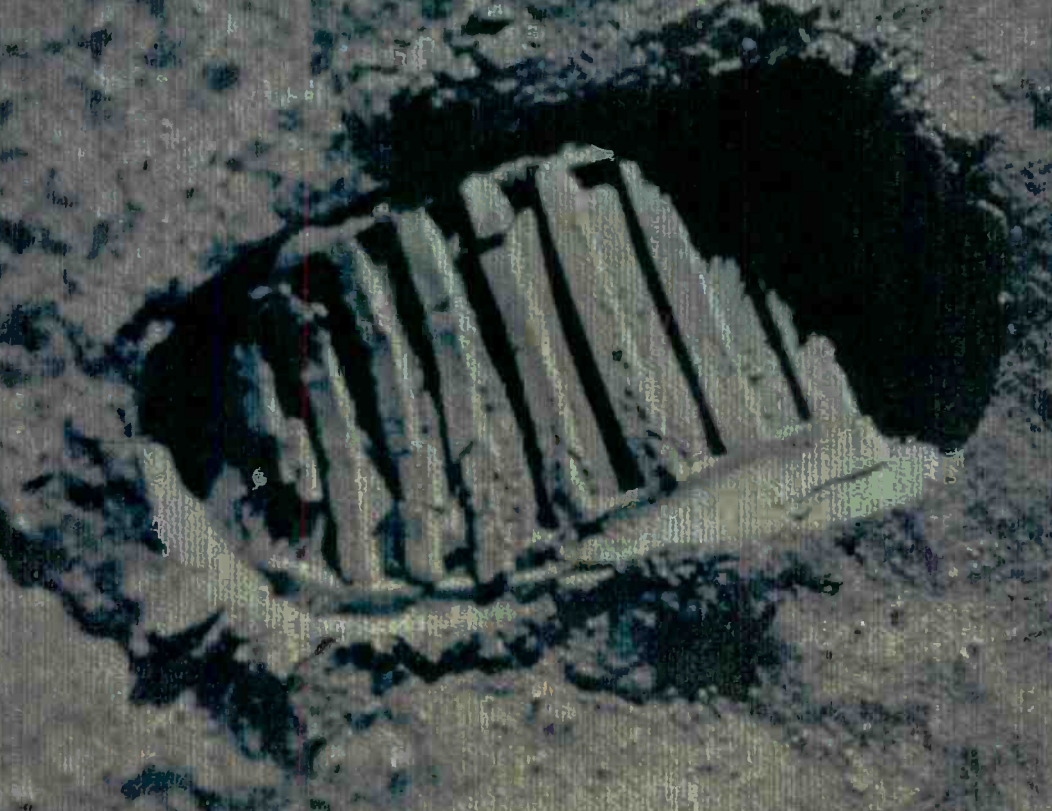
Then you pick up the paper and gasp in horror. Your second-worst nightmare has come true. At a press conference in Tokyo, a group of Japanese hardware and blank-media companies announced plans to launch consumer CD-R recorders and discs. Their position is that CD-R will "expand the audio market" so that "consumers can have a wider choice of digital recording media." The bastards!

ers all digital audio devices, the Japanese recording law covers only the DCC, MD, and DAT formats. That's good—CD-R can't go forward until the question of royalties is settled.

Throwing the paper down on the desk, you start pacing. The Athens agreement had this thing under control, but now they've let the cat out of the bag. Unless you take immediate action, CD-R could spoil everything! Well, at least you still have the trump card—unlike CD-R, your new digital formats offer the benefits of erasable recording. Then your eye falls on a secret prototype disc, glittering blue and silver on the edge of your desk. You shudder involuntarily—your very worst nightmare. Oh, my God! What if . . . ? (to be continued next month) □

# DREAM

During the 60's, a team of dedicated men and women  
shared a dream so ambitious that it soon  
consumed an entire nation. A dream so  
powerful, it propelled Apollo 11  
and mankind all the  
way to the moon.



SINCE ITS INCEPTION,  
PIONEER ELECTRONICS® HAS  
BEEN INSPIRED BY THE DREAM  
OF REPRODUCING MUSIC WITH ALL THE PASSION  
AND INTEGRITY OF THE ORIGINAL PERFORMANCE.  
TO REALIZE THIS DREAM FOR THE CAR ENVIRONMENT, PIONEER  
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# V I S I O N

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THE WORLD IS MOVING SO FAST THESE DAYS  
THAT THE MAN WHO SAYS IT CAN'T BE DONE  
IS GENERALLY INTERRUPTED BY SOMEONE  
DOING IT.

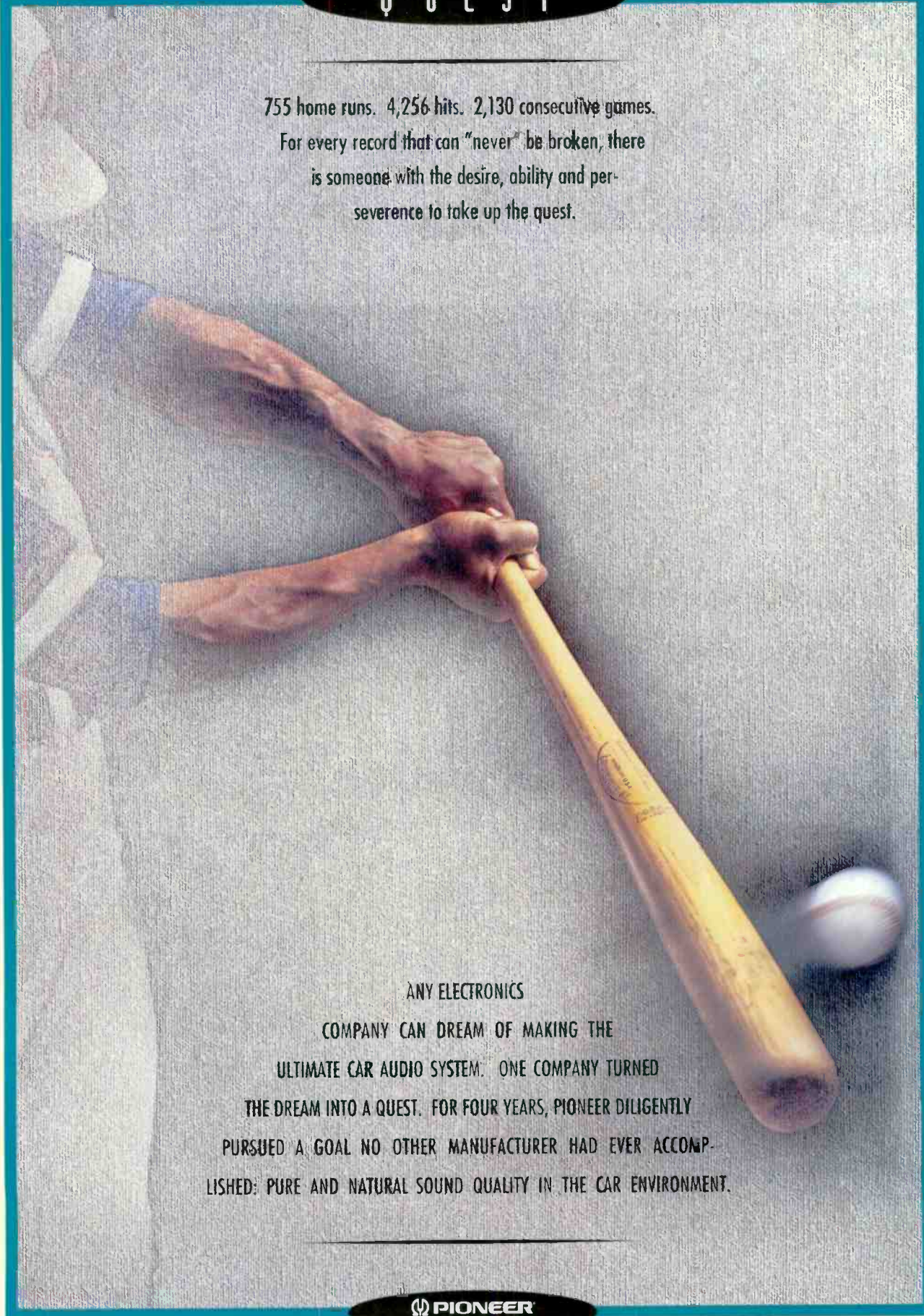
FOR PIONEER, ENGINEERING THE ULTIMATE CAR  
AUDIO EXPERIENCE DIDN'T START WITH THE EARS. IT  
BEGAN WITH A VISION. A VISION TO CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE AND  
SONIC INFORMATION INTERACTED INSIDE THE CAR AUDIO ENVIRONMENT.

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The Art of Entertainment



# Q U E S T

755 home runs. 4,256 hits. 2,130 consecutive games.  
For every record that can "never" be broken, there  
is someone with the desire, ability and per-  
severance to take up the quest.



ANY ELECTRONICS  
COMPANY CAN DREAM OF MAKING THE  
ULTIMATE CAR AUDIO SYSTEM. ONE COMPANY TURNED  
THE DREAM INTO A QUEST. FOR FOUR YEARS, PIONEER DILIGENTLY  
PURSUED A GOAL NO OTHER MANUFACTURER HAD EVER ACCOM-  
PLISHED: PURE AND NATURAL SOUND QUALITY IN THE CAR ENVIRONMENT.

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The Art of Entertainment

ADVANTAGE

The  
**PREMIER**

ADVANTAGE

**W**hether it's a certain instrument, composer, artist or song, music has the ability to fire the emotions like few other things. And there are always those who take their music and their car audio components a little more seriously. This specific group of demanding car audio enthusiasts is the reason Pioneer researches, engineers and manufactures advanced products under the Premier® nameplate.

**C**oncurrently, Pioneer knows that any car audio system is only as good as the person installing it. Which is why Pioneer hand-picked a select group of car audio experts across the country to ensure that

the sound quality Pioneer engineers in the factory comes through loud and clear in your car.

**P**remier Installation Specialists are car audio authorities because car audio is their passion. What's more, they do as good a job listening to their customers as they do to their customers' systems. And they're as helpful after a sale as they are leading up to one. That's what the Premier Installation Specialist advantage is all about.

**PIONEER**  
The Art of Entertainment

EARN MONEY AT HOME!

# The Tenth Annual Rodrigues Cartoon Caption Contest

This year our favorite artist and funnyman Charles Rodrigues has provided the editors of *STEREO REVIEW* with an unusually provocative drawing for our annual Rodrigues Cartoon Caption Contest, and with it he has provided you with another crack at fame (large) and fortune (small). The editors now invite the readers to submit captions for the new drawing at right.

The person who sends in the caption that is judged to be the funniest will win valuable prizes: the original drawing shown here, US\$100, and the signal honor of seeing his or her name published with the winning caption when the contest results are announced. If you win, just wait till those high-school bullies who kicked sand in your face see your name in print in the magazine along with those of, say, Blind Melon, Cecilia Bartoli, Def or Raymond Leppard, Nirvana, Carlo Maria Giulini, and possibly even Beavis and Butt-head. That'll show 'em!

Anyone may enter, and there is no limit to the number of times you may enter, but each caption submitted must be on a separate sheet of paper that also contains the clearly legible name and address of the person who sends it in. Entries that have more than one caption per sheet will be disqualified. All entries must be received by *STEREO REVIEW* no later than March 1, 1994.

In addition to Charles Rodrigues himself, the panel of judges will include members of *STEREO REVIEW*'s editorial staff and the winners of the nine previous contests: Thomas Briggie (Akron, Ohio), Michael Binyon (Weaverville, California), Bruce Barstow (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Matt Mirapaul (Evanston, Illinois), Marc Welenteychik (Richmond, Virginia), Douglas Daughhete (Birmingham, Alabama), Kelly Mills (Raleigh, North Carolina), Diane Sullivan (Grand Falls, New Brunswick), and Brian Hoffman (New York City). Entries will be judged on the basis of originality, appropriateness, and humor, and the decision of the judges will be final.

Now, consider the drawing. What can Rodrigues have been thinking of? More important, what does it make *you* think of? What warning is the midnight-riding audiophile shouting to the housetops? Put words in his mouth! Let's start 1994 with a few good laughs!



The winning caption and a selection of runners-up will be published in the June or July issue. Every January we resolve to finish the judging by June, but we haven't made that deadline yet. This, however, may be the year, and you may be the winner. Enter today. The usual restrictions are printed below. □

Send entries to:  
**Rodrigues Contest**  
**STEREO REVIEW**  
1633 Broadway  
New York, NY 10019

No purchase is necessary. Anyone may enter except the staff of *Stereo Review* and its parent company (Hachette Filipacchi Magazines, Inc.) and their immediate families. All entries become the property of *Stereo Review*, and none will be returned. If you wish to be notified of the results of the contest by mail, send a stamped self-addressed envelope to the above address. In the likely event of duplicate entries, the one first received will be considered the winning entry. The names of the winner and a few runners-up will be published in *Stereo Review* and may appear in promotional literature for the magazine. Submitting an entry will be deemed consent for such use.

*Stereo Review* will arrange the delivery of the prize; any tax on it will be the responsibility of the winner.

# PLAY YOUR PORTABLE CD PLAYER THROUGH YOUR CAR FM RADIO

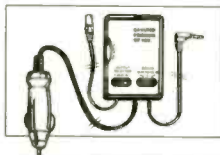
The Sound Feeder Model SF100 Mobile Audio Connector is the most practical and convenient way to connect your portable Compact Disc Player or Cassette Player to your car's existing FM radio speaker system. By simply plugging the Sound Feeder into your cigarette lighter, connecting the audio input wire to your portable player, and setting it to the desired station, you can begin to enjoy the amplified STEREO sound of your portable music source without the bother of dangerous (and often illegal) headphones.



**SOUND FEEDER™**  
MOBILE AUDIO CONNECTOR  
No Installation • Built in Battery Saver  
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As an added feature, the Sound Feeder contains a specially designed DC-to-DC converter that provides 4.5v, 6v, or 9v DC power from the car cigarette lighter to most brands of portable players.

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CIRCLE NO. 3 ON READER SERVICE CARD



# AUDIO Q&A

BY IAN G. MASTERS

## Collapsing Surround

**Q** When I watch VHS movies recorded in surround sound, the multichannel audio collapses to the center speaker just for a moment, perhaps ten or fifteen times during a movie. All other sources work perfectly. Is my problem inherent in the VHS Hi-Fi system?

CHERYL ANDERSON  
Dickinson, TX

**A** It's not inherent in the VHS format, but it does sound as though you have a problem with your VCR. Hi-fi videocassettes always have the sound duplicated on a conventional linear track so that they can be played on older machines, and this second track is usually mono. Most hi-fi machines automatically switch to the linear track if the hi-fi sound is interrupted (or if it's missing altogether), and that's what appears to be going on in your case. Your VCR is losing its "lock" on the hi-fi sound every so often and reverting to the linear soundtrack, which, being mono, is reproduced only by the center channel. The problem may be dirt on the heads or slight mistracking; in either case you can correct things easily. Or it might indicate a wiring fault in your VCR, which will need professional attention. Or, if the problem occurs mainly on tapes you have rented, it may be caused by dropouts in the tape surface.

## Equalizer Pay-Off

**Q** I bought a graphic equalizer with a built-in spectrum analyzer, and I have no idea how to use it. The instructions say that the supplied condenser microphone and "pink noise" can be used to compensate for something, but I'm not sure what. How can I use this equipment to make my system perform better?

GERARDO URIAS  
Miami, FL

**A** In the words of Earl Butz, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Unless you know there is definitely something amiss with either your room or your equipment, trying to "improve" matters by equalization will probably only make things worse. There are conditions that equalization can help tame, however: resonances or standing waves resulting from the shape or dimensions of the listening room, for instance, or anomalies in the response curve of your speakers.

In such cases, and provided you use it with a light touch, equipment like yours can be ideal: The pink-noise generator produces a signal with equal energy in each octave of the audio spectrum, the microphone (placed at the main listening position) detects the signal as modified by your equipment and room, and the spectrum analyzer displays it in narrow frequency bands that correspond to the equaliz-

er's controls. Any peaks or dips can then be corrected by nudging the controls up or down. Be aware, however, that most adjustments will be valid only for one listening position, and that if you have to make anything but subtle alterations to the system's response, a more fundamental fix is probably necessary. And response measured by this means should usually roll off somewhat at high frequencies rather than be perfectly flat.

## Cable Duty

**Q** Although my new speakers sound fine, I was told that if I were to re-do the internal wiring using heavy-duty specialty speaker cable I would achieve much better sound. Is that true? Do you recommend it? JOHN SMERZ  
Kadena, Japan

**A** Heavy cables are definitely advisable for long runs of wire, but you probably wouldn't use more than a couple of feet inside a speaker. For that sort of length, the benefit would be negligible. Taking your speaker enclosure apart to make the modification, on the other hand, might do it irreparable damage, and you would certainly hear that.

## Multiple Drivers

**Q** I have difficulty understanding how a speaker with only two drivers can play as loud and as well as another with four or five drivers. Doesn't the simple matter of the increased radiating area of the multiple-transducer speaker make for a more dynamic output?

ANDRZEJ BANIKIEWICZ  
Tallahassee, FL

**A** Yes, all else being equal, but no one speaker configuration has a lock on any particular aspect of audio performance. Multiway systems do usually have better power handling, which means that they can either play louder or play at moderate volumes with lower distortion. But if the drivers in, say, a two-way system use extra-heavy magnets and are built for long voice-coil and cone excursion, they can often equal the performance of speakers with more drivers. And the fewer the drivers, the fewer the transitions from one to the next and the simpler the crossover network. That makes it much easier to get smooth response and a reasonably uniform radiation pattern.

## Road Noise

**Q** My new car stereo speaker system consists of a pair of two-ways in the doors, two 6x9-inch speakers in the rear, and two 10-inch subwoofers. The speakers are all amplified separately. Would it be wise to add a noise-

# If you think home theater means a room full of speakers the size of movie posters...

## Think again.



The Bose Acoustimass-7 home theater speaker system

**Home  
Theater  
Made  
Easy**  
Acoustimass Systems

*"In fact, the more I use Acoustimass speakers, the more amazed I am."*

— Julian Hirsch, *Stereo Review*



The deep, powerful lows that help make movies sound so real are produced by the Bose patented Acoustimass bass module. Hide it completely out of view anywhere in the room.

**Like magic,** Bose® Acoustimass® home theater speaker systems turn an evening at home into a night at the movies.

### Home theater made more lifelike

At your favorite movie theater you hear everything, all around you, no matter where you sit. Bose Direct/Reflecting® speaker technology provides movie theater realism in your home by reflecting part of the sound off your walls. Everyone watching gets the same lifelike movie experience.

Your movie theater also provides consistent, matched sound – because all the speakers are the same. This advantage is usually ignored with home theater, but not with Acoustimass speakers. Like the movies, they have identical left, center, and right channels.

And for complete surround, add other Acoustimass speakers for matched rear channel sound.

### Home theater made smaller

Conventional speaker technology, where better sound means bigger speakers, makes home theater

impractical. But Acoustimass speaker arrays stand no taller than a video tape, so you can place them just about anywhere.

And Acoustimass home theater speaker systems are only made by Bose, the most respected name in audio.

### Check your local newspaper for special offers

Then go look. And listen. You'll find there's an Acoustimass home theater speaker system to fit your needs and your budget. Or call us toll free for more information and names of authorized dealers.

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# TECH TALK

BY JULIAN HIRSCH

## Audio Cables: Fact and Fiction

**T**he active components of an audio system (such as the tuner, amplifier, CD player, or tape deck) are directly and logically linked to its ultimate sound quality. But there has also been considerable promotion of such passive "components" as interconnect and speaker cables, including claims that they, too, have a substantial effect on sound quality. Actually, "substantial" is a rather mild adjective in the vocabulary of cable advertising.

I don't propose to get too involved in that morass. A recent announcement by Lucasfilm that it has established a set of specifications for certified Home THX interconnects and speaker cables seems to invest the subject with more authority, however, and when you examine Lucasfilm's rationale for standardizing Home THX interconnects—to insure trouble-free connections between the components of a Home THX system—the logic is indisputable. For example, the recommended standards for a multipin, six-channel interconnection system, designed for use with controllers, amplifiers, and equalizers, cover color coding, general electrical performance, and mechanical characteristics such as cable flexibility, insertion and removal force, connector diameter, jacket friction, and termination quality. I cannot argue with the importance of such standardization when dealing with a complex multicomponent and multichannel system such as a full-blown Home THX installation.

There is already a degree of standardization in the interconnection of home audio components, in the form of the phono jack and plug. There is little, if any, standardization of the cable itself, however, nor is there much need for it in a basic stereo system. Most components are designed to be relatively independent of their load

impedance over a wide range of capacitance and inductance, and such deviations as may arise from the cable interface are almost never audible. Note that Lucasfilm does not mention sound quality (other than an absence of audible hum, noise, and distortion) as a benefit of adherence to the Home THX cable standards.

There are a number of manufacturers of premium audio cable, and some of their products (probably most of them, in fact) are truly excellent with respect to their mechanical properties. I use them myself—not in a music system, but for testing loudspeakers, where their physical ruggedness, flexibility, and low resistance make them the logical choice.

My test needs are rather special, though. What about the advantages of such high-price cables in a normal, fixed installation? If I knew of any, I would certainly speak up, but by and large they do nothing that an ordinary twin-conductor wire could not do at a small fraction of their cost.

But don't they improve the sound? That is the essence of the benefit claimed for most exotic cables—a vaguely expressed or indefinable improvement in sound quality that is

bles actually have an *excessive* amount of inductance or capacitance, and some poorly designed amplifiers can become unstable when driving such a reactive load.

So what about the claimed sonic improvements so often attributed to special speaker cables? When the claim is made by the cable manufacturer, the reason is obvious and requires no explanation. In other cases, it is probably a manifestation of the power of positive thinking: people deluding themselves into thinking that they are hearing something because they have been told by an "expert" that it is there (the "Emperor's new clothes" syndrome). Since hearing is ultimately a mental function, they are probably happy in the thought that a sizable investment in system cables can reap a harvest of improved sound. It has been said that "hearing is believing." The reverse is often equally true, that believing is hearing.

Actually, there is one way that a cable *can* affect the sound without magic or hypnosis. All amplifiers have an internal resistance (their "source impedance") that is effectively in series with the loudspeaker load. Though normally negligible, the source im-

**It has been said that "hearing is believing." The reverse is often equally true, that believing is hearing.**

said to justify an additional investment of hundreds (or thousands) of dollars.

A speaker cable has only three significant electrical properties: resistance, capacitance, and inductance. For low-level interconnects, there is also shielding to be considered. That is it—absolutely *nothing else* can affect a cable's operation in a properly functioning audio system, although some cable companies do try to suggest that real-world audio cables can have problems with impedance mismatching or "skin effect." Pure nonsense! As it happens, some exotic ca-

pedance can combine with the load impedance to modify the system's frequency response by impressing the shape of the speaker's impedance curve on its frequency response. Except with tube amplifiers, which have output transformers that raise their source impedances relatively high, this effect is almost always small, but critical listening can reveal it. Just remember: This effect is normally only a minute change in frequency response—hardly a matter to be concerned about unless you are the type who agonizes about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. □

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A woman in a classical-style dress, possibly representing Liberty or a similar allegorical figure, stands on a dark wooden pedestal. She is wearing a long, flowing, light-colored gown with a blue sash or cloak draped over her left arm. Her right hand is raised, holding a small object. The background is a dramatic sky with large, billowing clouds in shades of blue, orange, and yellow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The word 'COLUMB' is written in large, bold, white, three-dimensional block letters across the top of the scene. The letters are set against the bright, glowing clouds. The overall composition is dynamic and theatrical.

**A Bigger, Better World Of Entertainment.**





A

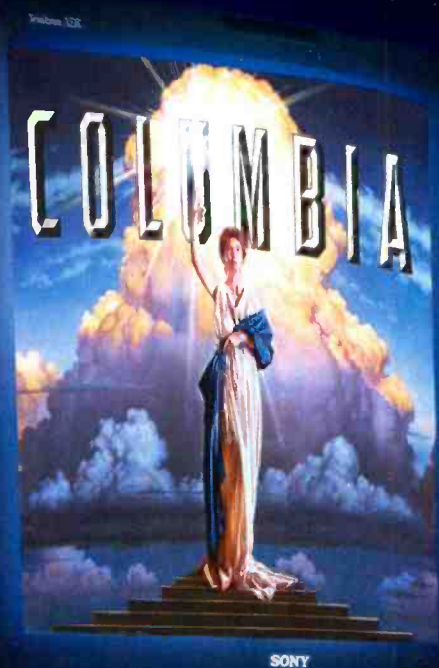
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### Instant Surround Sound.

It works with your TV and HiFi VCR and it's the simplest way to a total entertainment experience.

The Sony SA-VA3 Theater Sound System gives you full Surround Sound with front, center and rear channel speakers, subwoofers and Dolby Pro Logic amplification – all in just ten minutes set-up time.

### Home Entertainment Profile.

Take a moment to answer these questions and let us help you analyze your Home Entertainment needs.

**1 What kind of VCR do you own?**

■ **MONO**

*Start by upgrading to a HiFi Stereo VCR, go to question 2.*

■ **HIFI STEREO**

*You're in great shape, go to question 2.*

**2 What size is your main TV?**

■ **20" OR SMALLER**

*Upgrade to a larger TV, go to question 3.*

■ **25" OR LARGER**

*Consider upgrading to a larger TV, go to question 3.*

■ **A PROJECTION TV**

*You're in great shape, go to question 3.*



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VisionTouch controls every function of a Sony

home entertainment system through easy-to-

understand displays on your TV screen. You'll find

it in Sony's most advanced A/V Receiver, in the

ES Series of ultra high-fidelity components.



### 1 Is your Audio System:

#### ■ IN A DIFFERENT ROOM THAN THE MAIN TV?

Move it to the same room and connect it to your TV and HiFi Stereo VCR.

