CAR STEREO: UP-FRONT OPTIONS

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TESTED: Nakamichi Tape Deck, Harman Kardon CD Changer, Klipsch Speaker, Cerwin-Vega Speaker
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Like all Optimus brand audio equipment, the CD-6120 is designed, crafted and tested to the highest quality standards in consumer electronics. It's technology that performs for you. Hear it today.
So Long, Longbox
The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) has announced the imminent demise of the environmentally wasteful 6 x 12-inch cardboard "longbox" package for compact discs. CD's are sold in their 5 x 5½-inch jewel boxes almost everywhere else in the world, and according to the RIAA, packaging of that size will become standard for new releases on compact discs in the United States by April 1993.

Precious Metals
Carefully tracking sales, the Recording Industry Association of America has already given a number of 1992 multi-Platinum (for multimillion sales) and Gold and Platinum awards to popular recording artists. In January, Prince's "Diamonds and Pearls" (Paisley Park) went double-Platinum, and Michael Jackson's "Dangerous" (Epic) hit multi-Platinum with sales of four million units. More recently U2's "Achtung Baby" (Virgin) achieved multi-Platinum with sales of three million. Recent Gold awards went to Nine Inch Nails for "Pretty Hate Machine" (TVT), the soundtrack to Juice (MCA), and Vanessa Williams's "The Comfort Zone" (Wing).

Buying In
Last year 206,554 laserdisc players were sold in the United States. (There were barely that many in use in the whole country a few years ago.) The Japanese electronics giant Matsushita predicts that 900,000 players will be sold in Japan in 1992 and a total of 800,000 in other countries. Mitsubishi, another Japanese electronics giant, has bought $4 million worth of stock in Image Entertainment (a manufacturer and distributor of laserdiscs), which gives it 3.5 percent of the company. Mitsubishi has been pressing discs for Image during the past year.

Jazzpar Prize, awarded by the Danish Jazz Center, which carries a stipend of $30,300.

Kids and Cats
We are in the midst of another baby boom, and there are already 22,186,000 children in the U.S. between the ages of two and seven. Sony is the latest company to move into this potentially lucrative market with Sony Kids' Music and Sony Kids' Video, featuring Tom Chapin, Dan Paxton, Rory, Kevin Roth, and Lois Young. Recent releases from Kid Rhino include The Boy Who Drew Cats read by William Hurt and Puss in Boots read by Tracey Ullman, which made us think that there are 63 million cats in this country, so how come nobody is making records or videos for them?... Well, they are. Petavision Inc. has released "Video Catnip," a 25-minute VHS tape intended as entertainment for cats. The price is $19.95 plus $4 for shipping and handling from Dick Shapiro's Cats. Call (800) 268-1630 in Canada. (800) 268-9328 in Canada. Recommending it for adult cats only, we rate it PG. It was far too exciting for our six-month-old Korat kitten Lucia.

Buying Out
Warner Music International has acquired an outstanding share of the French classical record company Erato Disques, which now becomes a wholly owned Warner subsidiary. Erato has contracts with Daniel Barenboim and the Berlin Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony orchestras, Ton Koopman and the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, and Joel Cohen and the Boston Camerata, among others. The British conglomerate Thorn EMI has bought the Virgin Music Group from its founder, Richard Branson, for close to $1 billion. Virgin has recording contracts with such artists as Paula Abdul, Genesis, Janet Jackson, and the Rolling Stones.

Music Notes
The official theme music for the U.S. Open, to be played when the tennis matches are telecast on CBS in August, has been composed by Henry Mancini and recorded by the flirtatious James Galway. The music can also be heard on Galway's album "Greatest Hits Volume II," scheduled for May release by BMG Classics on its RCA label. Jazz artist Branford Marsalis has been named to become music director of the Tonight Show (NBC) when Johnny Carson is replaced as host by Jay Leno in May. Newport Classic is celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the New York debut of the conductor/keyboardist Anthony Newman with the release of four CD's of Newman performing music by Bach, Handel, Mozart, and himself. The U.S. Postal Service is offering the public the opportunity to vote on designs for a stamp honoring Elvis Presley, with ballots placed in post offices from April 4 to 26. Announcement of the winning design is expected in May. The American soprano Deborah Voigt, thirty-one, from Fullerton, California, who has already won several international singing competitions, is the recipient of the 1992 Richard Tucker Award, which carries a stipend of $30,000.