#### ■ IN THE SAME ROOM AS THE MAIN TV?

Connect it to your TV and HiFi VCR, go to question 4.

#### ■ I DON'T OWN ONE. PROCEED TO QUESTION 5.

Purchase a system with a Dolby Pro Logic A/V Receiver.

### 4 Does your Audio System consist of:

#### ■ A STEREO RECEIVER AND TWO SPEAKERS?

Consider upgrading to a Dolby Pro Logic A/V Receiver and adding three speakers.

#### ■ A SURROUND SOUND RECEIVER AND FOUR SPEAKERS?

Consider upgrading to a Dolby Pro Logic A/V Receiver and adding one speaker.

#### ■ A DOLBY PRO LOGIC RECEIVER AND FIVE SPEAKERS?

Don't stop now, go to question 5.

### 5 Are you concerned that a home entertainment system is:

#### ■ COMPLICATED TO USE?

Consider integrating Sony Audio Video Controller into your System.

#### ■ TOO EXPENSIVE?

Remember you can build your System one piece at a time.

#### ■ DIFFICULT TO SET UP?

Your Audio Video Salesperson can help you do it yourself, or in most cases, arrange for someone to hook it up for you.

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## Altec Lansing Home THX Loudspeaker System

BY DAVID RANADA

Like other products bearing the Lucasfilm Home THX licensing logo, Altec Lansing's \$3,000 Home THX speaker system is designed as part of a comprehensive solution to the problems of reproducing surround-sound movies at home. Its various components are available separately, but they will work best together or at least in conjunction with other Home THX speakers. And though it is not essential that the components ahead of the speakers be THX certified, it can be beneficial, especially in the case of the surround-sound decoder. The full Altec system consists of six components: three satellites used as left, center, and right front speakers, two surround speakers, and a powered subwoofer.

Each of the AHT-2200 satellites (\$300 apiece) has two 5¼-inch long-throw woofers with carbon-filled polypropylene cones. They cross over at 2.5 kHz to two ½-inch dome tweeters, all in a vertical array. Average imped-

ance is stated as 4 ohms and sensitivity as 89 dB sound-pressure level (SPL) at 1 meter from a 1-watt input. Altec specifies the lower limit of their response as 70 Hz, which means that these satellites should be used with a subwoofer for proper low-frequency balance. Made of high-impact black or white plastic, the enclosures measure 7⅞ inches wide, 15¾ inches high, and 7 inches deep and weigh 10 pounds. As the manual understates it, they "probably cannot be supported by screws in plaster board." Expansion anchors are recommended.

As required by Home THX design specs, the front satellites have fairly restricted vertical dispersion. Although this characteristic makes for very precise imaging and unusual clarity of dialogue reproduction (the main reasons for the dispersion restriction), it also virtually requires that the speakers be at ear level, or, if they are not at ear level, that they be tilted to aim at the ears, in order for the listener

to hear their fairly flat on-axis frequency response (also controlled—but not particularly tightly—by Home THX specs). Otherwise, the sound will tend to be somewhat dull. So you should *not* attempt to judge the Altec Home THX system's sound quality if the satellites are not at ear level. Departures from this rule, particularly in the case of the center speaker, are not catastrophic—just less than ideal sonically.

Weighing in at 13 pounds apiece, the AHT-2100 surrounds (\$900 a pair) also require some care in installation if you choose to mount them on walls. They actually look best mounted *in-wall*, for which brackets are provided. The reason they weigh so much is that each AHT-2100 contains *eight* drivers in its 15½ x 11 x 6¼-inch plastic enclosure: two front-panel 4-inch long-throw woofers, four 3½-inch woofers split into pairs on the angled side panels, and one ¾-inch dome tweeter on each of the side panels. Rated sensitivity and impedance are the same as for the front satellites.

When the surrounds are mounted to the sides of the listening position, the side-panel drivers fire toward the front and back of the room. The front tweeters operate out of phase with the rear tweeters in a quasi-dipole configuration that reduces the amount of sound radiated directly toward the listener. What you hear from the surrounds therefore consists primarily of reflections, yielding a more diffuse sound than you would get from conventional speakers. The intention here is to envelop the listener in the sound, much as happens in a movie theater with its multiple surround speakers.

The AHT-2300 subwoofer (\$1,200) tips the scale at a hefty 85 pounds and is obviously intended for floor placement. But it has no wheels, and moving it over a carpeted floor while looking for a sonically good location to install it wasn't easy. It is also a rather large piece of furniture, measuring 14½ x 19 x 27 inches, so it will be difficult to hide behind a sofa. It is very sturdy, however, and I imagine that you could safely put a large plant on it or use it as an end table.

In addition to its robust wooden construction, the subwoofer's weight comes from its two woofers, both with 10-inch cones made of woven carbon-fiber, and from its 100-watt Class B

power amplifier. The amplifier accepts both line-level and speaker-level inputs via phono-jack and push connectors, respectively. The connectors are located, inconveniently, on the bottom of the enclosure, from which also emerges a too-short power cord.

There are two indicator lights on the subwoofer control panel. One is for power (the amplifier turns on automatically when fed an audio signal). The other is for the dynamic level-control circuit, which prevents the subwoofer from being driven into excessive distortion at very high levels; when the circuit becomes active, the light goes out. When turned on but fed no signal, the subwoofer emits a very quiet rumble/rushing noise, but it is inaudible once you start playing anything. The subwoofer controls include a volume knob and an equalizer dial that raises and lowers the output around 100 Hz. There is a crossover-frequency switch with 50-, 80-, and 100-Hz settings plus a special THX position. One of the two pushbuttons on the panel selects between crossover slopes of 18 and 24 dB per octave. The other enables you to reverse the subwoofer's phase when that is necessary to achieve a good blend with the main speakers. All of these controls have specific Home THX settings. I used those settings for my listening tests, which were conducted, at least at the start, with the speakers fed from the amplified outputs of a Home THX "controller" (a component providing both surround-sound-decoder and preamp functions).

The tests demonstrated that the Altec Home THX speaker system was very successful at what it was primarily designed for: soundtrack reproduction. With adventure-movie or space-opera soundtracks, the feeling was of immense reserves of effortless power, a sensation produced only by systems incorporating a true subwoofer. Even when playing at levels that to my ears were excessively loud, the subwoofer's dynamic level-control light never extinguished. (The "re-equalization" introduced by the Home THX controller also helped reduce harshness on high-volume soundtracks.) When I listened from the prime location (on the center line between the speakers), imaging was extremely precise, and the dipole surrounds produced an all-enveloping

ambience as intended. Listening off-center, I found the imaging less precise, but the frequency balance remained very good.

Given their superb performance reproducing soundtracks in a full Home THX system, for which these speakers were optimized, I was particularly interested in seeing how they would fare under less than ideal but very common conditions: standard Dolby Pro Logic decoding and plain music listening. So I connected the speakers to a 75-watt A/V receiver containing an appropriately garden-variety Dolby Pro Logic decoder. In such a setup, you give up the harshness-taming Home THX re-equalization and the ambience-spreading surround-output "decorrelation." But, given those limitations, the Altec speakers still performed admirably, proving fully the equal of other, non-THX home theater speakers, with the added benefit of their sound-spreading quasi-dipole surrounds.

Altec's Home THX system also did very well with music. Having a subwoofer capable of substantial output below 30 Hz proved its worth with pipe-organ recordings. The ability of the subwoofer and satellites to play loud particularly benefited the drums in well-recorded jazz CD's. And the restricted vertical radiation of the satellites, along with their fairly flat frequency response, virtually guaranteed

pinpoint left-right imaging for all kinds of music.

But flat-response, restricted-dispersion speakers, like the Altec satellites, tend to be brutally revealing of problems in recordings. If the music is poorly equalized, if the vocals were recorded with non-flat mikes (more the rule than the exception), if the recorded ambience lacks depth, if there is no "air" around the strings, if the producer left a "hole" in the center of his stereo mix, the Altec Home THX system won't do anything to conceal them. You'll hear all these defects in their naked splendor, uncloaked by room reflections or a pleasantly colored response. A good multiple-echo ambience-enhancement system can help immensely here with music, and it's unfortunate that at this stage only one Home THX controller (the Lexicon CP-3) is equipped with one.

I consider such "analytical" reproduction desirable in a loudspeaker, but you may not. To find out, I urge you to audition the Altec Home THX speakers, especially if they are to end up as your primary speaker system. There can be little doubt, however, that a properly installed Altec Home THX speaker system will deliver immense quantities of the often promised but not always delivered excitement of home theater. These are probably the best speakers Altec Lansing has ever produced. □



*"Why don't you go on home and get some sleep, Mr. Thalman? We'll call you just as soon as the 'burning in' of your new speakers is finished."*





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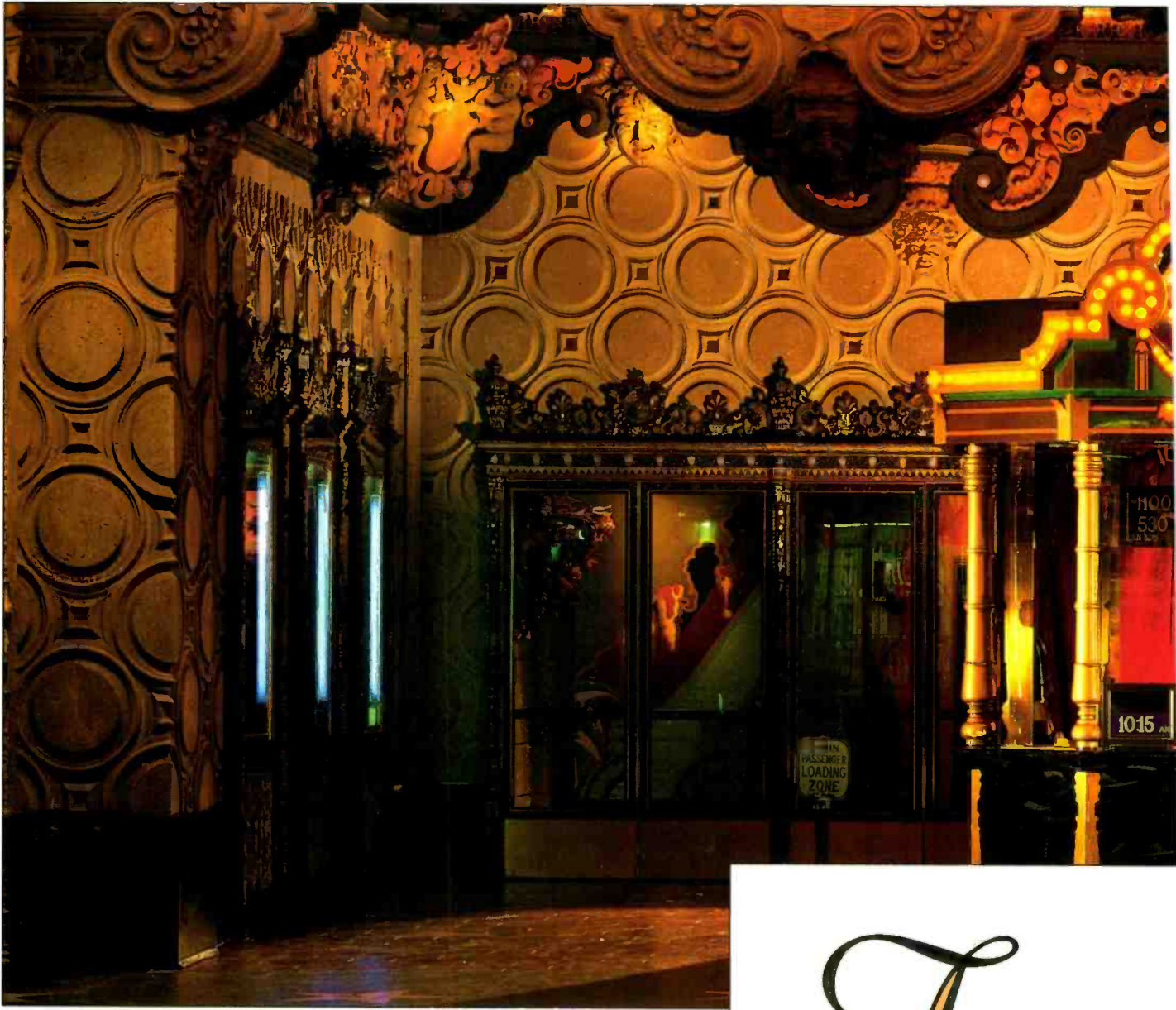


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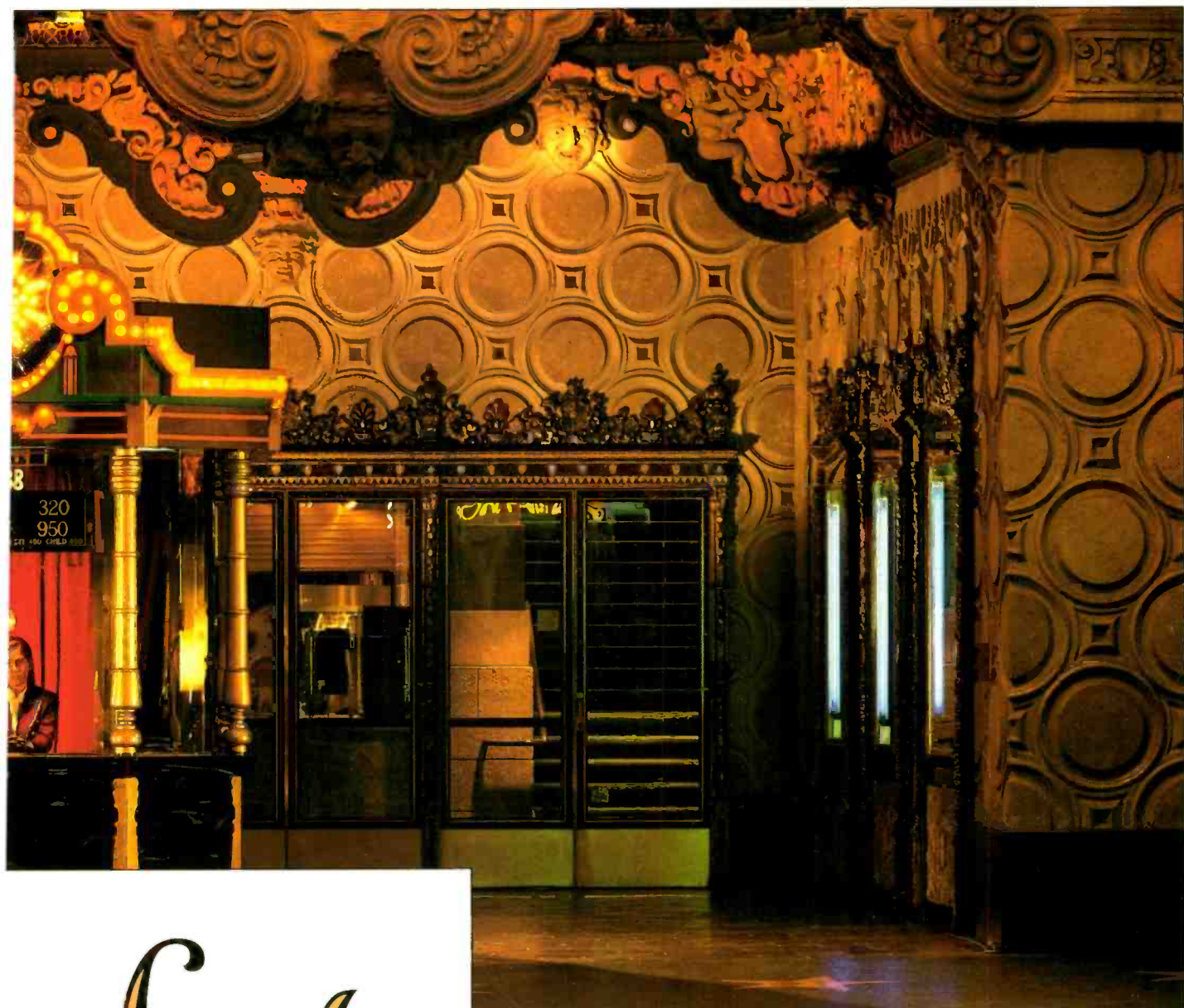
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# TEST REPORTS



## Kenwood KC-X1 A/V Tuner/Preamplifier

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

In this heyday of A/V receivers it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a "standard," non-A/V model. With the growing popularity of home theater installations, other traditionally audio-only components are showing signs of following the receiver's lead. One example is Kenwood's KC-X1, the first tuner/preamplifier we have reviewed that has full audio/video control and surround-sound decoding capabilities. It has inputs and switching for as many as five audio and four video components, with line-level outputs for external power amplifiers to drive three front speakers (left, center, and right), a pair of surround speakers, and a subwoofer. Its AM/FM tuner provides for as many as thirty preset station frequencies.

The KC-X1 has signal-processing circuits for Home THX, standard

Dolby Pro Logic, Dolby 3 Stereo (for systems with three front speakers but no surrounds), and DSP Logic (a hall-ambience simulation intended for use with normal, unencoded stereo program material). There is a bypass mode for conventional two-channel stereo listening, and a mono mode feeds all signals into the center speaker, if one is present, or equally through front left and right speakers. In systems with surround speakers but no

center speaker, the surround processing can be switched to a phantom-center mode.

Inputs are provided for CD and moving-magnet phono sources, and there are recording and playback connectors for two audio tape decks and three video recorders, plus inputs for a play-only video source such as a laser-disc player. For two of the VCR sources, there are S-video connectors as well as the standard phono jacks for composite-video signals. The video outputs to the monitor are also provided in both composite and S-video formats. The composite-video and S-video signals are handled separately, with no facility for conversion between them.

A loop antenna is provided for the AM tuner, and a 75-ohm coaxial jack is used for the FM antenna. The KC-X1's rear apron has jacks for use in remote-control systems with compatible Kenwood components. Its three switched, two-prong AC outlets have a combined power rating of 940 watts.

The KC-X1 is supplied with a system remote control that is internally

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### PRICE

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### MANUFACTURER

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accurately, with the proper volume level and dispersion pattern.

## Center Channel by Henry Kloss.

Center Channel is a compact, two-way acoustic suspension speaker with a 4" woofer and a ring radiator tweeter. Because of its compact size (8½" x 5¼" x 4"), it's simple to place Center Channel directly on top of or below your TV screen, so that dialog and sound effects will seem to emanate from their on-screen source.

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## Center Channel Plus by Henry Kloss.

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crossover\* will provide 18 dB per octave,

ered Subwoofer is \$599.

SEE LISTENING PAGE. \*Available late Fall, 1992.

CIRCLE NO. 6 ON READER SERVICE CARD

# TEST REPORTS

The one operational idiosyncrasy we encountered had to do with a small switch on the back panel, which the instructions said should be set to "on" when a subwoofer is used, presumably to provide a suitable low-frequency program output to it. They did not mention, however, that it is equally important that the switch be set to "off" when a subwoofer is *not* used. Also, the switch position should be changed only while the KC-X1 is turned off (which *is* mentioned in the manual, but in fine print at the bottom of page 9).

When we left the subwoofer switch on, the unit appeared to work normally, but frequencies below about 70 Hz were sharply attenuated. That effect may not be particularly audible, depending on the program material and loudspeakers used, but it certainly gave us some bad moments during the measurement process. Actually, this



is a very useful feature, since removing low frequencies from the main speakers when a subwoofer is used (as would normally be the case in a Home THX setup) can only improve the system's performance.

Intrigued by the KC-X1's impressive bulk and weight (after all, it is a tuner/preamp, not a full-blown receiver), we removed its top cover, revealing a well-filled interior with perhaps five or six good-size circuit boards on

two or more levels. Even without further knowledge of the internal circuitry, the reason for the KC-X1's size and weight (and price) became obvious. And given its obvious emphasis on audio/video system performance, it was easier to understand why it was fitted with an adequate, but not particularly advanced, AM/FM section.

Although we did not test it, the KC-X1 has a companion six-channel power amplifier, the KM-X1, rated for 100 watts per channel, and the two provide formidable audio/video reproduction capability at an exceptionally low price for Home THX-certified components. But, as our experience showed, the KC-X1 can deliver impressive performance in conjunction with almost any combination of power amplifiers. The tuner/preamplifier appears to be a product format whose time has come, and we will surely see others like the KC-X1 in the near future. □

## SECOND OPINION

**M**y measurements and listening tests of the Kenwood KC-X1's Dolby Pro Logic surround-sound performance gave very good results. Measured noise levels and distortion were very low, and the channel separations and overload margins were more than adequate. Both main-front and center Pro Logic frequency responses could be flatter at the extreme high frequencies (they were -1 dB at 16.25 kHz), but the deviation should be inaudible to most ears and with most program material. Worst-case THX equalization errors were negligible through the front and center speakers, but response was down slightly at 4 kHz through the surround channels.

Especially noteworthy was the unusually accurate level calibration of the surround-sound decoder when measured through the playback-only video input (Video 4). When this input is connected to a videodisc player with a nominal 2-volt maximum output, the KC-X1 should provide a less muffled surround-channel frequency response than most decoders do, though the difference would be difficult to hear with most soundtracks.

Home THX processing consists mainly of special equalizations applied to the five principal outputs of a

standard Dolby Pro Logic decoder. The KC-X1's adherence to the THX equalization specifications was on the whole very good, and we would not expect the minor deviations we did find to be audible with normal recordings.

I was particularly interested in listening to the KC-X1 in action since it contains the first Home THX surround-sound decoder that I have been able to use under controlled conditions. Because Home THX processing is based on Dolby Pro Logic, I could use the KC-X1 to make near-instantaneous comparisons between these two related approaches to surround-sound decoding. (The comparisons were not quite instantaneous because switching between the two involves a short interval of muting.)

The special THX "re-equalization" applied to the front, center, and surround speakers adjusts the high-frequency response so that soundtracks originally equalized under studio dubbing-stage conditions end up sounding the same under the very different acoustical conditions of a home listening room. All the movie soundtracks I played through the KC-X1 in Home THX mode benefited from this re-equalization, becoming

markedly less harsh when played at high levels. Although I happened to listen to the KC-X1 through a six-piece Home THX-certified speaker system, the same effect should be apparent with any reasonably good assemblage of speakers (ideally a set with sonically matched main and center units).

Home THX processing applies another layer of equalization to the surround channels to make their timbre more closely match that of the front speakers. A sound panned from the front to the surrounds is not supposed to change in timbre. But the benefit of the Home THX surround equalizer seems to be less consistent than that of the Home THX re-equalizer. Listening in Home THX mode to a specially constructed test signal (pink noise digitally band-limited to 7 kHz that flipped every second from one of the front speakers to the surrounds), I never heard an exact timbre match, even through Home THX speakers. But the tonal difference between front and surround was indeed less than that produced with straight Dolby Pro Logic decoding, so there is some advantage to the Home THX surround-equalization.

I also noticed that the sonic match

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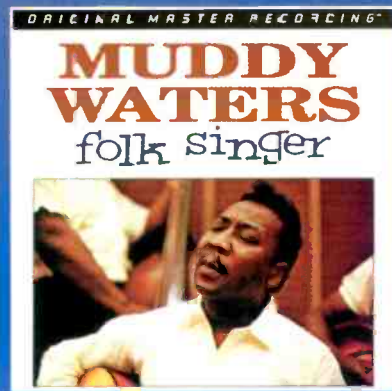


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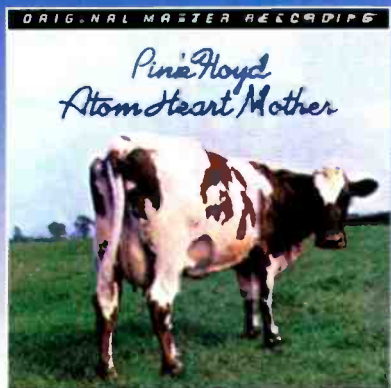


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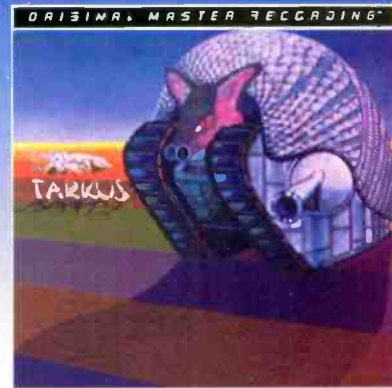
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# TEST REPORTS

## SURROUND PERFORMANCE

All measurements are referred to 1-kHz levels at the Video 4 input of 200 millivolts (mV) for the front channels, 141.4 millivolts for the center and surround channels, with the volume control at its 0-dB setting. All measurements were made with the Normal center-channel setting except frequency response and channel separation, which were made with the Wideband setting. Except where noted, all measurements refer to Dolby Pro Logic operation only.

### Frequency response

left/right	20 Hz to 20 kHz +0, -2.7 dB
center	20 Hz to 20 kHz +0, -2.9 dB
surround	20 Hz to 7.7 kHz, +0, -3 dB

### A-weighted noise

left/right	-78.6 dB
center	-74.3 dB
surround	-78.6 dB

### Distortion (THD + N)

left/right	0.06%
center	0.06%
surround	0.06%

### Surround decoder input-overload levels

left/right	+21 dB
center	+23.5 dB
surround	+20 dB

### Surround-channel-delay indication error

	1 millisecond low
--	-------------------

### Surround-channel Dolby calibration error

1 kHz	0 dB
3 kHz	+2 dB

### Channel separation (100 Hz to 7 kHz)

left from right	>54 dB
left from center	>33 dB
center from surround	>40 dB
surround from left	>46 dB
left from surround	>46 dB
surround from center	>46 dB
center from left	>30 dB

### Home THX re-equalization error

(maximum)	-0.5 dB
-----------	---------

### Home THX surround-equalization error

(maximum)	-1.7 dB
-----------	---------

improved if the surrounds were located where they should be, to the sides and several feet above ear level, rather than close to ear level or at the rear. The front/surround similarity deteriorated slightly when non-THX dipole surrounds were used, and further when conventional speakers were used for the surrounds, to the degree that there was no appreciable timbre-match advantage to switching

in the Home THX processing with those speakers.

But Home THX processing also involves a surround-channel "decorrelation" circuit whose effects were readily apparent regardless of the type or location of the surround speakers. The decorrelation serves to scramble the relative phases of the two surround speakers, which would otherwise receive an identical signal. All of that is to promote the disappearance of the surround speakers as discrete sound sources.

With decorrelation switched in, the sides and rear of the listening room should seem to vanish, replaced by the sonic environment created by a movie's sound designers. The decorrelation was far more effective with soundtracks than the standard "dual-mono" treatment of surrounds (so much so that I wish the processing were available in the regular Dolby Pro Logic mode as well). At least as executed in the KC-X1, however, it seemed to introduce a slight sense of "swimminess" to the surround signal that is hard to describe but easy to hear with pink noise.

On more mundane matters: The KC-X1's programmable remote is not well laid out, with tuner buttons split into two sections, both separated from the rest of the controls. I also found that most of the buttons were too small, and, except for the volume buttons, they were not differentiated by size, shape, or feel. The button labeling could stand some revision as well ("mode" to change speakers when adjusting surround-sound balances, for example). The rear-panel input-jack layout is of the desirable horizontal variety, however. Considering the FM tuner's measured performance, I wish Kenwood had incorporated a high-quality cable-ready TV-sound tuner instead, something that is hard to find except in some high-end VCR's.

If you are planning a component-by-component transformation of your present system into a home theater setup, the Kenwood KC-X1 is a good place to start. You'll get an outstanding Dolby Pro Logic decoder plus Home THX processing, which can provide sonic benefits even without Home THX speakers. But once embarked on the Home THX path, you should consider getting Home THX speakers if you can. The experience of a complete Home THX system going full tilt on a well-produced movie soundtrack can be stunning. —David Ranada

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# TEST REPORTS



## Fisher Studio 24 CD Changer

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

Compact disc changers have become extremely popular since their introduction. The first changers used removable magazines holding six to ten discs, and, with the almost simultaneous development of home and car models, they enabled convenient swapping of magazines between home and automobile.

The next step was the home carousel changer, holding up to six discs on a rotating platform that turns to place a disc on the playing spindle. The simplicity of the carousel mechanism has made these products competitive with medium-price single-play models. Considering that they do not sacrifice any significant aspect of audio performance, the great popularity of carousel changers is not surprising.

In June 1992 we reported on a hundred-disc changer, a pricy unit derived from professional CD "jukebox" designs. Now, several new CD chang-

ers also offer enlarged disc-storage capacity but at more affordable prices. Among them is the twenty-four-disc Fisher Studio 24 CD Management System (known more formally as the DAC-2403).

The Studio 24's mechanism incorporates a nonremovable rotating magazine with slots for twenty-four standard-size CD's (3-inch CD's, even with adaptors, cannot be used). The discs are loaded, one at a time, through a vertical slot in the front panel that is normally closed but

opens at the touch of a button. Because of the vertical disc orientation, the Studio 24 is considerably taller than ordinary CD players or changers. Its appearance is not unlike that of a rather large A/V receiver, although it is comparatively lightweight.

The left third of the panel contains the display window and a number of buttons, principally for disc selection. The window shows the usual information, including the current disc, track number, index number (displayed but not cueable), and playing time (which can be switched between elapsed and remaining time on the track or disc). The Studio 24 also offers a means of classifying the discs and displaying this information in the window. It has seven built-in music categories, designated as Rock, C/W (country-and-western), R/B (rhythm-and-blues), Jazz, Easy (easy-listening), Show (show tunes), and Clas (classical). The appropriate designation can be assigned to each loaded magazine slot and will then appear in the window when the disc in that slot is selected for playing. You can also create and store your own category names of up to eight characters. In addition, an

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16½ INCHES WIDE, 7¼ INCHES HIGH,  
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PRICE  
\$300

### MANUFACTURER

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# TEST REPORTS

eight-character subcategory name can be assigned to each slot and stored; like the main category, it is displayed when that slot is selected.

The Studio 24 changer provides many of the popular playback modes of conventional CD players, including intro-scan (playing the first 10 seconds of each track), random play (of both disc and track or just among the tracks on a single disc), a combination of intro-scan and random play, and multiple repeat modes (one track, all tracks on a disc, all discs, or all discs in a selected category or subcategory). You can also program the Studio 24 to play, in any order, up to forty-eight tracks from as many as twenty-four discs.

The right third of the front panel resembles the left side, including a symmetrically placed window that has only a cosmetic function. The internal light lets you see the disc tray spin around, but only from up close because the window is darkly tinted. This portion of the panel also contains the conventional transport buttons (fast forward or reverse, track skipping, and so forth). The rear of the player has only the stereo analog audio output jacks and the line cord.

The Studio 24 comes with a small and uncluttered remote control that duplicates all the regular operating functions, including disc selection. Programming, however, can be done only with the front-panel controls.

The technical specifications for the Fisher Studio 24 changer indicate only that it uses dual 1-bit digital-to-analog (D/A) converters with eight-times-oversampling digital filters and that it has less than 0.03 percent total harmonic distortion (THD) at 1 kHz and a signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) of 100 dB. In our measurements, it met or surpassed these specifications, although it produced lower than average performance in some other characteristics, sometimes because of its higher than normal ultrasonic noise and distortion levels.

The Studio 24's measured frequency response was flat within +0, -0.1 dB from 10 Hz to 9 kHz, with a rolloff to -1.9 dB at 20 kHz. De-emphasis error was a maximum of -1.1 dB at 16



## MEASUREMENTS

Maximum output level	1.28 volts
Frequency response	20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.1, -1.9 dB
Channel separation	
100 Hz	72 dB
1 kHz	79 dB
20 kHz	78 dB
Maximum interchannel phase shift at 20 kHz	0.95 degree
Signal-to-noise ratio (A-weighted)	120 dB
Dynamic range	114 dB
Distortion (THD+N)	
1 kHz (-45 to 0 dB)	0.018%
20 Hz to 5 kHz (0 dB)	0.025%
20 kHz (0 dB)	0.447%
Linearity error (-60 to -90 dB)	<0.5 dB
Defect tracking (Pierre Verany #2 test disc)	1,250 µm
Impact resistance	
top	C
sides	C
Slewing time	2.3 seconds
Disc-change time	13.5 to 17.5 seconds

kHz. The linearity of the D/A converters at low levels was excellent, as in most other 1-bit designs. Dynamic range and interchannel phase shift were both fine. Other measurements showed average performance when the inaudible contributions from ultrasonics were filtered out.

Finally, the player's speed (pitch) error of +0.33 percent was the largest we have measured from a CD player. Since this amount of error will cause an hour-long CD to finish nearly 12

seconds early, we consider it excessive (even an inexpensive record player—remember turntables?—has better speed accuracy than this presumably crystal-controlled CD player).

Fortunately, all of the changer's mechanical and operating features worked properly, so we were able to exercise and appreciate the versatility of this unusual product. Loading and unloading discs is easy and foolproof, for example, and actual operation of the Studio 24's playing functions is straightforward. Moreover, all the operating features are thoroughly and clearly explained in the instruction manual. There is a lot to learn, however, and if you are serious about using the player's considerable programming flexibility, be prepared to spend some time studying and even practicing the procedures. Fisher has wisely adopted a policy used by many computer hardware and software manufacturers, providing a toll-free phone number that you can call if you have any difficulty operating the player.

Despite the slight deficiencies we found in its measured performance, the Fisher Studio 24 CD changer produced good, listenable sound. As it happens, most compact disc specifications (like frequency response and channel separation) are many times better than they have to be for first-class sound reproduction, so a failure to meet the highest level of *measured* performance really should not automatically disqualify a player from consideration.

The Studio 24 combines the sonic performance of an average-quality single-disc CD player with the exceptional versatility provided by the twenty-four-disc changer mechanism. One should also bear in mind its low price, which would have been unimaginable not long ago. I see a nice market niche for the Studio 24 in the small-business environment, such as a dentist's office, where all-day background music is required and where its random-programming capabilities would provide a "turn on and listen" source of background music at a minimal cost. As a home component, it looks to me like a rather specialized product, albeit an excellent value. □

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# TEST REPORTS



## Monitor Audio MA700 Gold MkII Loudspeaker System

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

**M**onitor Audio is a well-known manufacturer of high-quality loudspeakers based in Cambridge, England. Among its several lines of loudspeaker systems is the Gold series, featuring Monitor's proprietary Gold Dome tweeter. It's called that because the tweeter dome is formed of an aluminum/magnesium alloy that is gold-anodized, a process said to increase its rigidity and extend its linear frequency range beyond audibility.

The MA700 Gold MkII is a small, two-way system, using a 1-inch Gold Dome tweeter paired with a 6½-inch woofer operating in a vented enclosure. The woofer cone is formed from a polypropylene material, and the molded rubber surround and concave dust cover contribute to the rigidity of the voice coil, which is wound on an

aluminum former. The tweeter's voice coil, like the woofer's, has a nitrile rubber surround and is cooled and damped by magnetic fluid in its gap.

The crossover, at 3.1 kHz, is a minimalist design with 6-dB-per-octave slopes. Monitor points out that such a

### DIMENSIONS

8½ INCHES WIDE, 13¾ INCHES HIGH,  
10 INCHES DEEP

### FINISH

BLACK-ASH OR ROSEWOOD VENEER  
(OTHERS AVAILABLE)

### PRICE

BLACK-ASH, \$999 A PAIR;  
ROSEWOOD, \$1,199 A PAIR

### MANUFACTURER

MONITOR AUDIO USA, DEPT. SR,  
P.O. BOX 1355, BUFFALO, NY 14205

simple crossover is practical because the tweeter and woofer were specifically designed to work together. The high- and low-frequency sections of the crossover network are electrically separated, enabling biwired or biamplified operation.

The MA700 Gold MkII's cabinet, with a volume of about 11 liters, is made of ¾-inch MDF (medium-density-fiberboard) panels and internally damped with padding and acoustic foam. The drivers are bolted onto the panel and recessed to minimize edge diffractions. The woofer port is on the rear panel. A removable black cloth grille covers the entire front of the speaker. Since the speaker panel is finished to match the rest of the cabinet, removing the grille exposes a handsome front, with a gold tweeter grille and dome and a well-finished woofer.

Monitor Audio prides itself on superior cabinet finishes, which in the case of the MA700 Gold MkII takes the form of matched black-ash (standard) or rosewood (premium) veneers finished by hand. Other finishes are also available.

The frequency response of the Monitor Audio MA700 Gold MkII is specified as 45 Hz to 30 kHz  $\pm 3$  dB. Its nominal impedance is 8 ohms, and the sensitivity is rated at 89 dB sound-pressure level (SPL) at 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input.

Monitor recommends placing these speakers on stands, such as its own MS24's, which feature rugged steel construction and hollow central columns that can be filled with sand. Our test speakers were supplied with the MS24 stands, which we used, although we chose not to fill them with sand since each stand already weighs 15 pounds by itself.

The averaged room response of the two speakers was impressively flat over most of the audio range. It varied only  $\pm 2$  dB from 400 Hz to 20 kHz. The close-miked woofer and port response sloped down smoothly by about 9 dB from 100 Hz to about 2 kHz (readings above that frequency were not valid). The output below 100 Hz dropped at 12 dB per octave. Combining this measurement with the room curve produced a composite response varying  $\pm 4$  dB from 45 Hz to 20 kHz.

The quasi-anechoic MLS measure-

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ments showed a response at 1 meter that varied only  $\pm 2$  dB from 300 Hz to 20 kHz, and the tweeter dispersion was excellent, with the output at 45 degrees off-axis falling off by 5 dB at 10 kHz and by only 8 dB at 20 kHz. Group delay (phase linearity) was a relatively constant 500 microseconds from 3 to 20 kHz (the tweeter range), rising to 1.1 milliseconds at 50 Hz.

The system's minimum impedance was 7.5 ohms at 60 and 200 Hz, with peaks of 23.5 ohms at 28 Hz, 20 ohms at 95 Hz, and 29 ohms at 2.2 kHz. At 88 dB, its sensitivity was close to the rated value. The woofer distortion at a 3.5-volt drive level (equivalent to a 90-dB SPL) was between 0.3 and 0.7 percent from 2 kHz to 100 Hz, rising to 1.5 percent at 60 Hz, 3 percent at 39 Hz, and 4.5 percent at 30 Hz.

The speaker was able to absorb the maximum output of our driving amplifier (roughly 400 to 700 watts) during single-cycle tone bursts at 1 and 10 kHz. At 100 Hz, the woofer cone reached the limits of its suspension travel with an input of 190 watts.

As our measurements clearly indicate, the Monitor MA700 Gold MkII is a very high-quality speaker indeed. While it cannot defy the laws of physics and match the low-bass output of many larger speakers, this mighty midget can deliver a useful amount of clean 35- to 40-Hz fundamental, without the accompaniment of much obvious distortion. In that respect, its sound belies its size.

There is more to good sound than low bass, however. The MA700 Gold

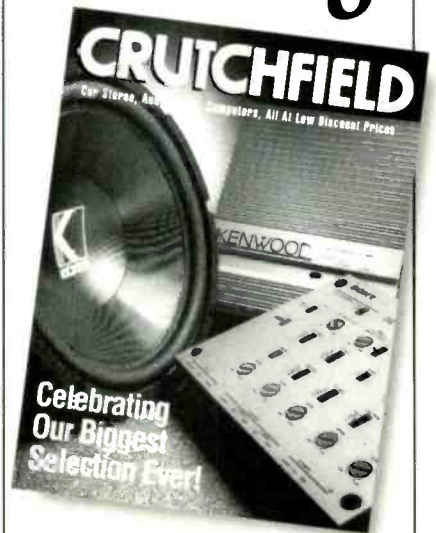
MkII was well balanced musically, never calling attention to itself through an audible lack or excess of any part of the audio spectrum. As our measurements show, this speaker has an exceptionally flat and wide-range response, combined with above-average dispersion at high frequencies. Its stereo imaging was excellent (not surprising given those characteristics).

We encountered only one sour note (figuratively speaking) in our testing and use of these speakers. Their input connectors, recessed into the back of the cabinet, are sturdy gold-plated binding posts. But their wide spacing prevents the use of dual banana plugs (single plugs are okay), and the hole in each post that would accept a stripped wire end is already partially filled with the heavy jumper wire that connects it to a corresponding post leading to the other driver (there are separate inputs for woofer and tweeter). We found it nearly impossible to make a tight, secure connection to stripped wires because of the presence of these jumpers. Single banana plugs would certainly be our preferred solution, even though this is discouraged in the manufacturer's instructions.

To be sure, the good qualities of this little giant have their price—it costs considerably more than some other speakers that also deliver excellent performance and that might go a bit lower in the bass. Nevertheless, there are many listening situations where a small but high-quality speaker is called for, and here the MA700 Gold MkII has few peers in its price class. □



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# TEST REPORTS



## MAS Charisma Preamplifier

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**T**hough new to this country, MAS (Metaxas Audio Systems), of Melbourne, Australia, has earned a solid reputation among European enthusiasts for its audio components, which are unique in many of their design features and embody the personal philosophy of their designer, Kostas Metaxas.

MAS products are characterized by uncompromising circuit design and physical construction, Metaxas says, the primary goal being to provide the most nearly ideal performance possible, especially with regard to sound quality. Aesthetic considerations have not been neglected, however. All of the components' controls have a silky-smooth, positive feel, and the knobs are machined from solid aluminum bar stock before being polished to a smooth satin finish.

The MAS line includes preamplifiers, power amplifiers, integrated amplifiers, a CD player, and loudspeakers, all carrying such unusual and distinctive names as Marquis, Iraklis,

Solitaire, and Opulence. We tested the Charisma preamplifier, the company's least expensive component.

The MAS Charisma is a basic preamplifier, almost minimalist in some respects. Like MAS's other electronic components, it has a separate power supply, with a toroidal transformer and two-stage filtering to minimize power-line hum, that is joined to its chassis by a detachable cable approximately 3 feet long.

### DIMENSIONS

PREAMPLIFIER: 13¼ INCHES WIDE,  
2½ INCHES HIGH (INCLUDING FEET),  
9½ INCHES DEEP

POWER SUPPLY: 4 INCHES WIDE, 2 INCHES HIGH,  
9½ INCHES DEEP

### PRICE

LINE STAGE ONLY, \$1,700;  
WITH PHONO STAGE, \$1,850

### MANUFACTURER

METAXAS AUDIO SYSTEMS, DEPT. SR,  
230 RAE ST., NTH FITZROY 3068, MELBOURNE,  
VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

The Charisma is designed to be powered continuously, and neither the power supply nor the preamplifier itself has a power switch. In fact, Metaxas suggests that the Charisma be powered for at least 24 hours before any critical listening. Since the preamplifier becomes quite warm, it requires adequate ventilation.

A bare-bones control center, the Charisma provides no tone controls or filters. Its three high-level inputs, marked tuner, compact disc, and video, are selected by a knob. A small toggle switch selects the phono input, and another controls the tape recording and monitoring functions. Since the Charisma cannot be turned off in the usual sense, it has a third toggle switch, marked muting, that silences the preamplifier by the simple expedient of disconnecting its outputs and shorting them to ground. A red LED on the panel, marked AC, glows when the preamplifier is powered. Another LED, marked DC, glows only when there is a DC component in the output signal, a sign that there is a problem (the Charisma circuit is direct-coupled from input to output). Should such a problem occur, a relay grounds the outputs to protect the power amplifier and speakers.

PHOTO: LOOK P. LEUNG

# Home Theater Speaker Systems

## There's A Right Way And A Wrong Way.

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We'd like to clear up some misconceptions on the subject of speaker systems for use in Dolby Pro Logic home theater systems.

**Misconception #1:** You can use any speakers for the surround and center channels.

The center channel is *very* important because a large portion of soundtracks is directed to the center in systems with Pro Logic. That speaker should have smooth frequency response, good power handling—and it *must* match the tonal balance of the main speakers. Also, a center channel speaker should be magnetically shielded to prevent video interference.

Surround speakers should also match the tonal balance of the front speakers. Indeed, all five speakers should have matching tonal balances for proper sound. But unlike front speakers, surround speakers should create a diffuse sound field. So the best systems with Pro Logic use "dipole radiating" surround speakers (e.g. *The Surround II* and *The Surround* speakers in our \$797 and \$1,117 packages).

All the systems on this page consist of speakers designed to match each other tonally. (Identical timbre).

**Misconception #2:** Use five identical speakers in a system with Pro Logic.

A number of companies have released speaker packages consisting of five matching mini-speakers (some with a subwoofer). This ignores the fact that the surround channels serve different purposes than the front channels.

**Misconception #3:** A good home theater speaker system costs thousands and thousands of dollars.

A number of retailers regularly sell \$10,000 Pro Logic speaker systems. This is just not necessary.

We believe that the two more expensive systems on this page compete head-on with combinations selling for *thousands* more. Add our Powered Subwoofer (\$599), and we'll compare them to anything on the market.



**\$463** Model Six Speakers, Model Ten-A Speakers (3)

### \$463 Home Theater Package Features Model Six And Model Ten-A.

Our most affordable speaker package for systems with Pro Logic is centered around the new Model Six two-way acoustic suspension speaker by Henry Kloss. Model Six offers smooth, natural sound over a wide frequency range. The center channel and surround speakers are our new Model Ten-A magnetically shielded two-way acoustic suspension speakers. Tonally balanced to match Model Six, they are ideal for this affordable system.

*Channel*, a magnetically shielded version of our Ensemble satellites. The surround speakers are *The Surround II*, the most affordable dipole radiating speaker we know of (see previous ad). You could spend thousands more without improving on this package.

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This system is built around our dual-subwoofer Ensemble speaker system (*Audio* magazine said it "may be the best value in the world"). The center channel speaker is our *Center Channel Plus*, a unique five-driver speaker that can be placed above or below your TV monitor. The surround speakers are *The Surround*, our best dipole

radiating surround speaker. This system, especially when matched with



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## TEST REPORTS

### MEASUREMENTS

<b>Output at clipping</b>	11.5 volts
<b>Sensitivity</b> (for a 0.5-volt output)	
CD	33 mV
phono	0.13 mV
<b>Noise</b>	
(A-weighted, referred to a 0.5-volt output)	
CD	-93 dB
phono	-68.5 dB
<b>Phono-input overload</b>	
(1-kHz equivalent levels)	
20 Hz	37 mV
1 and 20 kHz	35 mV
<b>RIAA phono-equalization error</b>	
20 Hz to 20 kHz	+0.2, -1.4 dB
<b>Frequency response</b>	
CD	20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.02, -0.01 dB
<b>Distortion (THD+N at 1 kHz)</b>	
2 volts output	0.0022%

The volume-control knob, at the right end of the panel, has forty lightly detented settings, with ten index markings on the panel. The adjacent balance control, which also has ten panel markings, has a smooth, continuous rotation. It is unlike any other balance control we have used. Instead of differentially varying the gains of the two channels, it merely lowers the level in one channel at a time, depending on which way it is turned from the center position, leaving the other fixed. It has a limited adjustment range of 4 dB in either direction.

The Charisma's back panel is well populated with phono-type connectors for the signal inputs and outputs, plus a binding post for grounding a turntable or another component to the preamplifier for hum reduction. Consistent with the elegance and superb construction evident throughout this component, the signal connectors are machined from brass and gold-plated.

MAS says the Charisma's preamp and power-supply chassis are both made of nonmagnetic material. To the eye, it appears chrome-plated, its mirror-like surface presenting an attractive contrast to the preamp's black panel and polished aluminum knobs.

The Charisma's phono stage has DIP (dual in-line package) switches on its circuit board that enable the cartridge terminating resistance to be adjusted between 60 and 47,000 ohms. Except for several common settings,

this can involve a certain amount of calculation to determine the overall value of as many as eight resistances in parallel. Similar internal switches can be used to set the phono-preamplifier gain to suit a wide range of cartridge output levels. All our measurements were made using the factory-set phono values.

The MAS Charisma met or surpassed its specifications in practically every test we performed. Although we did not use it with a turntable, its RIAA equalization was very accurate (with a reasonable rolloff below 20 Hz). As received, the preamp was set up for a moving-coil cartridge and had a terminating resistance of about 2,600 ohms. Its noise level through a high-level input was very low (about the same as that of a CD player), and though the noise was considerably higher through the phono input, it still met the manufacturer's rating.

The Charisma can deliver a rather high output voltage before clipping. The phono-preamplifier overload level was satisfactory for moving-coil cartridges, but its gain would have to be reset with the internal switches for most moving-magnet cartridges.

Although Metaxas says that the Charisma's metalwork is nonmagnetic, we found that magnets clung to it about as strongly as they did to a steel plate. But since there are no high-current AC components present in the preamplifier itself, there would seem

to be no reason for any concern about induced hum.

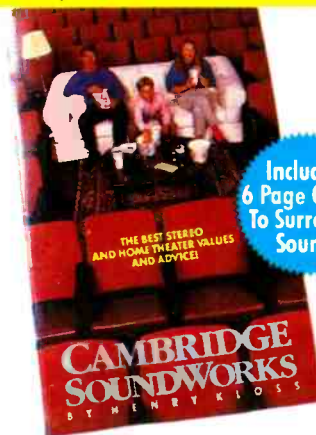
An unexpected discovery was the low input resistance of the high-level inputs (tuner, CD, video), which measured only 8,900 ohms. That will not cause any problems with most signal sources, but some might suffer a loss of deep-bass response when driving such a low load resistance.

The Charisma does indeed get hot, justifying the manufacturer's admonition to avoid obstructing its ventilation slots or placing it on top of a hot component such as a receiver or amplifier. Most large receivers and amplifiers we have tested (up to power ratings of 200 watts or so) do not get as hot in normal operation as this compact preamplifier does.

As for the Charisma's sound—if you are one of those who finds significant sonic differences between preamplifiers, you should listen for yourself. This one was as flat-sounding and noise-free as any you will find, and I heard nothing that could be said to originate in it. It is a very smooth-handling unit, as quiet and precise as they come, easy to use, and significantly more compact than any I have seen in some time. I would have no hesitation in recommending it to anyone willing to spend \$1,850 for a basic preamplifier—especially anyone who uses a moving-coil phono cartridge, for which the Charisma would seem to be ideal. □



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# 3 HI-FI VCR'S

**JVC, Mitsubishi,  
and RCA decks  
face off: Is one  
of them for you?**

Exotic and expensive when they were first introduced, VCR's have gone on to become almost as common as TV sets in American homes. Prices have dropped, and performance and capability have increased. One of the most important early developments was hi-fi audio, which enabled recording of high-quality stereo sound along with the video. It's hard to imagine home theater with the crummy mono sound characteristic of non-hi-fi VCR's.

The three hi-fi VCR's reviewed here are relatively high-end models, not too far short of the line dividing standard VHS recorders from premium Super VHS machines. They are the JVC HR-VP700U (\$600), the Mitsubishi HS-U59 (\$599), and the RCA ProScan PSVR81 (\$649). Even in these models, however, there's evidence of cost-cutting on the audio side to make way for additional video features. There was a time when VHS Hi-Fi implied audio recording-level and balance controls (with detents to suggest optimum settings for off-the-air recording) and at least halfway-decent level indicators. Two of these three decks—the JVC and the ProScan—have no audio level controls whatsoever, and though the ProScan has level indicators (the JVC does not), they serve little purpose under the circumstances. Only the Mitsubishi HS-U59 has level and bal-

ance controls (albeit tiny ones), which makes its (equally tiny) ten-segment level display of some value.

The video features are more fully fleshed out. All three decks have front-panel jog/shuttle dials, which are replicated on the JVC and ProScan remote controls. Mitsubishi's remote doesn't carry a jog/shuttle dial but does have jog/index-search buttons that advance the tape frame-by-frame from pause or initiate an index-marker search from other modes.