The saxophonist Lee Konitz, sixty-five, from Chicago, is the recipient of this year's International Jazzpar Prize, awarded by the Danish Jazz Center, which carries a stipend of $30,300.
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Stereo Review

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— Julian Hirsch, January 1988

High Fidelity

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— Robert Lang, November 1989

Stereophile

"The larger PN8+ was shockingly good for the money..."

— Peter Mitchell, April 1990

Inc.

"Good speakers for less than $200 are hard to find. The Pinnacle PN5+...boasts true high fidelity sound in small cabinets."

— Cary Lu, September 1990

Stereo Review

"Hear the PN8+...especially if you are looking for an exceptional value in a speaker."

— Julian Hirsch, July 1990

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CIRCLE NO. 26 ON READER SERVICE CARD
The Nakamichi Tuner Deck I, Jensen CD-9500, and Alpine Model 7980 represent some of today's options in car stereo head units. For more, see "Heads First" on page 42.

Photograph by Jeffrey Krein

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You know those sweet high notes in your favorite music? Well, they’re the first to go when you trash your ears by cranking up the volume. Once it’s gone, it’s gone for good! So keep the volume in check.

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Henry Kloss has demonstrated a rare talent for spotting important new concepts and incorporating them into readily affordable consumer products. His new models have stemmed from a deeply rooted desire to move audio technology forward and provide buyers with previously unavailable benefits.

Audio Magazine, February 1992

Audio Hall of Fame member Henry Kloss created the dominant speakers of the '50s (AR), '60s (KLH) and '70s (Advent). Now he's created a new kind of audio company with factory-direct savings...Cambridge SoundWorks.

The Surround II Price Breakthrough In Dipole Radiator Surround Speaker.

The Surround II is specifically designed for use as a rear/side speaker in Dolby Surround or DSP systems. They "surround" the listener with non-directional ambient sounds, unlike conventional speakers that are designed to create a precise stereo "stage."

The Surround II is a dipole radiator. Mounted on the side walls of your listening room, the sound is directed towards the front and rear of the room, using phase cancellation to create a null in the direction of the listener. The sound then reaches the listener from all directions, the way it was meant to be heard. The acoustic performance of The Surround II is essentially identical to that of our original surround speaker, The Surround. At $249 pr., The Surround II is the value on the market.

Introducing The In-Wall Ambiance™ Speaker System.

Ambiance In-Wall provides overall performance (particularly deep bass response) unmatched by its competitors. Unlike many in-wall speakers, Ambiance In-Wall uses a true acoustic suspension enclosure. We know of no other system like it that can match its bass performance.

Henry Kloss designed Ambiance In-Wall with

Our Ambiance In-Wall speakers use a true acoustic suspension sealed cabinet for optimum bass response.

Ambiance In-Wall is a dipole radiator delivering accurate response over a wide area. Place Ambiance In-Wall where it looks right in your wall (or your ceiling), and still have it sound right no matter where you are in the room.

Stereo Review said Ambiance "easily held its own against substantially larger, more expensive speakers." Ambiance In-Wall is also very simple to install—it's a custom installer's and do-it-yourselfer's delight.

At $329 a pair ($165 each), direct from the factory, it's an outstanding value.

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We Know How To Make Loudspeakers.

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CIRCLE NO. 6 ON READER SERVICE CARD
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 speakers. We believe Ensemble II is a better system than the new Bose® AM-5 Series II. 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..."
many larger and more expensive speakers.” Small (8¾" x 5¾" x 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" x 21" x 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—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 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, a free 48-page catalog, or to order...

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CIRCLE NO. 6 ON READER SERVICE CARD
Why Other Loudspeaker Companies Can't Run This Ad.

There are almost 400 speaker companies in the United States. But none of them can offer you all this...

Audio Hall of Fame member Henry Kloss. Cambridge SoundWorks products are designed by our co-founder, Henry Kloss, who created the dominant speakers of the '50s (AR), '60s (KLH) and '70s (Advent).