Programming for timer-controlled recording is simpler than ever thanks to the VCR Plus system built into each of these decks. VCR Plus enables you to program the VCR to record broadcasts simply by entering the VCR Plus code that's found after each program listing in *TV Guide* as well as many local newspapers and cable guides. The code tells the VCR the program's station, day, and starting and ending times, so all you have to do is pop in a blank tape, enter the codes for the programs and recording speed you want, and the rest takes care of itself.

Sort of. You must still learn to set the clock (and be sure it's functioning) and go through a one-time setup procedure to teach the VCR how to translate from the VCR Plus codes to the cable or TV channels used in your area. And you can still run afoul of

PHOTOS BY DAN WAGNER

**BY EDWARD J. FOSTER**



## JVC HR-VP700U (\$600)



The JVC HR-VP700U is small (the smallest of the three we compared), stylish, and (considering the price) loaded with extras. Like the other recorders in this review, it incorporates the VCR Plus system for programmed recording, but it is also outfitted with a cable-box controller that's wired to the VCR with a removable cable. The idea is to tape the controller to the cable box and orient it to transmit its infrared beam directly to the cable box's remote sensor. You do need a compatible cable box; JVC's manual lists forty-three brands that should work. When properly set up, the controller automatically switches channels on the box so that you can timer-record two or more cable stations.

The HR-VP700U has extensive insert and Random Assemble Editing features that enable you to preprogram eight scenes for automatic assembly in any sequence. The second deck must have a JVC-compatible remote-pause or Random Assemble Editing jack, which you wire to the corresponding jack on the HR-VP700U. An optional controller (RM-V403U) is available that

enables the system to function with some non-JVC VCR's. A/V recording inputs are provided on both front and rear, but choosing which set is active requires going through two layers of on-screen menus.

All front-panel controls are exposed, giving you no flip-down doors to contend with. Power, Menu, and Select buttons are at the upper left (Menu enables, disables, and switches among the on-screen menus, while Select steps you through the choices). The switch for the Hyper Bass low-frequency boost and the channel up/down buttons are sandwiched between the top three buttons and the Random Assemble Editing buttons just below. At the far right are the transport controls, just above the jog-dial/shuttle-ring combo. The transport button labeled REC/ITR initiates immediate recording, which automatically stops after 30 minutes; successive taps on the button increase recording time in 30-minute increments up to 9 hours.

Some of these controls are duplicated on the remote, whereas others (Hyper Bass, REC/ITR, and the Random Assemble Editing

buttons) are not. This can be off-putting, especially in Random Assemble Editing, which requires that the on-panel controls be used in conjunction with the search and cancel buttons found only on the remote.

As is increasingly the custom, some functions are accessible only from the remote. Many of the buttons on the HR-VP700U's remote serve multiple purposes, depending on the current operating mode. Although that's not atypical, I found the remote confusing, partly because its labeling is nonintuitive and partly because the manual is neither clearly written nor well organized. There's a lot you can do with this deck—if you can figure out how!

The back panel is straightforward: F-connector antenna-in and RF-out jacks, a Channel 3/4 output-select switch, one set of audio/video inputs, one set of audio/video outputs, the Random Assemble Editing jack, and an A/V Compu-Link jack. The last provides a means of interconnection with similarly equipped JVC audio/video amplifiers and TV sets so that they turn on and the TV switches to its video input as soon as you load a cassette and press play.

One novel feature is the Family Message function, which enables you to leave one of nine preset messages for your loved ones. The messages range from "Remember, I Love You" and "Happy Birthday" to "Please Don't Forget:"—and you can compose your own message of up to twenty characters (including spaces). The message appears on the TV screen when the Family Message button (on the VCR) is pressed. You can remove and erase it by pressing Cancel (on the remote), or you can just remove the message from the screen but retain it in memory by pressing Family Message again (on the VCR).

cable systems that scramble everything, requiring the use of an external decoder for descrambling and channel selection. (That, by the way, may end soon thanks to a recently proposed FCC ruling to insure cable-box/VCR compatibility.)

While on the subject of programming and user-friendliness, we tip our hat to Mitsubishi and ProScan for the quality of their manuals. Don't let the

size of these books dismay you. Both are clearly written, easy to follow, and quite detailed. In contrast, JVC's manual is, shall we say, traditional.

The front panels of these VCR's are relatively bare, and on the Mitsubishi and ProScan most of the controls that can be operated at the machine are hidden behind flip-down panels. The result is a clean appearance at the expense of occasional frustration

when you have to hunt up the remote to perform some task you'd just as soon do at the deck. Setup, programming, and function changes such as switching between reception of the main audio channels and SAP (second audio program), selecting the audio playback mode (hi-fi, normal, or mixed), and so forth are handled mainly from the remotes with the aid of on-screen menus.



## MITSUBISHI HS-U59 (\$599)



Anyone reasonably familiar with VCR's should find the Mitsubishi HS-U59 easy to use and the controls intuitive. Neophytes will appreciate its clearly written, well-indexed, and detailed manual. The front panel is clean, with power and transport buttons plus a jog dial and shuttle ring to facilitate forward and reverse program search and frame-by-frame operation.

Some of the controls have multiple applications. When you press REC/OTR, the deck begins recording immediately and, unless you press the button again, continues to the end of the tape. If you do press REC/OTR a second time, the deck stops after 30 minutes. Each additional press adds 30 minutes to the recording time, up to a maximum of 4 hours. The One Key Program button enables you to program the deck for timed recording without using the remote. But in the play mode, pressing and holding the same button converts the jog dial to a manual tracking control (not normally necessary, since the HS-U59 has automatic tracking).

Behind a flip-down door at the right end

of the front panel are recording-level and balance controls, editing buttons (video and audio dub), a switch that chooses alternative control codes to permit you to operate two Mitsubishi VCR's with the same remote, and a pencil-operated timer-reset switch that clears the programmer and clock. A door to the left of the display hides a set of A/V inputs (there's another on the back panel).

The HS-U59's front-panel display is unusually complete in this day of on-screen displays, but you get those too. Pressing the Display button puts up the current time, the elapsed and remaining time on the tape, the channel number, the recording source, and the deck's current operating mode. On-screen displays are used to set up the deck (set the clock, memorize the available channels, add, delete, and name channels, set the VCR Plus translation tables, and so forth), to program the timer, and to select other features.

There's a feature Mitsubishi calls Quick Search (operable from the remote) that skips over commercials by fast-forwarding

through 30 seconds of tape before resuming playback. You can press the Quick Search button as many as four times in succession to skip through 2 minutes. The HS-U59 also has an unusual auto-speed programming function (available only for the first program in the timer) that records as much as possible at standard speed before switching to EP if there's not enough tape to complete the recording in SP.

The remote is preset to operate Mitsubishi television sets as well as the deck, and it can be set up to work many (but not all) functions of a number of other brands. It is relatively straightforward to use with the on-screen menus. You can do almost anything from the remote that you can from the VCR's front panel, plus a few other things. Although the remote lacks a jog/shuttle dial, it has a pair of jog/index-search buttons that enable you to advance or reverse frame by frame and to initiate an index search in either direction.

The HS-U59 can control a cable decoder in one of two ways. There's a small window on top of the VCR to relay infrared control signals to a cable box that's suitably equipped and placed to receive them. Otherwise, you can use an infrared flasher wired to the cable-box control jack on the back of the HS-U59. The back panel also carries the antenna-in and RF-out F jacks, an ed $\bar{a}$  terminal to synchronize two Mitsubishi VCR's for editing, jacks to connect with other Mitsubishi products supporting the company's Active A/V Network (to turn auxiliary equipment on and off automatically), audio and video inputs, a video output, and two sets of audio outputs. A small switch selects RF output on Channel 3 or 4 or defeats the RF modulator entirely.

For the most part, the menus are reasonably clear and intuitive—the Mitsubishi's are outstanding, the JVC's the least impressive—but they are sometimes nested so deeply that gaining access to the function you want seems to require an endless search. Hit the wrong button, and you're back to square one. I guess you pay your money and take your choice: ten-thousand-button remotes that pro-

vide direct access to every conceivable function (if you can read the legends and manipulate the tiny buttons) or layers of on-screen menus.

### Lab Tests

For our record/playback measurements we used TDK HiFi T-120 videocassettes, a premium formulation a couple of steps above the company's standard grade. Except for video fre-

quency response (a measure of picture resolution), we tested only at the standard SP speed, since there should be relatively little difference in the other measured characteristics at the slower EP (SLP) speed.

One of the principal performance limitations of any standard VHS VCR is in video response. Whereas an S-VHS deck might achieve near-broadcast or even near-laserdisc luminance

## RCA PROSCAN PSVR81 (\$649)



Talk about user-friendly! When you turn on the ProScan PSVR81, the front panel displays a cheery "Hello"; turn it off, and it signals "Bye." Small point, but one that reflects the design philosophy behind this recorder. Its user's manual is perhaps the best I've ever seen, and the deck as a whole is a snap to use. Audio recording levels are preset—a mixed blessing, but it does simplify matters for many users.

The PSVR81 is unusual among current VCR's in offering the ability to record at the intermediate LP speed as well as at SP and (as RCA calls EP) SLP speeds. Special effects are best in SP and SLP, so you may not want to use LP often, but I'm not one to turn down freebies. Recording speed is selected with a pushbutton behind the front-panel door or on the remote and shown in the display window. Playback speed is, as usual, set automatically.

Other controls behind the panel include the input selector, the TV/VCR changeover

switch, a blank-search button to advance to the end of the recorded portion of a tape, a Record/XPR button to start recording immediately and (via successive taps on the button) to set a stop time in 30-minute increments up to a maximum of 4 hours, pause, and channel up/down buttons. Except for blank-search, all of these controls are duplicated on the remote.

Also behind the door is a set of audio/video inputs for temporarily connecting a camcorder or second VCR. There's another set of A/V inputs on the back panel for permanent connections, but the front jacks take precedence over the rear, so attaching cables to the front disconnects whatever equipment you've hooked up to the back-panel inputs.

The only controls on the main panel are a jog-dial/shuttle-ring combination, power and eject buttons, and transport buttons for stop, play, rewind, and fast-forward. The back is equally plain: the aforementioned

audio/video input set, a corresponding output set, F connectors for antenna input and output, and a slide switch to select Channel 3 or 4 for the RF output.

The remote is well designed and very easy to use. The jog/shuttle dial is replicated fully, as are all other transport controls. It also provides a separate frame-advance button and pads for variable-speed slow-motion playback, another pair of pads to adjust tracking manually if necessary (it's normally set automatically), and two more pairs for volume adjustment and channel selection. You can also select channels directly via an eleven-key pad (the eleventh key is +100, for three-digit channel numbers). You can return to the last channel selected by pressing PC (previous channel)—a handy way to jump back and forth between two channels.

An Edit button facilitates copying, while Clear resets the tape counter. The Display button serves several purposes. Pressed once, it activates the normal on-screen menu; a second press toggles to a mode that shows only the time counter; a third tap activates the memory-stop function (to stop the tape at a specific point). On-screen help is always available by tapping the Help key. Thanks to the excellent menus, you may not even have to read the manual! Finally, there are VCR1 and VCR2 buttons, which enable the remote to operate two VCR's, and a Program VCR + button that calls up the first of a nested set of menus that, among other things, enable you to set the clock, program the timer (directly or via VCR Plus codes), and set up the VCR in general.

bandwidth and resolution, any standard VHS deck will fall well short of that. Although the three models reviewed here were no exceptions, all delivered strong response up to 2 MHz at both speeds (although the Mitsubishi's response did tail off at that point at the slower speed), and the ProScan PSVR81 gave useful output at 3 MHz at the higher speed. (The broadcast limit, by contrast, is 4.2 MHz.) So one could expect resolutions of 200 lines or so from these decks, with the ProScan taking the lead.

Luminance output was close to standard level on every deck; even the worst of the group in this category, the Mitsubishi, was off only insignificantly. The Mitsubishi displayed perfect gray-scale linearity (uniformity of shading over the full black-to-white range), spot-on chroma level (related to color saturation), and absolutely no chroma phase error (tint inaccuracy). The ProScan PSVR81 was furthest off the mark in chroma level, but the implied loss in color saturation is modest and can be rectified by slightly

advancing your monitor's color control. The ProScan also exhibited the greatest tint shift (chroma phase error), but, again, this error should be correctable with a slight adjustment of your monitor's tint control.

All three decks did well in chroma differential gain (variation in color saturation with changes in scene brightness) and chroma differential phase (tint variation with changes in scene brightness). They were also notably free of luminance and chrominance noise ("snow" and color blotching.

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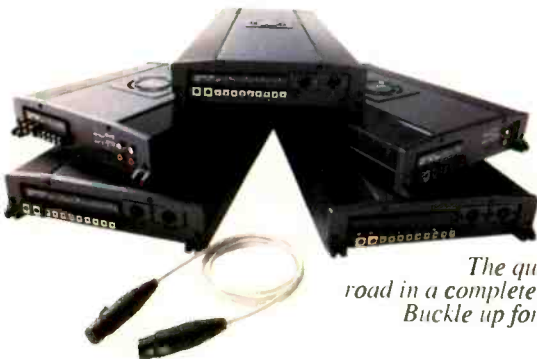
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respectively), although the tape we used for the tests certainly deserves part of the credit for that.

Audio frequency response was first-rate on all the decks under test, with the ProScan delivering the flattest overall response and the Mitsubishi and JVC (in that order) close behind. The HR-VP700U sports a feature that JVC calls Hyper Bass, which is essentially a switchable tone control that introduces a fixed low-end boost reaching 9.5 dB at 50 Hz. In the distortion measurements, the pecking order reversed, with the JVC generating the least and the ProScan the most. Distortion levels were similar to what one might expect from an audio cassette deck, which is typical of VHS Hi-Fi.

Channel separation was great on the JVC and Mitsubishi (well over 60 dB at 1 kHz), and though somewhat less on the ProScan, still easily more than adequate. As we'd expect with hi-fi recording, flutter was essentially nonexistent, and output levels seemed reasonably well chosen across the board.

With the reference and recording-level settings we chose, the Mitsubishi HS-U59's A-weighted signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) was 78.6 dB, with 9.8 dB of headroom (at 1 kHz) to the 3-percent-distortion point. Thus, its theoretical dynamic range is 88.4 dB, most of which you'll get in practice as long as you don't panic when the indicator goes into the red. (The top two segments are marked +4 and +7, and occasional flashes up there won't hurt, especially if the program isn't loaded with high frequencies.)

The JVC HR-VP700U had a measured S/N of 75.3 dB and hit 3 percent distortion about 14.7 dB above my reference. Although that makes the JVC's theoretical dynamic range, at 90 dB, a tad better than the Mitsubishi's, you'll get all of it only with exceptionally high-level inputs (2.7 volts), since there's no means to adjust recording level manually. The same holds for the ProScan PSVR81, except that it started with a lower S/N (69.8 dB) and hit 3 percent distortion at +14 dB (equivalent to a 2.5-volt input). Its theoretical dynamic range, then, is 83.8 dB, the least impressive of the group.

All the decks had very good TV tuners, with strong video response to 3.58 MHz and usable output at the top NTSC frequency (4.2 MHz). Although any of these tuners should come close to reproducing the full resolution available from today's broadcast and cable channels, I was particularly impressed with the performance of the

## LABORATORY MEASUREMENTS

### VHS HI-FI AUDIO

	JVC	MITSUBISHI	PROSCAN
<b>Frequency response</b> (20 Hz to 20 kHz)	+0.7, -1.3 dB	+0, -1.3 dB	+0, -1.1 dB
<b>Channel separation</b> (at 1 kHz)	67 dB	64 dB	43 dB
<b>Signal-to-noise ratio</b> (A-weighted)	75 dB	79 dB	70 dB
<b>Distortion</b> (THD + N at 500-mV input, 50 Hz to 10 kHz)	≤0.98%	≤1.62%	≤1.85%
<b>Line input for indicated 0 dB</b>	NA	225/410 mV*	330 mV
<b>Line output from 500-mV input</b>	0.61 volt	0.39 volt	0.52 volt

\*With recording-level control at maximum/center

### VIDEO

	JVC	MITSUBISHI	PROSCAN
<b>Frequency response</b> (SP/EP) at 500 kHz	+0.7/+1.7 dB	-0.3/+1.6 dB	+1.1/+1.0 dB
at 1.5 MHz	+2.3/+2.1 dB	-0.4/-2.5 dB	+2.8/+1.5 dB
at 2.0 MHz	-0.4/-1.1 dB	-1.4/-5.5 dB	+0.7/-0.9 dB
at 3.0 MHz	*	*	-17.0/-23.0 dB
<b>Luminance level</b> (SP)	0.6 dB low	1.0 dB low	0.3 dB high
<b>Chroma level</b> (SP)	0.6 dB low	standard	1.1 dB low
<b>Gray-scale nonlinearity</b> (SP)	≤0.6 dB	none	≤0.3 dB
<b>Median chroma phase error</b> (SP)	0°	0°	+5°
<b>Chroma differential gain</b> (SP)	0.3 dB	0.9 dB	none
<b>Chroma differential phase</b> (SP)	≈ ±2°	≈ ±2.5°	≈ ±2°

\*Too low to measure

### TV TUNER

	JVC	MITSUBISHI	PROSCAN
<b>Audio frequency response</b> (-3 dB)	34 Hz to 11.9 kHz	21 Hz to 13.6 kHz	32 Hz to 11.6 kHz
<b>Channel separation</b> (at 1 kHz)	34 dB	29 dB	29 dB
<b>Maximum audio output level</b>	0.55 volt	0.82 volt	0.45 volt
<b>Video frequency response</b> at 500 kHz	flat	+0.2 dB	+0.5 dB
at 1.5 MHz	+1.1 dB	+0.8 dB	+2.2 dB
at 2.0 MHz	+1.2 dB	+0.9 dB	+1.8 dB
at 3.0 MHz	+0.4 dB	-0.4 dB	+1.8 dB
at 3.58 MHz	flat	-3.0 dB	+1.5 dB
at 4.2 MHz	-9.3 dB	-15.9	-9.0 dB
<b>Luminance level</b>	0.4 dB high	0.4 dB high	0.4 dB high
<b>Chroma level</b>	0.3 dB high	1.3 dB low	1.8 dB high
<b>Median chroma phase error</b>	0°	+4°	+2°

JVC's tuner. It had the most uniform video response, the most accurate chroma level, and no chroma phase error whatsoever. In fairness, however, the deviations in the other tuners were so small that it's really splitting hairs to call a winner. The Mitsubishi's tuner had the most extended audio response, but the other two were certainly not atypical. Stereo channel separation was adequate on all three, with the JVC taking the lead.

I wish that all three decks had the recording-level controls that only the Mitsubishi provides, but I must admit that the preset levels used in the ProScan and JVC are well chosen. You should be able to record from laserdisc or CD players (which typically pro-

duce a 2-volt maximum output from a digital soundtrack) without problem and obtain close-to-maximum dynamic range. (That's about 5 dB better for the JVC than for the ProScan, however.) Only when recording low-level sources will you miss the Mitsubishi's controls. For the record, neither the JVC nor the ProScan uses a compressor or limiter to control audio level (that I definitely would object to); their designers have simply chosen to fix the level where they think it should be.

Picking a clear winner among these three VCR's would be an impossible task. Each has its strengths, and none has any devastating weakness. In their price range, I don't think you'd go wrong with any of them. □

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**By Laurence Vittes**

This headline is reproduced from Laurence Vittes' review of the RDL FS-1, published in the *Los Angeles Reader* (a weekly magazine). Mr. Vittes went on to say:

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In sharp contrast to the days when bulky boxes were par for the loudspeaker course, today's transducers are available in a variety of shapes and sizes, an increasing number of which are surprisingly unobtrusive. Applying some clever nuts-and-bolts engineering has engendered a wonderful variety of hi-fi speakers that blend into the visual background while leaving excellent sonic performance

This nearly 4-inch-square satellite speaker is part of Bose's three-piece Acoustimass 3 system, which includes a compact bass module with (\$599) or without (\$469) built-in power amplifiers.



**B Y D A N I E L K U M I N**

very much in the forefront. You needn't look far for the impetus behind this trend: As the core hi-fi generation reluctantly enters its middle years, the demand for audiophile performance has plowed headlong into the desire for speakers that don't take over a family's living space. The result is a flowering of models at virtually all price levels that are easy to appreciate while they're playing, but tough to find when they're not.

Inconspicuous speakers come in three basic varieties: in-wall models that are designed to be built into the room, minispeakers or satellites so small that they effectively fade into the background, and speakers that don't look like speakers at all but rather furniture or objects of art (see "In Camouflage" on page 92).

### Hide 'n' Seek

The modern in-wall speaker, pioneered by Sonance, ADS, and Boston Acoustics, among others, is an obvious choice for anyone who wants speakers that are truly concealed. When intelligently located and painted to match the walls, they can be almost impossible to spot. And, when properly installed, they can deliver the hi-fi goods—provided, of course, the music source is clean and the amplifier is good.

Most major speaker companies have embraced the in-wall format in recent years, so there is quite a variety of products to choose from. Prices start as low as \$100 a pair and scale up into four-figure territory. All in-wall speakers share certain advantages—as well as a few liabilities. Obvious benefits include a "zero footprint"—a boon to the space-conscious homeowner and apartment dweller—and the ability to blend seamlessly into the decor; most in-walls are designed to be flush mounted and have grille covers that can be painted or even wallpapered to match an interior scheme. But there are sonic pluses as well. When carefully deployed, in-wall speakers have an imaging advantage over many freestanding speaker systems because there are no cabinet edges to cause diffraction. Being mounted on the same plane as the wall also helps to mitigate the inevitable effects of room acoustics on midbass smoothness and accuracy.

On the other hand, in-walls do have a few serious encumbrances. For one, you have to cut holes in your walls and snake wires between the speakers and your power amplifier or receiver—not

▶ KEF's 10¼-inch-tall Q10 bass-reflex speaker (\$300 a pair) employs a single Uni-Q driver—a 6½-inch woofer with an integral ¾-inch tweeter.



▲ BIC America's Muro M8 in-wall speaker (\$279 a pair) features an 8-inch woofer, a 1-inch tweeter, and a paintable grille. Bandwidth is given as 40 Hz to 22 kHz and sensitivity as 90 dB.



▲ Sonance's S3500 in-wall speaker (\$499 a pair) mates a pivoting 1-inch tweeter (with a three-position level switch) and a 6½-inch woofer in a 8½ x 12¼-inch frame that's about 3 inches deep. Its low-frequency limit is given as 45 Hz.



▲ Polk Audio's Monitor 6 system (\$400) comprises two 8½-inch-tall two-way satellites and a 7¼ x 13¼ x 20-inch bass module. Bandwidth is given as 55 Hz to 20 kHz –3 dB.

▼ Boston Acoustics' PowerVent 300 subwoofer (\$400), said to play down to 45 Hz, mounts between floor or ceiling joists and vents through a grate.



Jamo's Graphic speaker (\$299) could easily be mistaken for wall art. Its 15 x 17 x 3-inch smoked-glass enclosure houses a 5¼-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter, and its fabric grille comes in a choice of three colors. Bandwidth is given as 40 Hz to 20 kHz.



The Optimus XTS 8 "swiveling cube" speaker from Radio Shack (\$80 a pair) uses 3¼-inch and 2½-inch drivers and plays down to only 220 Hz, making an add-on subwoofer imperative.



RDL Acoustics' two-way AV-1 speaker (\$99) can be used in a stereo pair or with the 11¼-inch-square W-1 subwoofer (\$199) to create a three-piece audio system or a home theater setup (shown). The AV-1 is 11½ inches tall.



Energy's two-way ESAT-2 satellites (\$175), shown with the API-HT-1 stand (\$90 a pair), and ESUB-2 subwoofer (\$175) can be used in a music-only or home theater system. Respective lower limits are 140 and 37 Hz.



Celestion's CS-2 satellite speaker (\$229 a pair) combines a 4-inch woofer and a 1-inch titanium-dome tweeter in a 12 x 6 x 7-inch vented cabinet. Its low-frequency limit is given as 63 Hz and sensitivity as 86 dB.



Atlantic Technology's System 150 speakers: Model 154 SR surround (outside pair), Model 151 LR two-way satellite (inside pair), both \$149 a pair in black, \$169 in white, and Model 153 center-channel (\$139).



the easiest of tasks for the average weekend warrior. And because it's nearly impossible to forecast sonic performance reliably, it's extremely difficult to evaluate in-wall speakers and select optimum mounting locations. The sad fact is that you won't *really* know how they're going to sound until you stick them in the wall—at which point it's too late to try another spot or another model. Nor are in-walls particularly portable, which is why you won't find many short-term renters who are willing to go the in-wall route.

On the aural side of things, the lack of a conventional enclosure makes the deep-bass response of in-walls somewhat elusive and hard to predict. In-wall speakers also tend to transmit sound (especially lows) to adjacent rooms quite readily—something to keep in mind when choosing mounting locations. One popular way to enhance bass performance without overly “polluting” the adjacent room is to assemble a three-piece system that teams a pair of in-wall speakers with a conventional freestanding subwoofer. And for bass lovers who want to keep things simple, a few full-range in-walls are equipped with an integral enclosure—usually a tall, shallow cabinet that is concealed inside the wall between the studs. The potential benefits to such a design are improved bass performance and reduced through-the-wall sound transmission. Finally, a few manufacturers offer subwoofers that are engineered to be secured between wall studs or mounted under the floor and vented through a heating-type grate.

Another interesting twist on the inconspicuous theme is the *on-wall* speaker: A conventional speaker with a very shallow enclosure (usually only 6 to 8 inches deep) that can be hung directly on the wall, providing at least some of the space-saving appeal of in-wall speakers. Many on-walls are attractively unconventional in visual appeal but most fall a bit short in the deep-bass department.

### Mini Duos and Trios

Back in the late Seventies a handful of speaker makers discovered a fertile market for mini-monitors, acoustic-suspension speakers small enough to be held easily in one's hand. Brand-name minis quickly became known for the astonishingly natural, dynamic sound they delivered. Stereo imaging, in particular, was excellent thanks to their very small and narrow front baffles, which helped to reduce image-

smearing diffraction effects. Legions of buyers discovered that only rarely did they miss the bottom two octaves of bass that was all but absent in these speakers' output; far more important was that miniature speakers could be placed inconspicuously on a bookshelf or mantelpiece.

For all these reasons—and more—mini-monitors remain popular today. They can do an excellent job as primary speakers in studio apartments or small rooms, and they make great secondary speakers in the kitchen, bedroom, or just about anywhere. Many are available in white or off-white for more natural blending into the room's decor, and some are even weather-proofed for use outdoors. Minis are also widely used as primary (front) and surround-channel speakers in home theater setups.

An even more popular speaker disappearing act these days is the three-piece subwoofer/satellite combo, a system made up of a stand-alone subwoofer and two minispeakers. The concept, popularized by Bose in the middle 1980's and quickly adopted by dozens of other makers, is simple: A woofer module—sometimes powered by its own built-in amplifier—reproduces low frequencies, while a pair of miniature “satellite” speakers handles the rest of the musical spectrum. Since deep bass is difficult, if not impossible, to localize by ear, the bass module can typically be placed wherever it's convenient, freeing the stereo speakers—which in many cases have been shrunk to subminiature size—to be positioned for minimum visual intrusion.

**S**everal sub/sat systems from Bose and others employ satellites that aren't much bigger than a pint milk carton. Such micro combos can deliver remarkably full-range sound and precise imaging. Millions of unwary listeners have been astonished during a first encounter by full-bodied stereo that seems to emanate from a pair of minute speakers. (Typically, unsuspecting listeners don't even spot the woofer module until the beaming demonstrator reveals its whereabouts—pulling back a drape or pointing behind a couch.) Sub/sat systems have thus become immensely popular wherever space is tight or the decor is incompatible with conventional tower-style or even bookshelf speakers.

Though not universal, there are a

few shortcomings to many three-piece speaker systems. First, the quest for miniaturization has led to ever-shrinking satellite speakers. And as the satellites get smaller, their ability to adequately reproduce midbass frequencies suffers. Consequently, the companion bass modules may have to operate up into the lower midrange, which tends to muddle imaging and midrange-to-bass smoothness. And the higher the crossover frequency between the bass module and satellites, the more likely it is that you'll be able to localize the bass output. While you'd be hard pressed to pick out the location of a bass module that plays up to, say, 80 or 100 Hz—with your eyes closed, of course!—you'd probably be able to sense the location of one that operates beyond 200 Hz or so.


Second, through no fault of its own, the sub/sat system's very convenience can be its undoing: Micro satellites are so easy to camouflage that many owners place them in locations less than conducive to good imaging—like behind the ficus tree or a few inches from the ceiling, rather than at ear level and out in the room. With any two-channel stereo system, an unobstructed triangular layout (with the listener at the apex) usually produces the best sound.

Third, there's the question of ultimate level and deep-bass output: More than a few compact speaker trios simply cannot play loud enough to reproduce symphonic or rock music realistically. And despite very high-tech, computer-aided enclosure designs, compact bass modules are sometimes too small to deliver the bottom octave or so of bass with authority.

Finally, wiring can be another three-piece conundrum: Cables running between the bass module and the satellites can be tricky to conceal. None of these caveats will cause casual listeners to take pause, however, and even serious listeners should be able to find a sub/sat system they can live with.


### Practical Advice

If you determine that a sub/sat combo answers your needs, there are few things to keep in mind. If serious listening is part of your plan, look into systems whose satellites are able to play below about 200 Hz—often not the case with the tiniest of speakers. Generally speaking, the lower the subwoofer-to-satellite crossover point, the more natural the sound—and the less sensitive the bass module is to placement. As for bass performance,



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



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larger subwoofers will almost always deliver more genuine deep bass than smaller ones.

Audition three-piece systems as critically as you would listen to any high-performance speaker pair. Common flaws include a "chesty" mid-range (male voices sound too "fat"), an overly warm midbass (which comes across as a prominent boom in well-recorded pop music), and an audible gap in response or imaging (often due to a high crossover point between the subwoofer and satellites).

If you're considering a three-piece combo as part of a home-theater setup in which the satellites will be placed close to the TV, make sure they are magnetically shielded (most are). All speakers radiate a magnetic field that can distort the TV picture. Likewise, if you plan to put the bass module near the TV, be sure that it, too, is shielded—many are *not*.

On the in-wall side of things, planning is the key to success. Unless you're experienced in the design and installation of custom A/V systems, seek professional help. Reputable dealers will have an in-wall expert on hand to help you select models that are optimum for your situation—taking into consideration things like your available wall space and listening preferences.

A few guidelines: Don't assume that any wall in your house is suitable for in-wall speaker installation—exterior walls are often avoided because snaking wires through insulated spaces is very difficult. Keep in mind that location plays a critical role in overall sound quality—especially imaging. When auditioning in-wall speakers, make sure that the candidates are installed in a partition of some sort, and that the models you're comparing are in similar locations. After you buy in-walls, don't mount them too high up, and space them much as you would a conventional pair of speakers. Putting in-walls too high, too close together, or too far apart will degrade sound quality. Stop to consider the room on the other side of the host wall: Some sound transmission is inevitable. Ceiling locations should be reserved for casual listening areas.

In-wall speakers can be a tempting choice for home theater systems. But remember that they're essentially impossible to relocate if you decide to rearrange your room or home. Addi-

## IN CAMOUFLAGE

Beyond in-walls, minis, and sub/sat systems are speakers that rely on disguise, rather than concealment, to stand out from the hi-fi crowd. Several firms now specialize in speakers that masquerade as something else or present such an attractive facade as to overshadow their acoustic nature.

One of the most prolific sources for disguised speakers is the Danish maker Jamo, which offers a wide array of speakers that look like lighting fixtures or architectural elements. Jamo's clever Atmosphere model combines an attractively scalloped wall-sconce lighting fixture with a two-way bass-reflex speaker said to deliver full-range response down to 40 Hz. A flexible mounting system permits the Atmosphere's halogen lamp to function as either a spotlight or an indirect light.



Rockustics' Rocky Jr. (\$940 a pair)

Rockustics offers perhaps the most thoroughly disguised of all speakers—transducers that are crafted from concrete and stone to resemble natural stones. While not necessarily the last word in hi-fi reproduction, these "rock" speakers can deliver surprisingly good sound—especially for casual background listening. Created for outdoor use, Rockustics speakers might also be suitable for some

indoor applications—as in a solarium or a corner filled with house plants.

Several speakers, including some high-end designs, have followed a different evolutionary path: They impersonate art. Carver's sculpted-wood Amazing series and several *faux-marble* obelisk-like ribbon speakers from Apogee Acoustics come to mind. Bang & Olufsen's Penta speaker is a strikingly clean chrome-and-gray column just a few inches in diameter that might easily be mistaken for a contemporary sculpture or an architectural element.

Finally, several firms specialize in hi-fi speakers designed to function as fine furniture—fine enough that the speaker aspect is not immediately obvious. One example is the Hepplewhite from Eggleston Works of Memphis, Tennessee: a meticulously hand-crafted antique-mahogany end table that gives fancy cover to a titanium-dome tweeter, two midrange drivers, and an 8-inch woofer. Such craftsmanship does not come cheap, however: Eggleston's products cost several thousand dollars per pair. Other makers of speaker furniture include Sound Decor of Cortland, Ohio, and Contemporary Audio Design (Patterson Mechanical Services) of Easthampton, Massachusetts. —D.K.



Contemporary Audio Design's C.A.D.1 subwoofer end table (\$1,300)

tionally, using in-wall speakers up front means that they'll probably be on a sonic plane that's a few feet behind the TV screen—not ideal, particularly for the very important center-channel speaker. (Of course, if the TV screen is built into the same wall as the speakers, the effect can be excellent sonically and stunning visually.) Don't overlook the handful of in-wall models designed specifically for surround-channel reproduction—their special

driver arrays and dispersion patterns can do a superb job.

Otherwise, approach unconventional speakers the same way you would conventional speakers. Audition them with a sharp ear for vocal naturalness, spatial realism, bass extension and definition, and the hundred-and-one other elements of superb sound, and you'll recognize those that deliver the real sonic goods in a snap. □

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# Cleveland Chic

There's nothing subtle about the music room in Diane Henry's suburban-Cleveland townhouse. Four towering Carver speakers, nineteen meticulously organized components—including six that play CDs—a computerized control system that talks *and* listens, and a very chic decor. "It's not a home theater system," the forty-eight-year-old attorney says emphatically. "It's an audio system with a television. As a music lover and season subscriber to the Cleveland Orchestra concerts, I want musical purity." And that she has—but things didn't come together overnight.

"I've always had some kind of stereo system, but nothing like this," Henry admits. Her pursuit of sonic excellence started as a hobby several years ago, not long after her husband died. "I was listening to the radio one day, and they played *One of Those Songs* by Jimmy Durante—my favorite song. I persuaded the radio station to send me a tape of the recording, but I didn't have a cassette deck. So I went out to buy one and [along the way] became really astonished by all the advances I wasn't aware of. Three and a half years and many visits to [Cleveland's] Severance Hall later, the sound is like being there."

Henry—who designed and set up the system on her own—started out with a pair of Carver hybrid-ribbon Amazing Loudspeakers in a bare room, eventually acquiring the newer Amazing Platinum Edition speakers and moving the original pair to the back of the room. "The Amazings have a particular dispersion pattern that is more lifelike than anything else I've heard," Henry says.

Carver amplifiers supply the power. A pair of Silver Seven-t 375-watt monoblocks drive the front speakers, while each rear speaker is powered by one channel of an M1.0t amplifier, rated to deliver 400 watts per channel. A third M1.0t powers a pair of Carver Silver Edition speakers in the bedroom.

The heart of the system is a Philips AV 1001 digital processor, featuring a Dolby Pro Logic decoder and numerous ambience modes for music and movies, including five that are adjustable. Three source components feed digital signals directly to the AV 1001: a Philips CDC-875 six-disc changer, a Yamaha CDX-805 five-disc carousel changer, and a Pioneer CLD-3080 laserdisc/CD combi-player.

Five additional source components run directly to a Carver CT-17 tuner/preamp: a

Technics RS-B11W dubbing cassette deck and SL-J2 turntable, a Philips CDI-910 CD-Interactive (CD-I) player, and two novel CD components—Sony's CDP-K1 karaoke player, which can perform vocal masking with almost any CD, and a Midtown Electronics GMR-1990, which is a Magnavox CD player disguised as a 1915 Gramophone record player. An ADC SS-300SL ten-band stereo equalizer, used mainly for recording analog cassettes, completes the audio lineup.

As for digital recording, Henry has adopted a wait-and-see attitude regarding MD and DCC but is seriously considering a CD recorder—especially now that she can get a Philips model by mail-order for \$3,000. "If they can bring the price of recordable CD down to a reasonable level, it'll really go. I have LP's that I want to put on CD."

Henry's video arsenal comprises a modest 27-inch Zenith TV and two VHS Hi-Fi VCR's: a Zenith VRD 530 HF and a Panasonic PV-4160. Video soundtracks go through the audio system, while the video signals—including those from the laserdisc and CD-I players—are switched by a JVC JX-S 300 switcher. All of the equipment is housed in a stunning brass-and-glass cabinet made by Sharut of Canada.

The automation side of the system—inspired by Henry's early fascination with the science fiction of Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov—is the handiwork of computer whiz Ron Groening. He assembled a control interface (not shown) using an SIIG MiniSys 386SX computer, a program from Home Automation Laboratories called Dynasty, and a variety of peripherals, including a voice-recognition card and a speech synthesizer.

"The computer understands my voice commands and can turn any of the components on or off and control their operations," Henry explains. And to the amusement of house guests, the system also speaks when spoken to: If Henry says, "Good morning," it responds, rather wryly, "Well, what do you expect, a fanfare?" Of course, it does a few more practical things, too, such as prompting her during a programmed routine to perform tasks that it can't.

All told, Henry's foray into audio's upper echelons cost upwards of \$40,000—including \$16,000 just for the room. "If you were able to rent the Cleveland Orchestra for about two hours—that's about what it would cost," she says with a chuckle. —Bob Ankosko

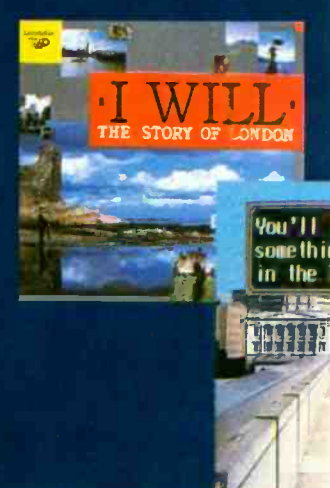
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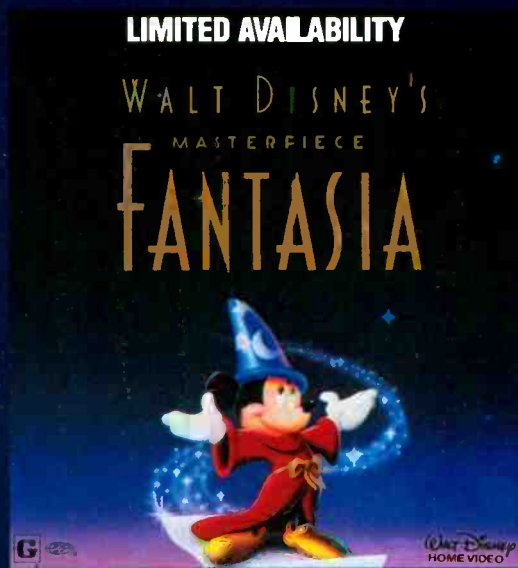


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# SPEAKER SUPPORTS

## DO THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

BY  
TOM NOUSAINE

**A**ccessories are a source of amusement and anguish for audio enthusiasts. Like a good dressing, they often seem to provide just enough pizzazz to turn an ordinary bowl of greens into something special. But there is often enough myth and hyperbole surrounding them to make your head spin.

So it is with speaker stands. Almost anyone who has ever owned bookshelf speakers has considered buying stands for them. Speaker manufacturers, even those who make speakers designed to be placed against a wall, usually recommend that the tweeters be placed approximately at ear level or that the speakers be separated from side walls by some distance. Speaker placement has an important effect on sound reproduction, and often the easiest way to meet a manufacturer's recommendations is with stands.

Like many other accessories, stands have built up a lore all their own. The conventional audiophile wisdom on speaker stands is now that, in addition to being the right height and size for your speakers, they must be (1) rigid, massive, and free of resonance, so that they do not impart their own sound; (2) stable, so that they don't topple over; and (3) firmly coupled to the room and the speaker itself, to avoid any relative

motion that might blur and muddy the sound. On the other hand, occasionally you will hear it said that speakers work best when they are isolated from the room as much as possible. Go figure.

Actually, each approach has some intellectual appeal. There are many speaker manufacturers who go to extremes to make rigid, inert cabinets for their products, so why would the rules for speaker stands deviate? And many professional recording studios go to great lengths to isolate control-room speakers to prevent them from retransmitting vibration and sound. Why not try that at home?

In an effort to get the real skinny on speaker stands in the living room, we conducted a series of blind listening tests to determine what stands contribute to the sound of a system. Do mass-loaded, super-rigid, spike-coupled stands make the sound better? What sonic role does isolation play besides keeping the teacups from rattling? In other words, what benefits do stands offer besides locating speakers properly and looking pretty?

### Let the Games Begin

We conducted our experiments in three heats, using Snell K/II loudspeakers throughout. The K/II is a



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CIRCLE NO. 11 ON READER SERVICE CARD

# ACOUSTICAL TUNE-UP

## HOW TO GET YOUR LISTENING ROOM IN SHAPE

BY  
MICHAEL  
KLASCO

Armstrong's  
Designer Series  
SoftLook  
ceiling tiles  
(left) and SDC's  
Art Diffuser  
Model P (below).

PHOTO: THOMAS HEALUTH/HUMPHREY/COURTESY SDC

**A**fter weeks of running back and forth between the local audio shops in search of the "perfect" speakers, you finally settle on a beautifully appointed tower system that sounds every bit as good as it looks. Tight bass, rich and mellow mid-frequencies, sweet highs, and superb imaging. You make room in your living room for the behemoths, wire them into your system, kick back in your favorite recliner, and hit the play button on your remote control. And then . . . *Wait a minute! Where's the tight bass? The lifelike*

*image? These can't be the speakers I fell in love with at Harry's!* You run to the basement in a panic to check the shipping cartons—only to confirm that they are, indeed, the same speakers.

You've just had a crash course in room acoustics.

The physical attributes of a listening room and its contents are every bit as important as the speakers themselves when it comes to sound quality—and far more important than things like fancy speaker wire, gold-plated connec-

STEREO REVIEW JANUARY 1994 107

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ing a recording session, the engineer places microphones in strategic locations in and around the performance area in an attempt to capture both the music and the acoustical "signature," or ambience, of the recording space. (Analog and

room, or it passes through to the other side (a phenomenon called "transmission").

The degree to which sound is absorbed by the surfaces it encounters has a profound effect on sound quality, so profound an effect that acousticians assign "absorption coefficients" to different materials: A coefficient of 1 equals complete absorption, while 0 means that all of the sound energy is reflected back into the room (no absorption). A coefficient of 0.5 indicates that half of the sound energy is absorbed and half is reflected back into the room.

Rooms with relatively nonabsorbent surfaces (and low absorption coefficients) are described as acoustically "live" and are usually dominated by hard, smooth surfaces, such as painted plaster or tile walls, undraped glass windows, and hard wood or tile floors. Such spaces tend to be noisy and loud, because the sound bounces around until it finally dies out. Rooms with relatively absorbent surfaces (and high absorption coefficients) are characterized as acoustically "dead" and usually have plush carpeting, overstuffed furniture, and drape-covered windows. These spaces tend to be quiet, because sound is quickly absorbed.

There are a number of steps you can take to improve the clarity and definition of your favorite music recordings—without tearing your living room apart.

### Floor and Ceiling Reflections

While acousticians disagree about whether horizontal (wall) reflections enhance the spatiality of music, there is no question that floor and ceiling reflections can degrade sound quality and should be minimized where possible. Such "bounce" reflections can blur the music's clarity and imaging, making it harder to localize instruments and hear the subtleties in a recording. In general, hard reflections come across as new acoustic sources—as if additional speakers were in the room. In optical terms, the effect is like walking into a room full of mirrors—you're confronted by an array of confusing images.

The most practical way to minimize floor reflections is to absorb them by putting down an area rug or installing wall-to-wall carpeting. Either way, use the thickest underpadding available to increase absorbency. As acoustical treatments go, this is a relatively inexpensive option.

Floor reflections can be minimized further by the positioning or, in some cases, the design of the speakers. Simply elevating a speaker on a stand and angling its baffle slightly upward is one way to avoid image-muddling floor



SDG offers a range of acoustic enhancement devices, including several wood and plastic versions of a modular diffusion panel called the Art Diffusor. The Art Diffusor Model P (in plastic) is shown painted and installed in the ceiling of a stately music room.

reflections. The downside is that eliminating one problem can create another. If the woofer is a few feet off the floor, for example, the indirect sound path (woofer to floor to listener) will be out of phase with the direct sound path (woofer to listener). The slight time delay can cause response dips and peaks at certain frequencies.

Roy Allison, the well-known speaker designer who now heads RDL Acoustics, documented that effect years ago, and he designed a line of speaker systems to address the problem in various ways. One model had a triangular cabinet with the woofers at the very bottom of the baffle, so close to the

floor that the cancellation notch was shifted out of the operating range of the woofer.

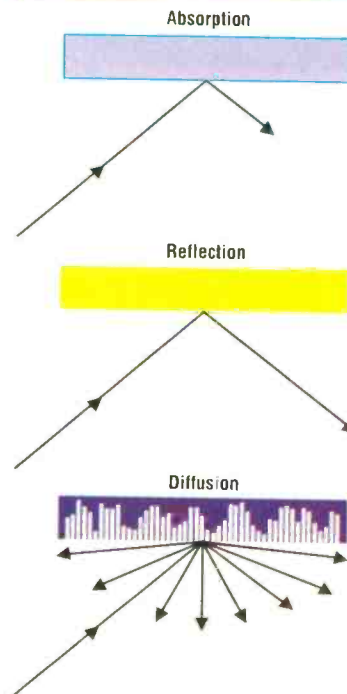
Using a subwoofer/satellite configuration with a stand-alone bass module that hugs the floor is another way to alleviate the cancellation problem, although it will probably not eliminate it.

Getting rid of ceiling reflections is more involved but well worth the effort for the same reasons that eliminating floor reflections is worthwhile. A moderate-cost option is

to install the mineral-fiber "acoustical" ceiling tiles sold at your local building-supply store. The problem is that they don't do a very good job of absorbing sound at frequencies much below the midrange, leaving the low frequencies uncontrolled. Besides, their industrial look doesn't quite cut it in a living room.

Ceiling tiles made of fiberglass, wood stock, or foam do a better overall job of reducing ceiling reflections, and they typically have some absorption down to the midbass. Various decor-friendly fiberglass and wood-fiber panels are available

### EFFECTS OF ACOUSTICAL TREATMENT





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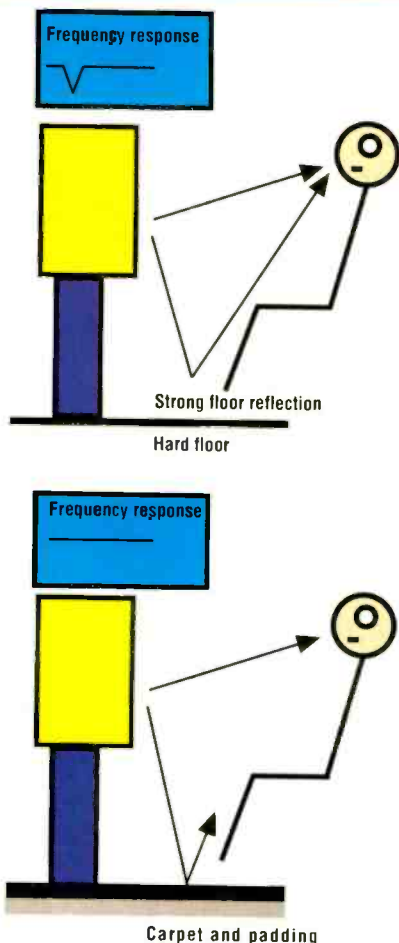
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## MIDBASS CANCELLATION EFFECT CAUSED BY FLOOR REFLECTIONS



In a perfect world,  
room acoustics wouldn't  
mess up sound too badly.  
But in the real world  
problems are inevitable.

nearby furniture or a nearby side wall can interfere with its sound. The audible consequences are impaired imaging and unbalanced tonal qualities (the result of a ragged frequency response). That's why it's always a good idea to position speakers in front of furniture and other objects that occupy nearby locations. If the speaker must be close to a side wall, try toeing it in to the listening area (not a bad idea anyway), or hang drapes with a heavy backing on the side wall to absorb the reflections.

Another option is to install fabric-covered absorptive panels, such as Fabri-Glass from Tectum (about \$4 a square foot, depending on size) or Sonora (about \$7 to \$9, depending on thickness) from Systems Development Group (SDG). These are available in a variety of woven and non-woven fabrics and many colors. If you don't mind making a high-tech design statement, Sonex and SDG also make wedge-shaped foam panels that can be glued to the walls.

from Tectum (see "Sources" at end of article). Fabric-face fiberglass tiles like Tectum Classic (about \$1.15 a square foot) can be hung from a drop ceiling, but they work best when glued to 1 x 1-inch wood strips nailed directly to the ceiling. The space between the tiles and the ceiling improves low-frequency absorption. Fiberglass density should be about 3 pounds for the best results.

Illbruck offers a variety of Sonex panels made from absorptive foam. Sonex 1 panels, made of white foam with very tiny pores, are aesthetically pleasing and have excellent absorptive properties. They can be glued directly to the ceiling, but you'll get better low-frequency absorption by gluing them to 1-inch wood strips nailed to the ceiling. Cost is about \$5 a square foot. Sonex Ceiling tiles, which are designed to be hung from a 2 x 2-foot drop-ceiling grid, start at \$7 a square foot.

### Wall Reflections

Troublesome reflections can also occur laterally, depending on speaker placement and the absorbency of the walls. If the dispersion or radiation angle of your speaker system is fairly wide, for example, reflections from

Designed to control wall reflections,  
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### Slap-Back Echo

If the wall opposite the speakers has a hard, reflective surface, sound bouncing off that wall can create discrete echoes known as "slap-back," or "flutter-echo." Unlike reverberation, which comprises many discrete echoes and adds richness to music, flutter-echo degrades clarity and overall sound quality because individual echoes are distinguishable—and often quite distracting.

There are a few ways to fix an echo-plagued listening room. First, if you have a big overstuffed couch in the room, try moving it into the area in front of the speakers. Experiment with placement to see if you can minimize the echoes or, even better, make them disappear. Failing that, consider hanging drapes with heavy fiberglass backing on the wall opposite the speakers (this approach can be very effective).