High performance transportable system. Our Model Eleven combines a powerful 3-channel amplifier, two satellite speakers and a BassCase" subwoofer/carrying case. Works on 110, 220 & 12-volts.

Ambiance ultra-compact speaker system. We think Ambiance is the best "mini" speaker on the market, regardless of price. Deep bass and high-frequency dispersion are unmatched in its category.

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DAT Lives

After reading "DAT Lives!" by Glenn Kenny in the March issue, I decided to "give in to DAT." What I found was that prices have dropped dramatically, making a digital audio tape deck all the more attractive. I strongly encourage anyone who has been considering DAT but has postponed a commitment because of price to reassess his position. The quality is more than worth the price.

THOMAS B. GREEN
Salt Lake City, UT

U2, or Not U2

As a long-time U2 fan, I was quite perturbed by Steve Simels's mean-spirited reference to the band in his March "Backbeat" column. U2 had absolutely nothing to do with the suit that resulted in Negativland's "U2" being pulled from stores. It was all done by Island Records without any input from the band. U2 is anything but "the world's most self-righteous band," as Mr. Simels calls them. They may not always have been right, or successful in accomplishing what they wanted to do, but at least they have cared enough to try.

ROY L. HENRY
Pigeon Forge, TN

Steve Simels replies: Whether U2 knew about the suit to begin with depends on whom you talk to, but by the time "Backbeat" was written, they almost certainly knew about it and could probably have stopped it if they wanted to. They didn't, and now Negativland and SST Records are out $90,000 they never had.

Boss Sightings

In his March review of Southside Johnny's latest album, Parke Puterbaugh stated that it contained the only appearance on record by Bruce Springsteen in the past year. In fact, Springsteen contributed backing vocals to John Prine's Grammy-winning album "The Missing Years."

TERRY CONTAS
Manchester, NH

We stand corrected.

Amplifier Sound

The "null test" described in the March test report on the Carver Silver Nine-t Mark II amplifier does not prove that two amplifiers "sound" the same. It proves that both amps have the same frequency response. They "sound" different because their distortions are different and they also differ in transient response.

TONY MAULDIN
Lewisville, TX
A null test will expose any differences between two amplifiers, including not only frequency response but also distortion, noise, and so forth. In general, if two amplifiers have identical frequency responses into the speaker load (within a tenth of a decibel or so) across the audio band along with low enough noise and distortion, they will sound the same when reproducing music so long as neither is driven into overload. Consequently, low output in a null test usually indicates that the amplifiers will sound the same within their power limits. Short of a perfect null, however, the only sure way to establish this is by means of a properly controlled A/B comparison of the two amplifiers' outputs.

Switched Headphones

In the article on headphones in January, photo No. 13 does not show the Nady WH-95 wireless phones, as the caption says, but the Stax SR Gamma. I could not figure out which picture was of the Nady phones because all the others except the Beyer Dynamic model were shown with wires. AMAR JOSEPH
Haifa, Israel

We very much regret that the Stax and Nady photos were transposed. Photo No. 1 (page 66) shows the Nady WH-95 phones, which do have a wire that runs from the phones to a compact receiver the user carries or places next to his chair. Between the receiver and the transmitter the signal is carried by radio waves. See the accompanying photo for a view of the full system.

CD Capacity

I have heard that the compact disc and the 12-inch LP were both designed to hold the same amount of music, based on the playing time of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (76½ minutes). Is there any truth to this?

Also, whatever happened to the 3-inch compact disc single?

MICHAEL R. HOULE
Golden, British Columbia

According to Dr. H. Nakajima, who headed Sony's design team for the compact disc, its diameter was changed from 4 to 4.72 inches specifically to fit a typical recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. But that is much more than can fit on a single LP without severe signal compression, low-frequency rolloff, or both. For high-fidelity performance, the playing time of an LP must be restricted to about 20 to 25 minutes per side. As for 3-inch CDs, they seem to be popular in Japan, but they never took off here.