Another solution is to install an "acoustical diffuser" on the offending wall. These unusual-looking devices, some of which resemble modern art, spread sound over a wide angle in an

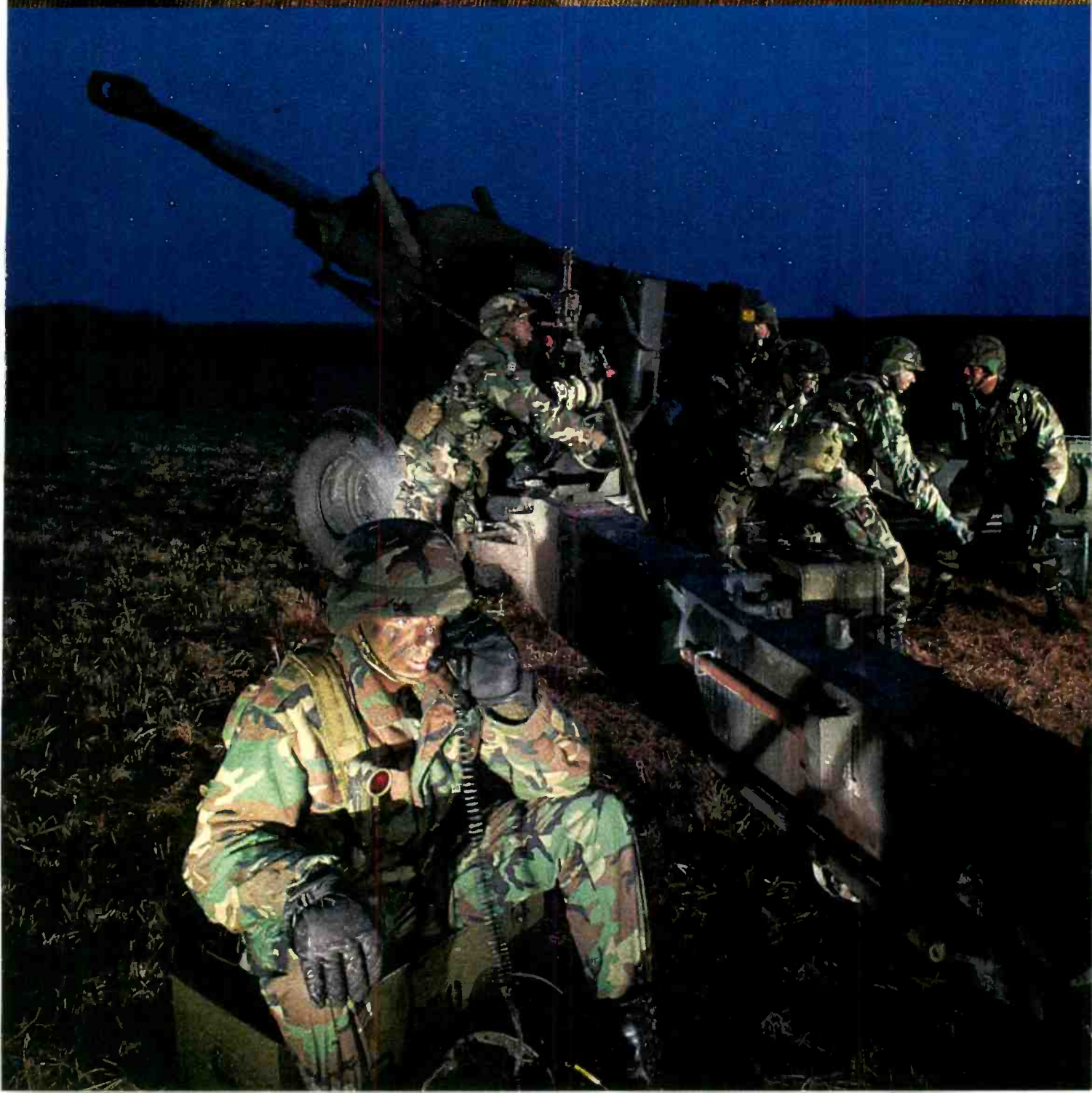
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A variety of Sonex-brand acoustic tiles made of foam and other materials is available from Illbruck. Shown in a chic restaurant setting are Sonex Panorama sculpted-foam ceiling tiles; the 2 x 2-foot tiles are also available in several other patterns.

unfocused, random way, producing many quiet reflections instead of a few loud, discrete echoes.

Diffusers are available from RPG Diffusor Systems and from SDG. RPG manufactures a full line of diffusers, including a model designed specifically to break up flutter-echo *without* absorption (Flutterfree, starting at about \$14 a square foot) and one that combines both absorption and diffusion characteristics (Abffusor, \$390 for a 4-inch-thick, 4 x 2-foot fabric-covered unit). SDG sells the Art Diffusor, an unusual checkerboard matrix of uneven squares made out of wood or plastic (starts at \$55 for a 9-inch-thick, 15 x 15-inch plastic unit). RPG's Diviewisor, for windows and skylights, has a clear or translucent back panel (\$540 for a 9½-inch-thick, 4 x 2-foot birch unit), but a less expensive—and less effective—way to minimize window reflections is to install wooden-slat Venetian blinds.

Of course, if you find diffusers too expensive or just too dramatic a design statement for your listening room, you can always create your own simply by filling a large bookcase with different sizes of books. Chairs, tables, and other furniture can also make effective diffusing devices.

## Standing Waves

All rooms that have parallel walls, ceilings, and floors will develop standing waves—unnatural-sounding peaks

and dips in bass response caused by the interaction of sound waves as they travel back and forth between parallel surfaces. But standing waves become audibly offensive only if the frequencies at which they appear are close together, such as in a room with dimensions that are multiples of each other (for example, a room with an 8-foot ceiling, an 8-foot short wall, and a 16-foot long wall).

Short of rebuilding or remodeling, you're stuck with the dimensions of your listening room, but there *are* things you can do to counter standing waves.

One device that's popular among audiophiles and recording engineers is the Tube Trap from Acoustic Sciences Corp.—a fabric-covered column stuffed with fiberglass and “tuned” to a specific frequency range. The idea is to absorb offensive low-frequency energy by placing traps around the perimeter of the listening room, especially in the corners where standing waves originate. While the Tube Trap is designed primarily to absorb low frequencies, it also has a mid/high-frequency diffuser that you can put into action by simply rotating the tube. It can help get rid of those nasty middle- and high-frequency reflections that impair imaging and clarity. The Tube Trap is available in full-, half-, and quarter-round versions with various diameters, heights, and fabric exteriors. Prices range from \$229 for a 9-inch-diameter, 3-foot-high full-round unit to \$1,219 for a pair of 16-inch x 4-foot full-round units.

RPG sells the Korner Killer (\$745 in birch), a triangular column designed for corner placement that provides both diffusion and bass trapping (absorbing).

## The Last Word

Finally, and most important, experiment. Move your couch or bookcase, slap down a rug, hang or close some draperies, add cushions to the chairs, and try relocating or reorienting your speakers. You may not even need to consider any of the special devices we've mentioned to make your speakers sound just as good as they did down at Harry's showroom. □

**Michael Klasco**, an acoustical engineer at Menlo Scientific in Berkeley, California, has had years of experience with custom installations and acoustic treatments.

## SOURCES

The following companies offer a wide variety of acoustic treatment materials and devices.

**Acoustic Sciences Corp. (ASC)**, P.O. Box 1189, Eugene, OR 97440; telephone, 503-343-9727.

**Illbruck, Inc., Sonex Division**, 3800 Washington Ave. N., Minneapolis, MN 55412; telephone, 800-662-0032 (toll-free) or 612-520-3620.

**RPG Diffusor Systems, Inc.**, 651-C Commerce Dr., Upper Marlboro, MD 20772; telephone, 301-249-0044.

**Systems Development Group (SDG)**, 5744 Industry Lane, Suite J, Frederick, MD 21701; telephone, 800-221-8975 (toll-free) or 301-846-7990.

**Tectum, Inc.**, P.O. Box 920, Newark, OH 43055; telephone, 614-345-9691.

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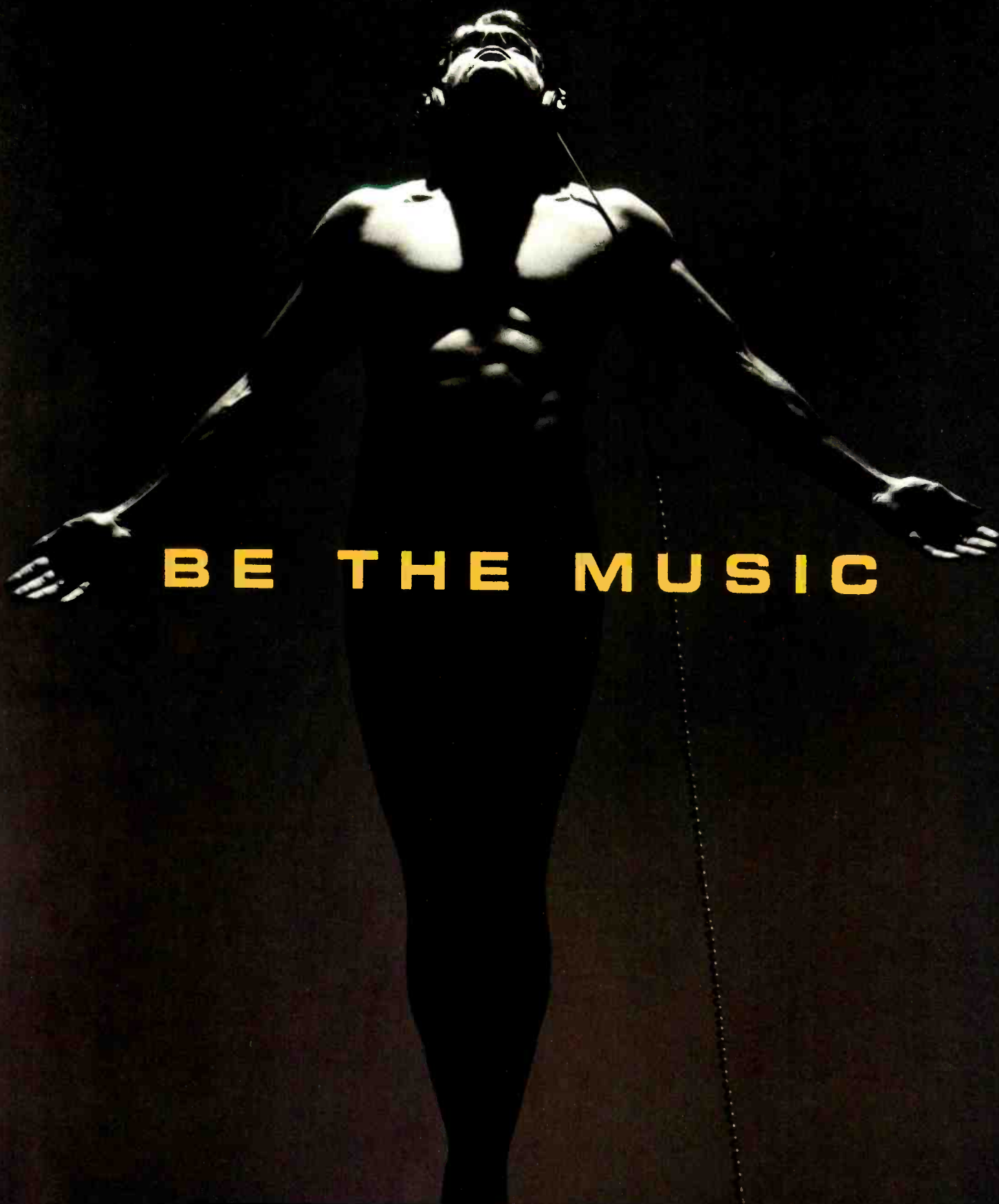
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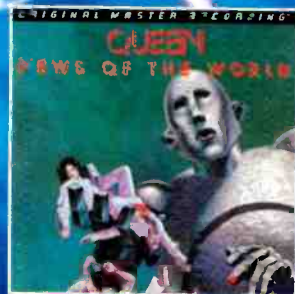
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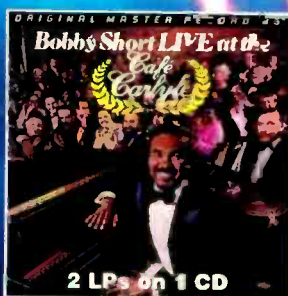
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# BEST OF THE MONTH REVIEWS

STEREO REVIEW'S  
CRITICS CHOOSE  
THE OUTSTANDING  
CURRENT RELEASES

## Big Star Twenty Years Later: Pure Pop with Claws



Will wonders never cease? Big Star—the Seventies cult band that almost singlehandedly laid the blueprint for alternative pop in the Eighties and beyond—was convinced to reunite for a one-off concert at a midwestern university's springfest. Zoo Records snatched the opportunity to record this little slice of power-pop history—now enshrined as “Columbia”—which saw founding members Alex Chilton and Jody Stephens joined by spiritual heirs Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow of the Posies. The quartet made a spirited stab at a batch of Big Star classics from “#1 Record” and “Radio City,” plus *I Am the Cosmos* by the group's late co-founder Chris Bell, a well-chosen track (*Thank You Friends*) from “Third” (in reality, a Chilton solo album), and covers of songs by T. Rex (*Baby Strange*) and Todd Rundgren (*Slut*), both part of Big Star's live repertoire in the early days.

So much for facts. What puts “Columbia” across is the raw, romping freedom with which they attack their legacy. Two points of view are operating here: The two Posies, having learned their parts

perfectly, want to put them across with passionate precision, while the iconoclastic Chilton, author of most of the material and de facto bandleader, is trying to deconstruct it into a more spontaneous, interactive experience. It's a figurative tug-of-war that gives the album a live, organic feel—as pure, uncut, razor-edged musical event, “Columbia” is the real thing.

The set opens with *In the Street*, a tangle of bum notes, uncertain timing, and the frantic thrust of a train about to derail on a curve, all gloriously appropriate to the mood of adolescent abandon described in the lyrics. *Don't Lie to Me* has never rocked harder, nor has *I Am the Cosmos* projected such pathos. But it's with *The Ballad of El Goodo*, a Chilton song from 1971 whose lyrics were eerily prescient of the course his life would take, that the band really makes an emotional connection with the music. “Columbia” just builds momentum from there.

Chilton's and Auer's guitars thrust and parry in the left and right channel, respectively, while Stringfellow's melodic, swooping bass holds down the low end

and Stephens's Ringo-meets-Keith-Moon style of aggressively tasteful drumming kicks the whole thing along. It's fun right through to the finale, an *Animal House* version of *Slut* that could raise John Belushi from the dead. For their devil-may-care daring, you've got to love Chilton and Big Star, who make pure pop with claws that scratch beneath the surface.

Parke Puterbaugh

**BIG STAR**  
Columbia: *Live at Missouri University, 4/25/93*

*In the Street; Don't Lie to Me; When My Baby's Beside Me; I Am the Cosmos; The Ballad of El Goodo; Back of a Car; Way Out West; Daisy Glaze; Baby Strange; For You; Feel; September Gurls; Thank You Friends; Slut*  
ZOO 72445-11060 (49 min)

## Touchstone Sibelius and Tchaikovsky

For my money the classic 1935 Bidulph recording of the Sibelius Violin Concerto by Jascha Heifetz with Thomas Beecham has at last met its match. The new version by Gil Shaham, a twenty-two-year-old Israeli-American violinist, and Giuseppe Sinopoli, on a Deutsche Grammophon CD with the Tchaikovsky concerto, is wonderfully satisfying.

The opening pages of the Sibelius might best be described as sinuous and intense, and as the music develops the performance seems to become larger than life (somewhat like David Oistrakh's 1967 Moscow reading). The solo episodes of the first movement are more wildly rhapsodic than in most other versions I've heard, yet without bursting the formal bonds of the elaborate musical architecture. I think much of the credit for that control belongs to Sinopoli, whose contribution fully matches Beecham's in the Heifetz recording.

While Shaham uses an intense vibrato in the early pages of the slow movement,

# BEST OF THE MONTH

about it—is this singer-songwriter's greatest gift. *Alanna Nash*

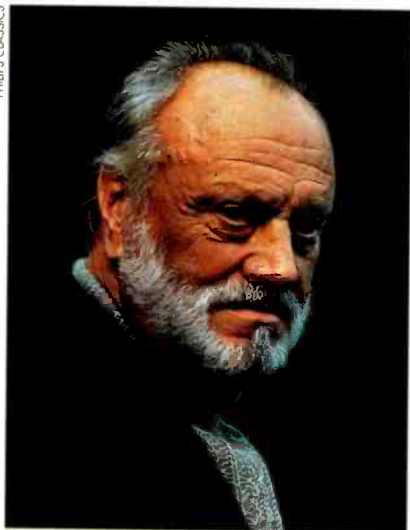
## JIMMIE DALE GILMORE Spinning Around the Sun

*Where You Going; Santa Fe Thief; I Was the One; So I'll Run; I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry; Mobile Line (France Blues); Nothing of the Kind; Just a Wave; Reunion; I'm Gonna Love You; Another Colorado; Thinking About You*  
ELEKTRA 61502 (45 min)

## Beethoven Comes Alive

**K**urt Masur's conducting seems to have become livelier and more communicative in the last few years, an impression especially apparent in his remakes of the Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Beethoven symphonies. While his first Beethoven cycle was mostly solid and reliable, his recently completed new one, again with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on Philips, is a good deal more. That was signaled in the release of Symphonies Nos. 1 and 5 three years ago, and it's splendidly confirmed in the just-issued No. 3 ("Eroica") and No. 8.

Philips's claim that this is "the first recording to be based on the new Critical Edition . . ." is a bit of an exaggeration—Otmar Suitner's Beethoven cycle on Decca used the same scores a decade ago—



Conductor Kurt Masur

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### POPULAR

- **THE CLASH: Super Black Market Clash.** EPIC/LEGACY 53191. The Clash's 1980 ten-inch EP in its entirety, now fleshed out with bonus tracks including *Mustapha's Dance*, a remix of their hit *Rock the Casbah*.
- **FACES: A Nod Is as Good as a Wink . . . to a Blind Horse.** WARNER ARCHIVES 2574. Rod Stewart and company's third album (1971), featuring the single *Stay With Me*.
- **THE KINGSMEN: In Person.** SUNDAZED 6004. Debut album (1964) by the Kings of Frat Rock, featuring their investigated-by-the-FBI anthem *Louie, Louie*.
- **THE KNACK: ...But the Little Girls Understand.** RAZOR & TIE 2020. Second (1980) album by the legend-in-their-own-minds "Next Beatles," and so bad it all but ended their brief career.

### CLASSICAL

- **CURRAN: Songs and Views of the Magnetic Garden.** CATALYST 61823. A fascinating 1975 recording by the American composer/performer Alvin Curran, who uses recorded sounds, unconventional instruments, voice, and synthesizers.
- **DEBUSSY: La Mer; Nocturnes; other works.** Ormandy. SONY 53256. "All told, the record is an excellent one, and Columbia has lavished a particularly sumptuous sound upon it" (October 1965).
- **LISZT: Sonata in B Minor. SCHUBERT: Sonata in D Major, Op. 53.** Gilels. RCA 61614. "Gilels seems marvelously at home at the keyboard—nothing seems to faze him" (September 1965).
- **MAHLER: Symphony No. 5.** Barbirolli. EMI 64749. "... calm, collected, dutiful, accurate, and respectful . . . but about as savage as an English garden party" (June 1970).

but that is not what is going to matter to most listeners. What does matter is the degree to which these performances revitalize the music without distorting or re-vamping its familiar characteristics.

The new "Eroica" gains over Masur's earlier one not in being radically different, but in being more concentrated in focus and more sinewy in execution. It's more forceful, if you will, more clearly etched both in the shaping of phrases and in the bringing out of orchestral detail—and most of all in the grand sense of momentum, a sort of drive that is never earthbound yet never hectic. There is still nothing hinting at indulgence; there is still a touch of austerity, a degree of patrician reserve that keeps the power from being an empty display and allows the Funeral March to evoke a sense of exaltation rather than mere pathos. The orchestra, recorded with exemplary spaciousness and vividness, sounds absolutely delighted to be carried to such a level. There is not a single mundane

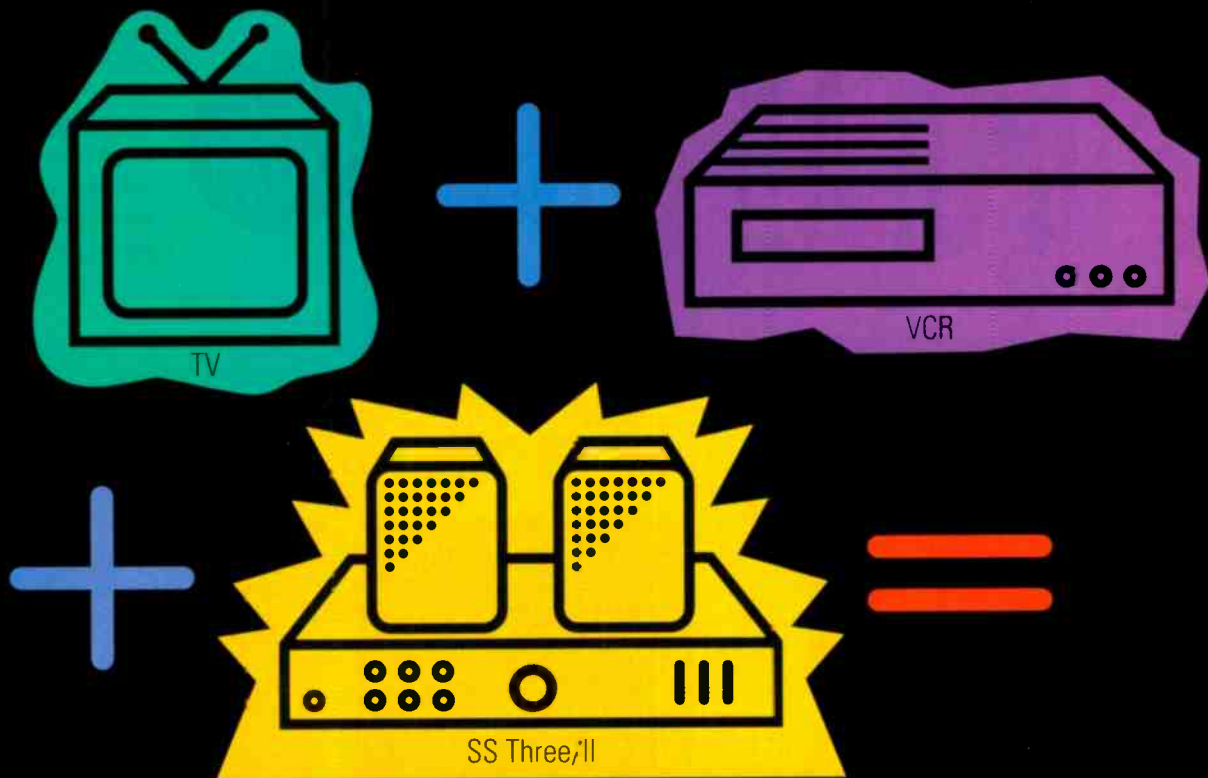
passage, and the finale, without a hint of inflation, rounds off the performance with truly Promethean impact and conviction.

In the Eighth Symphony the same sort of subtle reserve in applying power serves just as effectively to allow the Olympian humor to bloom and brighten without a nudge, while maintaining the elegant setting that gives it all point. There is a little unplanned confrontation between strings and winds in respect to tuning at the opening of the second movement—a momentary bobble in the remarkably compelling flow that might have been at risk in a retake.

Both performances are reasonable candidates for anybody's first choice, and they certainly whet the appetite for the rest of this cycle. *Richard Freed*

### BEETHOVEN: Symphonies No. 3 ("Eroica") and No. 8

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Masur  
PHILIPS 434 913 (75 min)



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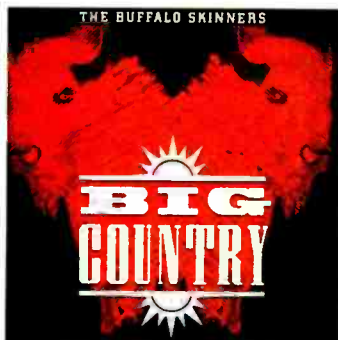
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 STEVE SIMELS



**BIG COUNTRY**  
 The Buffalo Skinners  
 FOX/RCA 66294 (60 min)

**Performance:** The Scots are a steely people  
**Recording:** Very good

On their first U.S. release since 1988's "Peace in Our Time," Scotland's Big Country jumps in feet-first with a pounding, propulsive twin-guitar chime and enough clichés in subjects and lyrics to float a barge of bilge from Glasgow to Boston. Lead singer/songwriter Stuart Adamson knows how to get your attention—he's a passionate shouter, and he can fashion a clever melodic hook and keep things moving at breakneck speed. But when he's not hard-hitting at soft targets, he goes the

tortured adolescent route, all doormat love and self-pity. Adamson would probably be the last to recognize that arrogance comes in different forms—"The one I love is still in you," he sings, "but I don't have the time I used to."  
 A.N.



**THE BREEDERS**

**Last Splash**  
 4AD/ELEKTRA 61508 (40 min)

**Performance:** Inventive  
**Recording:** Good

"Last Splash" is as much fun as a day at the beach when the waves are doing all sorts of unpredictable things. Because the Breeders

follow their muse instead of the rules of composition, their songs take crazy turns that most musicians would edit out. But the Breeders just let it fly as it comes to them from note one of *New Year*, which commences with a splashy slog through guitar murk then abruptly picks up tempo, becoming a mosh-pit special. A sample of tribal chanting provides the lead-in hook to *Cannonball*, in which a mighty, punkish quaking rumbles around beneath the Deal sisters' (Kim and Kelley) imperturbable vocals. There's bitchy humor to be found in numbers like *No Aloha* (with its reference to the bass line in Led Zeppelin's *Whole Lotta Love*) and *I Just Wanna Get Along* ("If you're so special, why aren't you dead?"). The album becomes sunnier as it progresses, bile giving way to lilt, grungy blurs yielding to a poppier resolution. *Divine Hammer* is the most unabashed pop tune here—short, sweet, and emblematic of the alternative ethos. But there's also *Hag*, with its pretty, impressionistic chords; *Saints*, a great summer's-here song that's an instant pick-me-up; and *Drivin' On*, a cruising tune that bops blithely to a country-flavored fiddle. If variety is the spice of life, "Last Splash" is a cornucopia of intriguing tastes and flavors.  
 P.P.

**MARIAH CAREY**  
 Music Box

COLUMBIA 53205 (51 min)

**Performance:** Good  
**Recording:** Very good

"Music Box" opens with one of those dog-whistle swoops that became Mariah Carey's trademark on her first three albums. But bless her gamine soul. Carey is beginning to learn the value of restraint. At times here, she punches the notes lightly, so that every lingering phrase, by contrast, creates a nice tension. She also takes a softer approach to the standard-issue ballads that dominate "Music Box." Unfortunately, as Carey improves as a singer, it becomes even clearer how limited she is as a songwriter. As pleasant as these tunes sound individually, as a group they really lack distinctiveness. Carey brings nothing fresh or surprising to the subject of romance—and she just keeps bringing it. Listening to "Music Box" straight through is *déjà vu* all over again and again and again.  
 R.G.

**COWBOY JUNKIES**

**Pale Sun, Crescent Moon**  
 RCA 07863-66344 (45 min)

**Performance:** Riveting  
**Recording:** Very good

The songs of the Cowboy Junkies are filled with labyrinths in which one can burrow endlessly. Hearing them is like entering an emotional wilderness whose underlying intensity is masked by deceptive calm at the sur-

## LOST IN SPACE



A janitor and his robot friends are trapped in orbit while mad scientists make them watch (and heckle) the worst movies of all time. That's the premise of TV's coolest show, Comedy Central's *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. We contacted the Satellite of Love—actually, the *MST3K* studio in the wilds of Minnesota—to find out what the cast is listening to between flicks.

### CURRENT FAVE

Michael J. Nelson  
 (Mike)

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*King of America*  
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 (Tom Servo)

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*Kiko*  
 SLASH 26786

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"Brian Eno's great for bizarre, hallucinatory sex."

Trace Beaulieu  
 (Crow T. Robot)

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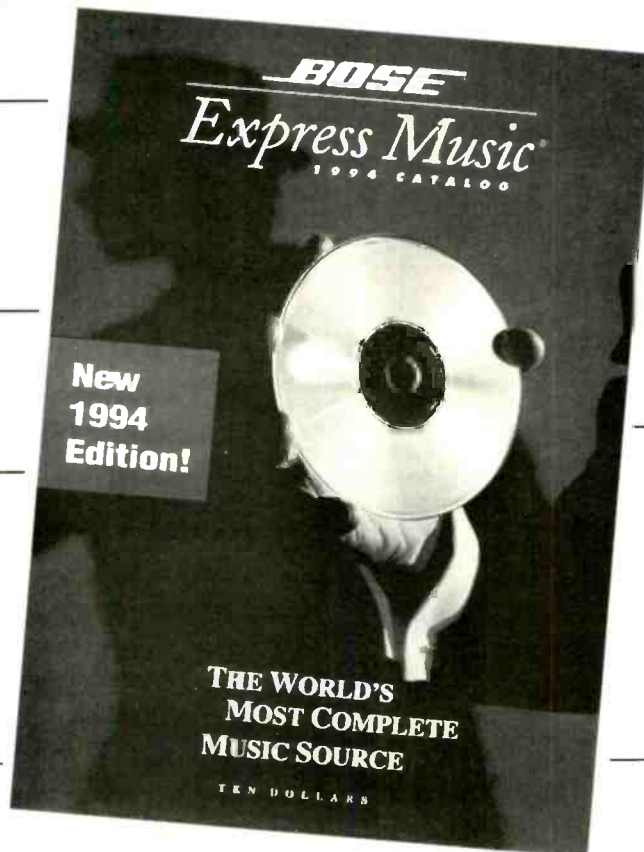
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Cowboy Junkies: the Morse Code of raw feeling

RCA RECORDS face. But plumb its depths, and you'll discover a gallery of souls set whirling by desertion, loneliness, and uncertainty. The songs are literary in the most compelling way, presenting impressionistic visions on which listeners can project their own readings. Thus, a song like *Hard to Explain* opens up to become a universal plaint about what it feels like to be left for another: "It's so hard to explain / My loss is someone else's gain."

"Pale Sun, Crescent Moon" marks the continued ripening of Margo Timmins as a vocalist and brother Michael Timmins as a songwriter. Margo sings with a subtle but unwavering fire, while the band spices its accompaniment with some extroverted lead guitar from Ken Myhr. His fuzz-toned lines crackle like embers behind Timmins's tremulous delivery in *Seven Years*, a song that finds her repeating the line "This memory is just a dead man making trouble." Such touches give the Junkies' songs a kind of urgent, upfront edge, particularly on numbers like *The Post* and *Hunted*. This is an album fairly bleak in complexion—malevolent figures skulk in the dark in *Floorboard Blues* and *Hunted*, while haunting images lurk at the edges of memory elsewhere. The songs here transmit their messages in the Morse Code of raw feeling. You can't get them out of your head, nor will you want to. P.P.

**THE CURE**

Show

ELEKTRA/FICTION 651551 (73 min)

Performance: Rich

Recording: A little murky

Some live albums function as de facto greatest-hits collections. That isn't true here, because "Show" concentrates mostly on songs from the Cure's last studio album, "Wish." Some live albums introduce a whole other dimension of a band's abilities, as seen and heard in concert. That isn't true here either, because the group's admittedly very enjoyable performance doesn't go much beyond what we've heard on record before. So why does this album exist? Probably because the Cure has produced a concert film of the same name. Unless you're a really big Cure fan, you probably don't want this. R.G.

**MELISSA ETHERIDGE**

Yes I Am

ISLAND 422-848 660 (44 min)

Performance: Intense

Recording: Good

For gossip hounds who spend time speculating about Melissa Etheridge's sexuality—to wit, is she gay?—the title of her new album might seem to provide an answer. However, if the lyrics of the title track are examined, "Yes, I am" is her answer to the question "Am I your

**THE SONG REMAINS  
THE SAME  
(REMAKE OF THE MONTH)**


Question: What are roots-rock icons Los Lobos doing on the soundtrack to *Gunmen* (MCA 10708) in the company of urban-contemporary types like Kid Frost, Rakim, and Big Daddy Kane? Answer: A blistering, absolutely faithful cover version of Creedence Clearwater Revival's 1970 hit *Run Through the Jungle*, that's what. Food for thought: Can a Creedence tribute album be far behind?

passion, your promise, your end?" If you want to pursue this further, skip ahead to *Talking to My Angel*, wherein she sings, "I've been talking to my angel / And he said that it's alright" (emphasis added).

Like the Indigo Girls (particularly the husky-throated Amy Ray), Etheridge projects emotion with too indelicate a hand on occasion but gets genuinely caught up in the rapture and agony of her life's passion. A solid songwriter, she's prevented from straying too far afield by the sturdy channels through which her songs flow. "Yes I Am" is at times reminiscent of a good mid-period Stones album, its tunes building a steady head of steam as bluesy guitar figures curl with increasing fervor around Etheridge's mounting vocal attack. *I'm the Only One* kicks off the album with a sultry, snakehipped rhythm. Etheridge clipping her vocals around whipcrack guitar lines as the tune gaits like a restless pony. Congas, guitars, and drums interlock in a devilishly hot groove on *If I Wanted To*; one of the guitars, played in Keith Richards's patented open-G tuning, gives off distinctively Stonesy echoes. *Come to My Window* takes wing on the strength of a soaring chorus, while *I Will Never Be the Same* is a power ballad sung with enchanting restraint and borne along by some stirring slide guitar.

Etheridge does go off the deep end a time or two, notably on the would-be anthem *All American Girl*, which tries too hard to fashion an archetype of a woman who drinks decaf, smokes Marlboro Reds, drives a foreign car to her office job, and perseveres despite the fact "she lives and dies in this man's world." Such lapses are forgivable, for in the main "Yes I Am" is a hard-charging, heart-on-sleeve quest for the state of determined self-affirmation embodied in its title. P.P.

**TIM FINN**

Before &amp; After

CAPITOL 94904 (50 min)

Performance: Sublime

Recording: Excellent

It's hard to believe that Tim Finn was once a member of Split Enz, the New Zealand band whose eccentric appearance and quirky music rendered them as willfully unconventional as anything now coming out of Grungeville, U.S.A. These days, Finn is a no-gimmicks purveyor of mature, ingenious, and undeniably adult pop; the better you are at that, the more you're likely to find yourself stranded without a seat at this decade's go-round of musical chairs. However, all the ostrich-headed inattention in the world can't diminish this album's excellence.

Finn has crafted a disc that flows from ecstatic peaks to melancholy chasms. The sine qua non of this school of brainy, emotionally candid pop is hooks, and "Before & After" is bristling with them: the irresistibly tuneful chorus of *In Love with It All*, where Finn gives a rainbow of harmonic shadings to the word "love"; the oxymoronic collision of the title words in *Always Never Now*, on which he sounds like a hipper Phil Collins; the twelve-string pop 'n' bounce of *Funny Way*, and on and on. Finn keeps the rope pulled taut between the listener-friendly accessibility of pop and the challenge of more outré touches (odd intervals, exotic instruments, ethnic spice),

without providing too much give in either direction. The result is a suite of songs that falls easily on the ears but has the staying power to bear up under repeated listenings. From the philosophical quandary posed by *Protected* and the hard-gained wisdom of relationship songs like *Persuasion* to the relaxed epiphany of *I Found It*, "Before & After" takes the listener on a rewarding journey through the emotions. *P.P.*

**HEART**

**Desire Walks On**  
CAPITOL 99627 (47 min)

**Performance: Hearty**  
**Recording: Very good**

**M**y wife isn't a music reviewer, so she isn't used to the risks I take every day as a professional listener. Nevertheless, she will sometimes strap herself into a living-room chair while I'm on one of my critical rocket-steroid rides. Recently she did just that, as I was going hellbent for Heart. In the middle of *Anything Is Possible* from "Desire Walks On," she said, "I haven't heard lyrics this bad in years." She was referring to one particularly uplifting couplet—"You are my friend / Hold on and transcend"—but the judgment could apply to this album generally. For all the slick, semi-hard-rock tunefulness here, you really can't pay too much attention to what's going on—it's just too dangerous. My wife survived, but you may not be so lucky. Leave the tough jobs like this to pros like me. *R.G.*

**KIRSTY MACCOLL**

**Titanic Days**  
I.R.S. 27214 (48 min)  
**Performance: Natural**  
**Recording: Okay**

**W**hen I say that Kirsty MacColl lets her voice do the talking, I mean that she doesn't rely on showy vocal effects when she sings. She hits the notes and pronounces the words and allows the natural feeling of each song to hit you in the heart or the mind or the gut. When the song is good—and much of the material on "Titanic Days" is very good—MacColl is an exhilarating performer. In the sweetly romantic *You Know It's You*, she exudes brisk charm without wasting a single inflection. With *Bad*, she creates a coy and seductive character fit for the music-hall. Only in the middle of the album, when a song or two seems a little too formulaic, does MacColl falter a bit. But then she comes on strong again, which is to say, of course, that she hardly comes on at all. *R.G.*

**NIRVANA**

**In Utero**  
DGC 24607 (41 min)

**Performance: Sounds great, less filling**  
**Recording: Very good**

**W**ould teen spirit by any other name smell as sweet? Not really, to judge by Nirvana's follow-up to "Nevermind," the 1991 album that made the term "alternative rock" meaningless by selling millions of copies. "In



ANTON CORRIJN/DGC

**Nirvana: maturing?**

Utero," the trio's third studio album, lacks much of the buoyancy of its predecessor. In fact, for all the adolescent rage fueling Nirvana's music, the hard-to-make-out lyrics of "Nevermind" were wrapped around some downright catchy tunes. "In Utero," however, is more somber, restrained, sour. This might be called maturity, of a sort, if singer-guitarist-songwriter Kurt Cobain had anything coherent on his mind. But the songs on this album jump from sarcastic asides to politically incorrect throwaways to bewildering metaphors without any real payoff. Little flecks of in-

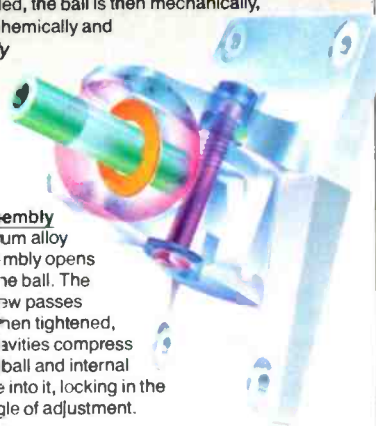
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sight, like the opening line on the album ("Teenage angst has paid off well") collect like dead bugs on a windshield. Actually, Cobain's songwriting limitations are even clearer now, because Steve Albini (credited with recording rather than producing this album) has given the performances clarity within their necessary distortions. For a change, you can distinctly pick out Kurt Cobain's voice in the mix and, since the lyrics are reprinted here, you can follow his logic to nowhere. At the same time, Albini gives the trio a deep-end wallop they've never had before: the band has never sounded this good on record. In other words, Nirvana really kicks on "In Utero," even if the songs don't. *R.G.*

**RINGO STARR  
AND HIS ALL STARR BAND**

Volume 2  
RYKO 20264 (65 min)  
Performance: Geriatric  
Recording: Very good

This is Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band in the flesh, a crew of guys who briefly bonded to tour as a graying supergroup sideshow. They're led by the one-and-only Billy Shears—that's Ringo Starr for those unborn in 1967—whose homely charm sets the tone for this caravan of stars (?) as they take their turns behind the mike. Some of it's entertaining enough (Dave Edmunds's frothy romp through *Girls Talk*, Nils Lofgren's steely *Walking Nerve*), while other performances are, well, painful (Joe Walsh's sodden, mush-mouthed stabs at *Desperado* and *In the City*).

The album plays like a not particularly inspired hour of programming on a dinosaur FM rock station: *I Can't Tell You Why* by Timothy B. Schmit, another Eagle with clipped wings; Todd Rundgren's lightweight *Bang on the Drum*; Burton Cummings's wretched *American Woman* (couldn't he have come up with a better Guess Who tune?); and material of minor consequence from Ringo, such as the pop-psychology manifesto *Don't Go Where the Road Don't Go*. But before we mock our elder statesmen's Guy Lombardo trip too smugly, don't think that it won't happen to the punks, New Wavers, and grunge-meisters at some point down the road. I can just picture it: MC Johnny Rotten introducing Sting, Thomas Dolby, Human League, et al., as each warbles a hit from their heyday, returning en masse for a rousing finale of *God Save the Queen*. Long live rock! *P.P.*

**10,000 MANIACS**

Unplugged  
ELEKTRA 61569 (61 min)  
Performance: Cozy  
Recording: Clean

Truth to tell, there's not much difference between 10,000 Maniacs plugged or unplugged, and the always violable strictures of the "Unplugged" format—the bass and organ sure sound plugged in—brought few cosmetic changes to their onstage array. Mainly, guitarist Robert Buck strums and picks tastefully on an acoustic instead of an electric.

This latest disc from the MTV series does serve as a warm farewell from the band, as singer Natalie Merchant has since announced her departure. Save for the occasional cloying, clichéd sound of a cello, this is a gorgeous set

from a band that plays best when it plays least—and they underplay to perfection here. The songs are seasoned with spring-like celebration (*These Are Days*) and autumnal musing (*About the Weather*). The not-so-maniacal Maniacs play, by turns, with a sprightly lilt (*Candy Everybody Wants*) and sobersided emotionality (*Trouble Me*). Complete with a disarmingly full-bodied cover of Patti Smith's *Because the Night*, "Unplugged" is a fitting memento of a special band who quit while they were most certainly still ahead. *P.P.*

Collection



**COMMON THREAD: THE SONGS OF  
THE EAGLES**

GIANT 24531 (57 min)  
Performance: Not exactly soaring  
Recording: Good

The idea behind gathering the hottest of the country crop to record the songs of the Eagles was twofold: to show just how much contemporary country owes to their sound.

TRACK  
RECORDS

**Ringo Starr**

When rock drummers go solo, they usually make lousy albums. Exception (in fact, he's made several), but hey—he's still

Ringo. And as it turns out, the following CD's are actually pretty good.

**Ringo** (1973)  
CAPITOL 95637  
Big hits: *Photograph*, *You're Sixteen*.

**Goodnight Vienna** (1974)  
CAPITOL 80378  
Special guests: John Lennon, Elton John.

**Blast from Your Past** (1976)  
CAPITOL 46663  
Best of his post-Fab Four solo work.

**Time Takes Time** (1992)  
PRIVATE MUSIC 82097  
Surprising comeback, interesting collaborators (the Posies, Tom Petty).



and to route a portion of the royalties to Don Henley's Walden Woods Project. But while the majority of these artists owe much to the Eagles' spirit, they're unable to duplicate their heart, tension, or angst—they can only pay tribute in straight-ahead, note-for-note arrangements. Little Texas may turn in a respectable version of *Peaceful Easy Feeling*, but why listen to it when you can pop in the Eagles' own superior rendition? Only Vince Gill's perfect choice of *I Can't Tell You Why* and Trisha Yearwood's *New Kid in Town* come close to making the songs resonate with new vibrancy. In the end, the Eagles remain unconquered, and these Nashville cats just look like one expensive cover band. *A.N.*

JAZZ REVIEWS

**JAZZ FUTURES**

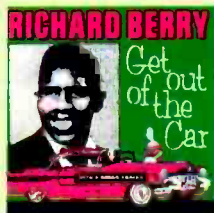
Live In Concert  
NOVUS 31558 (57 min)  
Performance: Yes  
Recording: Fine remote

One does not have to be an astute observer of the jazz scene today to see that it teems with young bop players. Several of these newcomers have already earned widespread reputations as leaders, so the idea of assembling a twenty-something all-star neo-bop band is as good as it is logical. Jazz Futures is such an assemblage, brought together by festival producer George Wein for a 1991 concert tour, parts of which are now documented on this exceptional disc. If the performances—recorded a month apart at the JVC Newport Jazz Festival and Spain's Festival de Jazz de Vitoria—don't indicate a new direction for jazz, they at least prove that bop is in good hands.

Of the two trumpet players, Roy Hargrove is probably the best known, but Marlon Jordan—who has three Columbia albums under his belt—is getting there. He can caress a ballad effectively but is best here when going one on one with Hargrove on the fiery opening and closing numbers. Tenor saxophonist Antonio Hart and altoist Tim Warfield have served time with Hargrove and Jordan, respectively, but these are no mere sidemen. Warfield's *Blue Moon* and Hart's *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered* are fine, and both men generate excitement as they engage each other on the album's faster numbers. Guitarist Mark Whitfield shows the influence of Wes Montgomery when he gets downright funky on *Medgar Evers Blues*, a performance that reflects the fondness this young generation of players has for traditional jazz. Pianist Benny Green gives tradition a nod on *Picadilly Square*, a bit of funk written by the group's only over-thirty ringer, drummer Carl Allen. Green is a superb pianist who has blossomed since escaping from his former employer, Betty Carter. *Picadilly* also features a well-rounded solo by Christian McBride, one of the finest young bass players around. Like the group Tough Young Tenors, the Jazz Futures skim the cream off that new generation of musicians we call neo-bopsters. Their flame burns brightly. *C.A.*



# QUICK FIXES



## RICHARD BERRY

### Get Out of the Car

FLAIR/VIRGIN 2438 39104 (55 min)

Richard Berry, author of *Louie Louie* and thus one of rock's true immortals, was a Fifties R&B journeyman when he recorded this little-known but entertaining album (now fleshed out with period bonus tracks). To be sure, most of it is derivative of Little Richard, Fats Domino, the Coasters, *et al.*, but hey—why not (steal from) the best? Pick hit: the hilariously sexist put-out-or-go-home title track, which some Hollywood metal band with a sense of humor should cover real quick. S.S.

## BORN TO CHOOSE

RYKO 10256 (48 min)

Alternative types (Helmet, Sugar, Soundgarden) and perennial outsiders (Tom Waits, the Mekons, Lucinda Williams) get



together for an extremely entertaining benefit album for the National Abortion Rights Action League and other like-minded organizations. Good music (check out Matthew Sweet's live-take on the Beatles' *She Said, She Said*), good recording. S.S.

## NEIL DIAMOND

### Up on the Roof—Songs from the Brill Building

COLUMBIA 57529 (48 min)

This tribute to New York City songwriters of the Sixties is so overblown and charmless that it's hard to believe it's by a guy who used to write hits for the Monkees. Barely redeeming moment: *Ten Lonely Guys*, an obscure but hilarious weeper rescued from a period B-side. Must to avoid: a ghastly *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* with Dolly Parton. S.S.

## JOHNNIE JOHNSON AND THE KENTUCKY HEADHUNTERS

### That'll Work

ELEKTRA/NONESUCH 61476 (49 min)

As you'd expect, the former Chuck Berry

pianist's second solo album showcases his trademark mix of deceptively casual blues-rock and boogie-woogie. Also as you'd expect, Johnson sounds great and the Kentucky HeadHunters are nowhere near as idiomatic as the Keith Richards/Eric Clapton/NRBQ ensemble the star fronted last time out. S.S.

## NORMAN NARDINI

### Breakdown in Paradise

CIRCUMSTANTIAL/RELATIVITY

28121-1004 (48 min)

In concert, this legendary Pittsburgh roots-rocker comes across as an improbable cross between Stevie Ray Vaughan and Dennis Leary—he truly burns on guitar and his raps are outrageous and funny. This new album doesn't quite capture Nardini's manic energy, but the best songs here (the insouciant neo-rockabilly *I Never Cared*, for example) come close enough. Lots of fun. S.S.

## WU MAN

### Chinese Music for the Pipa

NIMBUS 5368 (71 min)

The pipa (a long-necked, four-stringed lute) can sound like a twangy banjo, but the exceptionally gifted Wu Man draws an impressive variety of tonal and emotional colors from the instrument in this recital of traditional and contemporary pipa compositions. An excellent addition to even a small collection of world-music CD's.

William Livingstone

## CHARLES MINGUS

### Thirteen Pictures

RHINO 71402 (two CD's, 129 min)

Performance: Must-have

Recording: Very good

Charles Mingus had a wonderful understanding of jazz. A great modernist who could trace his on-the-job training to bands led by Louis Armstrong and Kid Ory, he also had great dramatic flair and political consciousness, and he put it all together in music that is as much its own category as the music of Duke Ellington.

"Thirteen Pictures: The Charles Mingus Anthology" is a beautifully packaged release that combines material from the Atlantic, Impulse, EmArcy, United Artists, and Columbia labels with recordings issued by Mingus on his own labels. It starts with *Cumbia and Jazz Fusion*, an extended work written for a 1977 film. A suite of sorts, it encompasses so many elements that it is virtually a slice of Mingus's many-faceted approach to jazz. Completely different, but just as extraordinary, is *Myself When I Am Real*, a selection from the bassist's 1963 piano album on Impulse, created spontaneously in the studio.

"Pictures" also includes such classic Mingus works as *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, *Good-bye Pork Pie Hat*, *Better Git It in Your Soul*, and the two-part *Meditations on Integration*. But perhaps the most ambitious work here is *Half-Mast Inhibition*, a tightly scored piece that Mingus claimed to have written in the late Thirties but did not record until 1960. And for something completely different, there is *Wig*

*Wise*, a piece from Mingus's 1962 studio meeting with Ellington (a musical encounter that he must have seen as a personal triumph, for Duke had personally fired him from his orchestra nine years earlier). There is more, and it is all spectacular, including a fifty-page illustrated booklet. Mingus was a true genius, and this collection offers ample proof of that. I cannot recommend it too highly. C.A.



## DAVID MURRAY

### Fast Life

DIW/COLUMBIA 57526 (61 min)

Performance: Mixed

Recording: Very good

When David Murray arrived in New York from the West Coast in 1975 he was only twenty, but he had been playing saxophone for eight years—first in church, then with rhythm-and-blues bands. In New York, he quickly became identified with the Greenwich

Village loft set, having become interested in jazz before leaving California. One of Murray's strongest jazz influences was the late saxophonist Albert Ayler, remnants of whose somewhat forbidding style can still be heard on "Fast Life." Murray's latest CD, which features his quartet augmented on two tracks by fellow tenor Branford Marsalis.

Marsalis appears on the opening track, *Crucificado*, a Dave Burrell composition that sounds at first like something Stan Getz might have dished up during his Bossa Nova period. Toward the end, however, it turns into a chaotic free-for-all that has more in common with the old loft sounds. That's not a put-down, because the transition works very well. I am less thrilled with *Calle Estrella*, which also has a south-of-the-border beat and is on the dull side. Marsalis returns on the title track, an eventful 12-minute exercise that has the two tenors conversing at a fast clip. With the rhythm section foaming under them, they generate considerable excitement, and pianist John Hicks follows with an appropriately frenetic solo. Unfortunately, the build-up is anticlimactic, for excitement takes an intermission when bassist Ray Drummond and drummer Idris Muhammad solo. That is not to say that these are not good players, just that their solos here were ill-placed. The remaining three tracks are a mixture of good, so-so, and boring, but Murray's own *Off Season* is a fine quartet track that demonstrates why he has lasted so long when so many of his former loft associates have squeaked themselves into oblivion. C.A.



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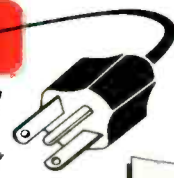


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**BEETHOVEN: Symphonies Nos. 2 and 8**  
 La Scala Philharmonic. Giulini  
 SONY 48238 (66 min)  
**Performance: Splendid Second**  
**Recording: Transparent**

Carlo Maria Giulini's reading of the Second Symphony is big and bluff, expansive rather than crisp, but it flows at a steady pulse that leaves the slow movement in no danger of grinding down. The scherzo and finale shine with an amiable sort of vitality that will appeal especially to listeners who find other readings overdriven. The orchestra is splendid in every section, with strings that really are silken. The recording itself is silken rather than buttery, outstanding in both richness and transparency; this is how an orchestra ought to sound.