TDK Cassettes

Why is it that you show a TDK AR100 tape cassette not once but twice in the March (tape) issue, on pages 48 and 57, yet in the listing of available TDK tapes on page 57, the AR series is not included? Similarly, you tested the Pioneer Elite CT-93 deck with TDK AD tape, but according to the list, we can't buy that tape either to do our own tests.

PAUL MOUNT
Teaneck, NJ

TDK advised us that the AR and AD series cassettes were being discontinued, replaced in its line by the new DS-X formulation, and the listings reflected that, but these popular tapes are probably still available in many stores. The cassettes pictured were illustrative only, but we agree that the AR100 was not the best choice.

CD Storage

Glenn Kenny's "Neatness Counts" in February was helpful but did not say whether CD's should be stored vertically (like LP's) or if their smaller size and greater rigidity are enough to allow horizontal storage, making for easier reading of their spine labels.

SOREN N. S. LAUREN
Mahwah, NJ

As long as they are in their protective jewel boxes, there is no reason CD's should not be stacked. The main reason most people store them vertically is that it's easier to pull out the one you want that way.

We welcome your letters. Please address correspondence to Editor, STEREO REVIEW, 1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. You should include your address and telephone number for verification. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.
Conductor John Mauceri and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra made their recording debut with "Hollywood Dreams," an album of movie music, and followed it up with "The Gershwin in Hollywood." This year they turn to Rodgers and Hammerstein, with a CD devoted to overtures from their musicals due from Philips Classics in June. The recording so impressed the Rodgers and Hammerstein families that they gave their permission for Mauceri to record two complete scores, The King and I (with Julie Andrews) and Oklahoma! (with a cast of country singers yet to be announced).

The first disc in a Tchaikovsky symphony cycle by Gennady Rozhdestvensky and the State Symphonic Kapelle of Moscow has been released by Erato. Rozhdestvensky and the musicians (formerly the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra) toured the U.S. and the world early this year in the company of another Erato artist, pianist Viktoria Postnikova. In May Erato will release the team's most recent recording, the Saint-Saëns Carnival of the Animals, with pianist Jean-François Heisser and the Ensemble Musicales joining in.

Since 1987, Antone's Records in Austin, Texas, has been doing its part to preserve the blues in America. It is also one of the very few record labels run almost entirely by women and presenting mostly women artists. In 1990 the album "Dreams Come True" by the label's founder, Angela Strehi, and two of its other singer-musicians, Marcia Ball and Lou Ann Barton, was named Best Blues Album by the National Association of Independent Record Distributors. Previously released and unreleased tracks by the same performers are featured on the label's new midprice CD sampler, "Antone's Women," which also includes fresh material by four artists just signed by Antone's: newcomers Sue Foley and Toni Price, and blues veterans Barbara Lynn and LaVelle White. All four have solo albums scheduled for release later this year.

"Got Love If You Want It," on Pointblank/Charisma, was produced by J. J. Cale and features performances by Cale, Little Charlie & the Nightcats, and John Lee Hooker, who enlisted Hammond's help last year for his "Mr. Lucky" album. Hammond has also been doing some work in television, hosting a special called The Search for Robert Johnson. In it he interviews some of Johnson's contemporaries and demonstrates how his performances in San Antonio's Gunter Hotel were originally recorded. The program will be seen on Britain's ITV this spring and later on American TV and home video.

 Highlights of the 1992-1993 Carnegie Hall season include the first visit in sixteen years by the Orchestra of La Scala, Milan, to be led by Riccardo Muti in Verdi's Requiem, the Vienna Philharmonic under Georg Solti, the opening-night concert by the Pittsburgh Symphony and its music director, Lorin Maazel, with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, the house debut of the National Orchestra of Spain with conductor Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos and pianist Alicia de Larrocha, and the return of the Metropolitan Opera Or-
MAKERS

Don't call the music played by the Dolphins fusion—call it new electric jazz. "There aren't any fusion bands any more," says Dolphins bassist Rob Leon. "It's a dead term." Whatever you call it, however, the band's new CD, "Old World, New World" on DMP, is something of a smorgasbord, with elements of funk, Middle-Eastern scales, modern jazz harmony, and unusual rhythmic approaches derived from Indian music. Incidentally, if the Dolphins' drummer, Dan Brubeck, looks familiar, that's because he resembles his very famous father—the jazz piano great Dave Brubeck.