But this is not how the Eighth Symphony ought to sound. Giulini has not merely steered clear of any temptation toward giddiness but has shorn the work—which Beethoven himself described as “unbuttoned”—of the effervescence and humor that underlie its distinctive character. The approach is so monumentally sober that one might imagine the conductor had been prepared for the quite different Eighth of Bruckner. While there is not much point in listening to more than a single interpretation if all are going to be the same, this one just doesn't work for me. *R.F.*

**BRYARS: Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet**  
 Waits; orchestra  
 POINT 438 823 (75 min)  
**Performance: Mesmerizing**  
**Recording: Good**

If you put this CD on your player and hear nothing at first, or perhaps just a faint and distant singing, have no fear—the problem is not a defect or system malfunction but a long, slow fade-in. What fades in is the sound of a tramp singing a fragment of an old hymn tune on a piece of soundtrack tape recorded in London in 1971. From it the composer Gavin Bryars made a tape loop, and to that simple and moving little rendition he gradually, over some 75 minutes, adds and takes away an

orchestral accompaniment, finally appending a version by the singer-songwriter Tom Waits, whose gravelly voice, a fitting extension of the old man's singing, fades away against angelic high strings.

There is nothing in the least mushy or sentimental about all of this. Bryars is absolutely faithful to the old man's song, phrase by phrase by phrase by phrase, sweetening it a little but resisting the obvious temptation to build to any kind of climax or peroration. Only at the very finish does Waits take over, and even so he remains close to the original.

The result is either the most boring and repetitive piece of music you have ever heard,



or the most profound and subtle meditation on age, human misery, and simple faith that you can imagine. In fact, it is both. If that sounds like a paradox, it is one. Out of such paradoxes, Gavin Bryars makes his music. *E.S.*

**COPLAND: Clarinet Concerto**  
**BERNSTEIN: Clarinet Sonata**  
**GERSHWIN, JENKINS: Clarinet Arrangements**  
 Stoltzman: London Symphony,  
 Thomas and Stern  
 RCA VICTOR 61790 (64 min)  
**Performance: Delightful**  
**Recording: Fine**

The pastoral and reflective little Clarinet Concerto written by Copland for Benny Goodman is the only original item here. Everything else was expressly arranged for clarinet and orchestra by various capable hands, including Bernstein's Clarinet Sonata and variants from *West Side Story*, several songs and piano preludes by George Gershwin, and Gordon Jenkins's tribute to Goodman, *Goodbye (In Memory of Benny)*. The results are delightful Americana, eminently suited to Richard Stoltzman's many and varied talents. Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the concerto and the Jenkins; the capable Eric Stern (best known for his musical theater work) takes the rest. *E.S.*

**DVORAK: Cello Concerto; Silent Woods; Rondo; Slavonic Dance**  
 Schiff: Vienna Philharmonic. Previn  
 PHILIPS 434 914 (54 min)  
**Performance: Outstanding**  
**Recording: Very good**

You can add this Heinrich Schiff-André Previn collaboration in the Dvorak Cello Concerto to the top half-dozen of the more than thirty previous versions. Given the sentiment inherent in the work, it is a sore temptation for most cellists to squeeze out yet more. For my taste, Schiff has the balance of emotion and virtuosity exactly right. The hushed loveliness of his initial approach to the first movement's lyrical theme lingers in memory, and he takes the showier passages in stride, with no attempt at flamboyance for its own sake. The slow movement is breathtakingly beautiful, graced not only by the delicacy and nuance of the solo playing but also by ravishing sound from the Vienna Philharmonic woodwinds—and by the horns in their celebrated central episode. The finale can be heavy going at times, but Schiff eases up in just the right way and keeps the music moving until the poignant valedictory passage, to which he brings the utmost poetic expression.

The conductor functions on a par with the soloist in this concerto, and Previn not only does himself proud in that department, but he plays top-drawer piano accompaniments for the encore pieces, usually heard with orchestra, that fill out the CD. The recorded balance between cello and orchestra is flawless in the concerto, and there is just the right amount of acoustic elbow room to produce a warm, full sound. Highly recommended! *D.H.*

**GRIEG: Piano Concerto (original version); Small Piano Pieces (1859)**  
 Derwinger: Norrköping Symphony, Hirokami  
 BIS 619 (62 min)  
**Performance: Personal and passionate**  
**Recording: A tad resonant**

A composer's anniversary can hardly pass these days without the exhumation of some earlier version of a warhorse. Grieg apparently tinkered with his Piano Concerto for roughly forty years, mostly with the orchestration. Though the differences aren't earthshaking, the original version here seems a bit bolder than the familiar one, with a greater reliance on brass and winds. What really makes this recording worth hearing is the young pianist Love Derwinger. He has rethought the concerto much in the spirit of Percy Grainger and, like Grainger, plays it with the freedom of someone who knows a piece of music so intimately he “owns” it.

But for all of Derwinger's romantic impetuosity in the concerto—thankfully devoid of

# The First Freudian Musical



Soprano Jessye Norman

**S**choenberg's *Erwartung*—the title means waiting, expectation—is one of the landmark pieces of twentieth-century European music, and Jessye Norman's recording of it is a landmark performance.

This "monodrama," as the composer called it, is a one-act, one-person music-theater piece in which everything happens in the performer's head—the kind of piece that's often better served in a live performance. The Woman, otherwise unidentified, is looking for her absent lover and either does or does not finally find his dead body.

*Erwartung* is really about her mental states, and the highly emotional music is composed in a method that can only be described as free association. It is not only atonal but a-thematic, a-melodic, a-rhythmic, and totally neurotic. In short, the first Freudian musical.

Yet this truly powerful work is also firmly rooted in the nineteenth-century Wagnerian music drama, here carried to its ultimate conclusion. Music and language are totally intertwined in a deep and rich way; the music is, in effect, the psychological subtext of the drama. The words, by a young poet and medical student named Marie Pappenheim, were set at a fever pitch. The work was completed in seventeen days, and the intensity of its creation is reflected in the music. It is, especially in a performance like the one here, an onrushing, inspired work that cannot be explained or analyzed in any conventional way.

Because of the extreme nature of the piece, it is easy for a performer, even a good one, to be overwhelmed by it; instead of creating the drama, the singer ends up, like the character, as a victim. No danger of that here. Jessye Norman is so much the confident master of the painful twists and turns of the astonishing vocal line that she is able to take the rough and scarred music to an almost lyric place. The drama and psychological torment are there, but never ex-

pressed at the expense of the music. This is, literally, a beautiful as well as a powerful performance.

The orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera, led by James Levine, is rarely as challenged as it is here; the musicians do a first-class job with a score that pushes orchestral virtuosity to the limit. The only hitch is that the vocal line is placed so far forward in the Philips recording that some of the orchestral details are lost in the background.

The CD is filled out with Schoenberg's *Brettli-Lieder*, or Cabaret Songs, which date from only a few years earlier than *Erwartung* but are, superficially at least, a world apart. Written for a Berlin art cabaret, supposedly in a popular style, they are really almost classically pure art songs with a light touch—something Schoenberg was not always noted for. They are artfully wrought and very artfully performed by Norman with Levine at the piano; these artists are as much at home with the romantic charm of these neolieder as with the feverish and psychotic atonality of the monodrama.

Eric Salzman

**SCHOENBERG:**

*Erwartung; Cabaret Songs*  
Norman; Metropolitan Opera  
Orchestra. Levine  
PHILIPS 426 261 (62 min)

simpering or swooning—even he can't get too excited over the juvenilia filling out the disc. The twenty-three small piano pieces written when the composer was sixteen are promising snippets of ideas waiting to be developed, and they seem all the more remote for the overly resonant acoustic. *D.P.S.*

**MOZART: Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Seraglio)**

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DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON ARCHIV  
435 857 (two CD's, 133 min)

**Performance: Excellent**  
**Recording: Excellent**

**T**his is an intimately scaled performance featuring young, as yet uncelebrated singers, but it comes off extremely well. John Eliot Gardiner leads with his customary fleetness and gives the singers strong support. Some of his tempos may prove too brisk for a staged performance, but here the cast is with him all the way, and an admirable momentum is sustained. The English Baroque Soloists offer delicate and transparent sound, with lustily stressed woodwind and percussion detail.

The excellent impression I gained from the soprano Luba Orgonasova's earlier recital disc on Naxos is fortified here. She brings a

warm tone, pure intonation, and accurate coloratura to Konstanze's music. In the taxing "Märtern Aller Arten" aria she infuses her singing with a sense of defiance without sacrificing roundness of tone. The young American tenor Stanford Olsen shines with his stylish and tonally winning Belmonte.

The tenor Uwe Peper is an expert and sympathetic Pedrillo, partnered by the charming and agile Blonde of the soprano Cyndia Sieden. Sieden dispatches "Welche Wonne" with the instrumental ease of a flutist—vocal characterization becomes a moot point at this tempo. Cornelius Hauptmann is really a bass-baritone, without the true *profundo* sonority, but he puts across both the comedy and menace of Osmin's character with great skill and contagious gusto.

The excellent annotations assure us that the recording is based on the new (1982) Bärenreiter edition. I have two minor quibbles: There's a certain fussiness in the orchestral phrasing in the introduction to "Märtern Aller Arten," and the spoken dialogue is recorded at an almost whispering level. *G.J.*

**PROKOFIEV: Piano Concertos Nos. 1-5**

Kraïnev; Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, Kitaenko  
TELDEC 73257 (two CD's, 123 min)

**Performance: Four out of five**  
**Recording: Comfortable**

**PROKOFIEV: Piano Concertos Nos. 1, 3, 5**

Bronfman; Israel Philharmonic, Mehta  
SONY 52483 (66 min)

**Performance: Steely, brilliant**  
**Recording: X-ray clarity**

**N**early fifty now, Vladimir Kraïnev has made very few recordings (few, at least, known in the West), and his name has yet to become as familiar as those of some other Russian pianists. But he is a formidable representative of the highest standards of the Russian school and, it would appear, especially well attuned to the Prokofiev idiom. His big, assured approach in the Teldec set encompasses wit, lyricism, and stunning gradations of color, as well as the sort of unstrained power that suggests vast resources held in reserve—in other words, the very qualities this music demands. He also never seems to be using any of the concertos as mere "vehicles."

Well, perhaps the Third. Curiously, while Kraïnev seems comfortably "inside" the four less familiar concertos, responding to their various demands with the most winning sense of spontaneity, he does seem given to self-conscious gestures in the most popular one, as if determined to put his own imprint on it even if that means distorting a phrase here or exaggerating an effect there. Too bad, for his other performances are thoroughly persuasive. Dmitri Kitaenko has the orchestra in fine

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shape, and although some details are a little lost in the sonic focus, which favors sumptuousness over clarity, the listening is very comfortable.

Some of that sumptuousness, in fact, would have been welcome in the Sony recording, which tends toward harshness in its almost X-ray image of the Israel Philharmonic winds and brasses. Yefim Bronfman's steely, brilliant piano playing is itself beautifully focused, however, and he and Zubin Mehta leave nothing to be desired in their vital account of the Third Concerto. I got the impression, though, that the First and Fifth may have been less thoroughly digested: In the First, Bronfman is a little fussy in his phrasing, and in the Fifth one might wish for a little more lyricism. If only Bronfman's Third could replace Krainev's quirky one on Teldec—that would be quite a set! But his disc has a lot going for it, and I'm eager to hear what he and Mehta do with the remaining concertos, No. 2 in particular. *R.F.*

**RODRIGO:** *Concierto de Aranjuez*  
**TAKEMITSU:** *To the Edge of Dream*  
**ARNOLD:** *Guitar Concerto*

Bream: City of Birmingham Symphony. Rattle  
 EMI 54661 (58 min)

**Performance:** Youthful energy and ardor  
**Recording:** A perfect balance

This is the fourth time that Julian Bream has recorded the Rodrigo concerto, which all by itself constitutes the classical period of guitar concertos. It is still very sexy music, especially in this amazingly youthful performance: the veteran Bream stays right up with Simon Rattle, many years his junior, in energy and ardor. The Takemitsu, which hovers curiously between old-fashioned modernism and New Age sensibility, is extremely well conceived for the medium and gives Bream a chance to show a very different side of his musical personality. The mildly jaunty, rather diffuse Malcolm Arnold concerto is dedicated to Bream and is, like the Rodrigo, a staple of what is, after all, a small repertoire. Bream plays it as if he owns it (and, in fact, he does), and that makes it almost convincing. Good sound, perfectly balanced. *E.S.*

**SCHUBERT:** *String Quartets No. 2 and No. 14 ("Death and the Maiden")*

Artis Quartet  
 SONY 52582 (59 min)  
**Performance:** Idiomatic  
**Recording:** Very good

The Quartet No. 2, which Schubert composed at the age of fifteen, is no mere achievement for a teenager, and no mere aping of the Mozart-Haydn models. There are defi-

nite touches of the Schubert to come in the carefree and spirited first movement, the *siciliana*-style slow movement, the *Ländler*-flavored minuetto, and the major/minor finale, which displays genuine structural command of the medium.

The young Artis Quartet performs both No. 2 and the familiar No. 14 in the best Viennese Romantic tradition. The recording locale (an Austrian *Schloss*, or "castle") produces a bright but not glaring sonority; the microphoning is close enough that the audible decay time presents no problems. *D.H.*



**SHOSTAKOVICH:** *Symphony No. 11*

National Symphony, Rostropovich  
 TELDEC 76262 (69 min)

**Performance:** Eloquent  
**Recording:** Good

Shostakovich's massive Symphony No. 11 ("The Year 1905") commemorates the abortive 1905 Russian revolution, with its January 9 slaughter of unarmed petitioners before the Tsar's Winter Palace. It was composed at the time of another failed uprising, that of November 1956 in Hungary (ruthlessly put down, ironically enough, by Soviet troops).

The four movements—"The Palace Square," "The Ninth of January," "In Memoriam," "The Tocsin"—are a fantasia of huge dimensions built on Russian prison and revolutionary songs. There is little or no symphonic development, but there are plenty of atmospherics—cold, tense, fearful—of a type only Shostakovich could generate (his experience with film music dated back to his boyhood in the 1920's, when he pounded the piano for silent movies).

Mstislav Rostropovich, the composer's steadfast friend and devoted interpreter, brings a special authority to this latest recorded realization. Like James DePreist in his 1988 Helsinki reading on Delos, Rostropovich opts for very slow tempos, making the performance more than 10 minutes longer than most others on record. The effect is to enhance the sense of space overall and to give the fast action music, when it finally comes in the last movement, even more overwhelming impact (further heightened at the end by the use of a set of 200-pound bells).

Rostropovich has a much better orchestra than DePreist's, especially in the strings, which bring a heartstopping poignancy to the "In Memoriam" movement and such elemental force to the finale that you can almost smell the rosin. Teldec's sound also has more impact and presence than the Delos CD, due in part to a tighter acoustic surround. This is the best available recording of "The Year 1905." *D.H.*

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**HONEGGER: Pastorale d'Été; Pacific 231; Rugby; Other Works**  
Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, Plasson  
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON  
435 438 (65 min)

This CD explores Honegger's narrative orchestral works, including tone poems, ballets, and suites from film scores. Aside from old favorites there are some intriguing discoveries, including a prelude for Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and a "pantomime symphony" called *Horace Victorieux*. The harmonies have a lingering, dissonant kick and a coloristic distinctiveness that's emphasized by these sumptuously recorded, idiomatic performances. *D.P.S.*

**SCHUBERT: Symphony No. 9; Overture in the Italian Style**  
San Francisco Symphony, Blomstedt  
LONDON 436 598 (67 min)  
Herbert Blomstedt gives the Schubert Ninth Symphony, the "Great C Major," a decidedly cool, Nordic treatment with a brisk first movement, a darkly classic slow movement (with unusual restraint at the

tragic climax), a well-sprung scherzo taking all possible repeats (as in the other movements), and a tensely brilliant finale with a coda of near-elemental ferocity. Things are more to my taste in the pert, Rossinian overture. Good sound. *D.H.*

## AMERICAN CLASSICS

Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Mauceri  
PHILIPS 438 663 (70 min)  
John Mauceri's hitherto impressive series with the new Hollywood Bowl Orchestra falters here. Gershwin's *An American in Paris* and Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story* come off as fairly lackluster runthroughs. John Adams's *The Chairman Dances* has little rhythmic verve or sparkle. Most disappointing of all is Mauceri's "new edition" of Luther Henderson's symphonic arrangement of Duke Ellington's frustratingly underdeveloped 1950 tone poem, *Harlem*—it is not improved by the retouching or the heavy-handed performance. *Roy Hemming*

## REMBRANDT TRIO

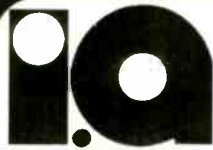
Piano Trlos by Ravel, Chaminade, and Saint-Saëns  
DORIAN 90187 (74 min)  
The Rembrandt Trio plays beautifully in these ingratiating, well-crafted, generally light-hearted French chamber works. The

little-known Saint-Saëns Trio No. 1 is especially pleasing, and I was happy to have an opportunity to hear anything by Cécile Chaminade, who is not well represented in the current catalog. Good recorded sound reveals plenty of detail without sacrificing warmth. *William Livingstone*



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**R. STRAUSS: Ein Heldenleben;**

**Till Eulenspiegel**

Cleveland Orchestra, Dohnányi  
LONDON 436 444 (61 min)

**Performance: Terrific "Till"**

**Recording: Very good**

In this performance of Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, or *A Hero's Life*, Christoph von Dohnányi's characterization of the Hero strikes me as somewhat robotic, at least at first; he moves swiftly, but like a well-oiled machine. The Cleveland winds have a real field day, on the other hand, portraying the Hero's critics, who come across as a marvelous barnyard lot. I don't find much caprice and mercuriality in the "Hero's Helpmate"—personified capably enough in violin solos by the orchestra's concertmaster. The battle scene gets off to a rousing start with wonderfully recorded offstage trumpets, but the unison return of the Hero theme at its close brings no real sense of culmination. Dohnányi finally warms to his task when we get to "The Hero's Works of Peace"—he clearly seems to enjoy its juxtaposition and combination of quotes from Strauss's earlier works, and the music's beautifully balanced polyphonic texture is elegantly realized. The final moments are distinguished by superb solo-horn playing.

Dohnányi is much more in his element in the volatile world of *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*. Rarely has that scamp been so astutely characterized in his many guises, thanks to the orchestra's flawlessly blended and articulated string tone, razor-sharp attacks by woodwinds and brass, crackling percussion work, horn playing with nary a bobble, and conductorial control that's second to none but never coldly virtuosic. The rendition of the epilogue really says it all, and the CD is worthwhile for this 15-minute track alone. The recording, too, is a tad more sharply focused than in *Heldenleben*, but that may stem from the differences in the scoring of the two works. *D.H.*

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**Performance: Scrumptious**

**Recording: Excellent**

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because it's all so ingratiating that it could nudge choral directors toward more adventurous repertory. It truly doesn't bite—though occasionally I wished that it would.

Olivier Messiaen's *O Sacrum Convivium* is an early work that sounds hardly at all like his more mature music. Many will remember György Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna* from its use in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. And Meredith Monk's *Return to Earth* is a hypnotic study in rhythm that immediately touches something elemental in the listener.

The three new works commissioned for the recording show that wonderful music can still

be written far from the cutting edge of modernism. Robert Moran's lovely *Seven Sounds Unseen* sounds like a descendant of Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*. Ricky Ian Gordon's deeply personal *Water Music: A Requiem* is a subtle, intimate setting of its haiku-like text and a formal hybrid as well, contrasting thematic development with a song-like refrain. Most striking of all is Kim D. Sherman's Bosnia-inspired *Graveside*, with its Eastern European folk influences and use of drone effects from sacred music. The consistently rich-sounding performances do justice to the different needs of each piece. *D.P.S.*

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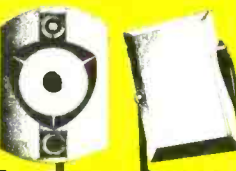
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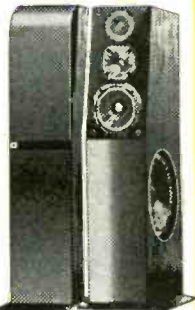
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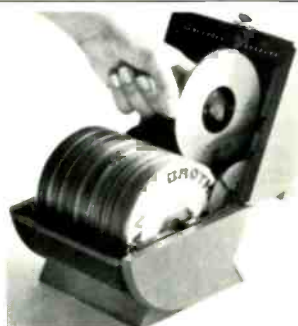
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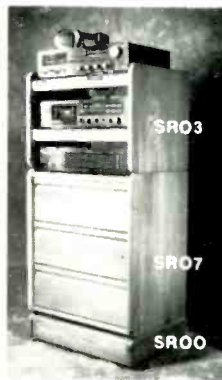
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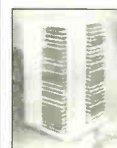
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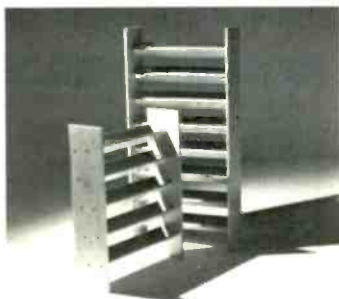


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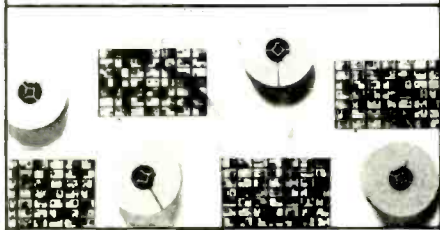
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**January**

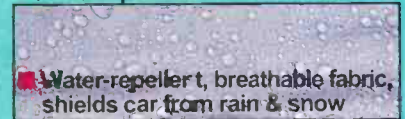
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# THE HIGH END

BY RALPH HODGES

## Maggies and Musings

It just happens to be a part of this job. Once you have everything sounding very much to your satisfaction, and you begin wondering what it would be like to start inviting record producers in and confronting them with what their work *really* sounds like, it's time to throw everything out and begin anew.

Therefore, the Yellow Room's new principal loudspeakers are Magneplanar 3.5's, the as-yet-unannounced successors to the 3.3's, replacing them as the company's next-to-largest offering. I confess to a long fascination with planar-diaphragm speaker designs, having been astonished by how marvelous they can sound when sensitively installed, and how abominable when they're put just anywhere. The difference lies, of course, in the treatment of the speakers' rear radiation, normally identical to the front, which will bounce back from the wall behind them to interfere catastrophically with what the device is trying to project into the listening area. Any speaker is subject to some of this sort of degradation, but with a planar-diaphragm type, the back reflections don't even have to ooze their way around a cabinet to do their damage. They will come right through the diaphragm, which is, after all, only a flimsy sheet of plastic film.

I anticipated many an exasperating hour lugging the 6-foot Maggies here and there to locate their sweet spots, but in that I was disappointed. The structural irregularities of the Yellow Room (window casements, strange junctions of walls and ceiling) seemed to disorganize the back reflections so effectively as to make the very first experimental placement quite delightful—with some reservations.

The first of these had to do with... well, let's call it "bigness." The Maggies are large objects, to be sure, but

their working parts are as massless and insubstantial as gift wrap, leading one to expect a certain retiring delicacy in their emissions. Instead, "My God, it's like the fifth row in a movie theater," remarked one visitor, and his assessment was correct, except that the overall sound *quality* was infinitely better. Another suggested that the whole wall had come alive with music, which was fascinating in its way, but not easily reconcilable with the modern concert-hall experience, in which the whole stage may bloom with sound but that stage remains a relatively small portion of the entire auditorium. Here, the stage had been brought into the room, and the room was not really big enough for it.

It's probably time to point out that the above comments have nothing to do with stereo imaging, or "sound-staging," as it is now often called. The Maggies keep the violins precisely in place, very much up front and to the left, and the percussionists remain fixedly in back, to the point where you can almost sense them playing cards during the slow movement. There are no spatial distortions unless they are contributed by the recording.

listening, lest a musician step out to introduce himself.

A second cavil was anticipated: lack of low-frequency extension, as is inevitable with almost any dipole loudspeaker of less than enormous dimensions. These Maggies do full justice to the string bass, but at the lower frequencies plumbied by many orchestral bass drums, pipe organs, and synthesizer compositions, your imagination must provide the floor shakes and tummy massages. A subwoofer to handle the lowest audio octave would seem a likely fix, but getting a cone driver to "join up" satisfactorily with film-diaphragm elements has often proved puzzlingly difficult.

My strong suspicion is that the crudely horn-like configuration of the Yellow Room's sending end has a lot to do with the potency of the Maggies' projection, but I have heard from some colleagues that they can verge on the overwhelming in other listening environments. A major problem with saying more is that not many people have heard Magneplanar speakers *anywhere*, and very few have heard them in their homes. The company is small, the dealers not nu-

**The Magneplanar 3.5's keep the violins up front and left, and the percussionists in back—you can almost sense them playing cards during the slow movement.**

Nor is there any sort of "forwardness," often associated with an aggressive upper midrange. The upper midrange is handled by a ribbon tweeter, 4 feet tall, about a centimeter wide, and not thick enough to be worth talking about. Magneplanar says it's dead flat to 40 kHz, and you readily believe it when you hear it.

This is the sort of tweeter that draws you in instead of driving you away. And so does the rest of the system. But its overall presence, its "thereness," makes you wish you had bothered to shave before you started

merous, and the setup in showrooms that do have Magneplanar products can be very disadvantageous. Magazine reviews are scanty. For these reasons, and others, I'd like to call your attention to them on this page. They possess all the favorable sonic attributes of full-range electrostatics at a minimum of cost (about \$3,200 a pair) and complexity, and what they can do, bass limitations considered, is probably as much as could be expected from any loudspeaker. The thing is that, for some, they might do a little *too* much of it. □

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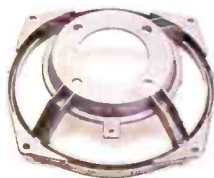
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