Based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the movie The Mambo Kings traces the lives of two brothers who emigrate from Cuba to New York City in the Fifties to form their own mambo band. Naturally, music is an essential ingredient in the film's soundtrack, now available on Elektra. It features performances by Linda Ronstadt, Los Lobos, Arturo Sandoval, Celia Cruz, and Tito Puente that authentically convey the sound of the mambo era. Puente, a major force in Latin music since the early Fifties, reprises three of his biggest hits in the film, including "Ran Kan Kan," which is a hit again today as a single. Puente recently celebrated the release of his hundredth album, "Mambo King, the 100th LP," with a special concert at New York's Madison Square Garden. He was also nominated for a Grammy this year (it would have been his fifth if he had won) and received a Lifetime Achievement award at the second annual Caribbean Music Awards.

S Yoko Ono a groundbreaking, misunderstood artist who was two decades ahead of her time? That's the rationale behind "Onobox," a six-CD retrospective from Rykodisc. The 105 tracks, including an entire unreleased album from the early Seventies, range from 1969 to 1985, and guest musicians include Ono's husband, John Lennon, as well as George Harrison, Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, and Paul Shaffer. Ryko is also releasing a single-disc Ono compilation titled "Walking on Thin Ice" that features nineteen songs from 1972 to 1992, including the previously unreleased "O'Oh.

G RACENOTES. The newly revived Southern rock label Capricorn Records is releasing "The Scepter Records Story," a three-CD retrospective of the Sixties label responsible for hits by the Shirelles, Dionne Warwick, B.J. Thomas, and the Isley Brothers. Deutsche Grammophon has released two special collections to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. One is a deluxe, specially priced twelve-CD set of live recordings under conductors closely associated with the orchestra, including Richard Strauss, Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Herbert von Karajan, and Leonard Bernstein. The second is a two-CD set of the music of Johann and Josef Strauss conducted by various maestros over six decades. Mosaic Records (telephone 203-327-7111) has released "The Complete Candid Otis Spann & Lightnin' Hopkins Sessions," recordings made in 1960 by the legendary blues performers. The limited-edition set is available on three CD's or five LP's. The Metropolitan Opera's acclaimed production of Wagner's Ring cycle conducted by James Levine was released in March by PolyGram Video. The four operas, totaling 15½ hours of music, are available either separately or in a complete set. PolyGram has also released on video "The Metropolitan Opera Gala 1991," with Luciano Pa...
Mobile Fidelity

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab, long known for its audiophile LP and CD releases, enters the hardware market after ten years of research with the Ultra-Amp series. It consists of a 100-watt dual-mono power amplifier, an active “line amplifier” (preamplifier) with full-function switching between six line-level inputs, and a quadruple-oversampling, 16-bit digital-to-analog converter. A separate phono stage will soon be available. The components are being sold factory-direct only, with a thirty-day home trial. Price: $1,295 for each component. Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab, Dept. SR, 105 Morris St., Sebastopol, CA 94752; telephone (800) 423-5759.

Circle 120 on reader service card

Celestion

Celestion’s first entries into the auto-sound category are the AP and AD Series subwoofers, three models in each line. The AP 10, AP 12, and AP 15 feature 10-, 12-, and 15-inch drivers, respectively. Each has a rated power-handling capacity of 400 watts. The AD Series subwoofers are said to have both higher sensitivity and greater power-handling ability. The AD 12 has a 12-inch driver, and the AD 15 and 15H are both 15 inches. The AD 12 and AD 15 can handle 600 watts, the AD 15H 1,200 watts. Prices: AP 10, $139; AP 12, $159; AP 15, $189; AD 12, $279; AD 15, $339; AD 15H, $469. Celestion, Dept. SR, 89 Doug Brown Way, Holliston, MA 01746.

Circle 121 on reader service card

ADI

The CW Series auto subwoofers from ADI feature paired compound-loaded drivers (face to face and wired out of phase) in fourth-order vented enclosures. The design is said to provide low distortion and extended low-end response in boxes half the size of conventional subwoofers. The CW-650 (top left in photo) has 6½-inch drivers and is rated down to 36 Hz – 3 dB; maximum power handling is 100 watts. The CW-800 (top right) has 8-inch drivers, a –3-dB point of 30 Hz, and 160 watts maximum power handling. The CW-1000 (bottom left) and CW-1200 (bottom right) respectively have 10- and 12-inch drivers, response limits of 28 and 32 Hz, and input limits of 250 and 300 watts. Dimensions range from 2 1/4 x 9 x 10½ inches (CW-650) to 21 x 14½ x 17 inches (CW-1200). Prices: CW-650, $260; CW-800, $330; CW-1000, $425; CW-1200, $475. Audio Design Innovations, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 402, Osseo, MN 55369.

Circle 122 on reader service card
The only reason not to buy an Onkyo CD Carousel is if you’re into antiques.

The World's First 6 Disc Carousels

With the introduction of the world's first six disc carousels, Onkyo takes the CD changer into the future and consigns all other models to the past.

But, Onkyo’s new DX-C909, DX-C606, and DX-C206 6 Disc Carousels don’t accomplish this by just being "one better" than conventional 5 disc players.

The Integra DX-C909, for example, incorporates design elements usually reserved for only the most costly single play components.

It utilizes Onkyo’s proprietary Single Bit D/A Converters and AccuPulse Quartz System for unsurpassed linearity and stability, resulting in musical reproduction that’s indistinguishable from the original performance. Onkyo’s AEI Transformer eliminates electro-magnetic flux leakage (a hazard common to other players) that can cause distortion. A copper plated chassis provides greater shielding and lower noise levels, while optical outputs insure the purest possible signal transmission.

With Onkyo’s new six disc carousels, optimum engineering joins breakthrough convenience for the first time as well. Onkyo’s Next Selection Function lets you change the next track programmed without interrupting the track that’s playing. No other carousel, magazine changer or single play machine has this ability.

So, if you’re purchasing a CD changer, Onkyo’s new carousels are really the only choice you have.

Unless you’re into antiques.
NEW PRODUCTS

Fox

The Fox800 multisystem remote control can replace as many as eight dedicated audio and video remotes. It features a touch-screen LCD panel that shows only the appropriate controls for the component being operated. It can be programmed using a built-in library of remote-control codes, and it can also learn the codes of additional remotes. The Fox800 can set up a VCR for unattended recording without using the timer section of the VCR itself; the user has only to enter the time, date, and channel of a desired program. Price: $99.95. Fox Electronics & Technology, Inc., Dept. SR, 220-F Zanker Rd., San Jose, CA 95131.

AudioSource

The SS Four surround-sound processor from AudioSource uses a new Dolby Pro Logic integrated-circuit chip designed and manufactured in the U.S. The chip is said to be the first Pro Logic IC to incorporate an auto-balance function, which provides dynamic correction of left/right input-level imbalances for improved center-channel definition. The SS Four includes two built-in 24-watt amplifiers for the center and rear channels, and it comes with a full-function remote control. Price: $330. AudioSource, Dept. SR, 1327 North Carolan Ave., Burlingame, CA 94010.

Paradigm

Paradigm's Titan is a low-price two-way speaker system. Its woofer has a polypropylene cone and a Kapton voice-coil former; an oversized magnet is said to insure high power handling and low distortion. The ferrofluid-cooled tweeter has a wide-dispersion polyamide dome and an aluminum voice-coil former. Frequency response is rated as 55 to 20,000 Hz ±2 dB, sensitivity as 88 dB, and power-handling range as 15 to 100 watts. Dimensions are 7 3/4 x 12 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches. Available in oak, white, or black-ash vinyl veneer. Price: $199 a pair. Distributed in the U.S. by AudioStream, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 2410, Niagara Falls, NY 14302.

Onkyo

Onkyo's PCS-D1 is a compact music system with some unique twists that provide a good deal of placement flexibility. Unlike minisystems wired together with special cable, the PCS-D1 uses optical digital transfer technology to send signals from the portable control unit, which is equipped with both a CD player and a cassette deck, to the 30-watt-per-channel receiving amplifying unit, which contains an AM/FM tuner. Bookshelf speakers complete the array. Price: $1,100. Onkyo U.S.A., Dept SR, 200 Williams Dr., Ramsey NJ 07446.
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Look at this way. Every time you sit down in front of a pair of our speakers, there’ll be someone standing behind them.
NEW PRODUCT

3M

The new 2020 High Position and 4040 Metal Position cassettes are the latest in 3M's Black Watch line. The 2020 cassettes, designed for everyday use in car and portable players, use a formulation that combines pure metal particles with cobalt-modified ferric oxide. The 4040 cassettes use oxide-free metal-particle tape that is said to be able to capture the wide dynamic range of CD's. Prices: 2020, $4 and $6 in 74- and 100-minute lengths; 4040, $7 and $9 in the same lengths. 3M Black Watch Products, Dept. SR, c/o The Ginther Group, 1 Appletree Sq., Bloomington, MN 55425. Circle 130 on reader service card

Custom Woodwork & Design

CWD's Shaker-style Woodstock birch cabinet, with blue satin stain and cherry top and accents, can accommodate a 35-inch direct-view TV set. There are four adjustable shelves for audio and video components and two drawers for storing tapes, CD's, and laserdiscs. Dimensions: 68 x 57 x 25½ inches. Price: $1,495. Custom Woodwork & Design, Dept. SR, 5200 W. 73rd St., Bedford Park, IL 60638. Circle 131 on reader service card

Pioneer

Pioneer's latest LaserKaraoke combi-player, the CLK-V920, features digital signal processing (DSP) and automatic two-sided play. The DSP circuitry enables users to adjust the instrumental and vocal tracks on sing-along karaoke discs to enhance the sound; it can also be used for CD's and videodiscs. Karaoke features include a nine-step digital key controller to adjust music for the key of a singer's voice. A built-in cassette deck facilitates recording karaoke performances, and there is also a built-in amplifier and a pair of speakers. Price: $1,900. Pioneer Laser Entertainment, Inc., Dept. SR, 2265 E. 220th St., Long Beach, CA 90810. Circle 132 on reader service card

Soundstream

Soundstream's whole-house audio/video system is now available in a stand-alone version, the SN-1 Mk. II Simul-source. The system distributes and controls five audio and three audio/video sources in four zones. Users can operate the system with either a soft-touch keypad or a handheld infrared remote. The system routes audio signals using balanced lines for low noise and distributes video in composite form to avoid picture-degrading RF modulation and demodulation. Price: $1,195. Soundstream Technologies, Dept. SR, 120 Blue Ravine Rd., Folsom, CA 95630. Circle 133 on reader service card
Color Me Badd—C.M.B., I Wanna Sex You Up; I Adore Mi Amore, plus more. (Giant/Reprise) 426-916

Bette Midler—For the Boys (Original Soundtrack); Every Road Leads Back To You, many more. (Polydor) 430-421

Mariah Carey (Columbia) 407-510

Basia—Brave New Hope (A&M) 429-722

Bryan Adams—Walking Up the Neighbourhoods. Can’t Stop This Thing We Started; plus many more. (A&M) 429-779

Boyz II Men—Coolyhighharmony. Notwingshippers. It’s So Hard To Say Goodbye To Yesterday, etc. (Motown) 428-754

Legendary Jazz

Bird (Original Soundtrack) (Columbia) 372-532
John Coltrane—Giant Steps (Atlantic) 371-691
Count Basie—Essential Volume 1 (Columbia Jazz Masterpieces) 357-176
Duane Ellington—Ellington at Newport (Columbia Jazz Master) 354-642
Dave Brubeck Quartel—Time Out (Columbia Jazz Masterpieces) 353-060
Miles Davis—Kind Of Blue (Columbia Jazz Masterpieces) 353-045

Elton John’s Greatest Hits (MCA) 319-541
Foreigner—Records (Atlantic) 319-055
Squeeze—Singles 45’s & Under (Atlantic) 317-974

Best Of the Doobies (Warner Bros.) 291-128
Eagles—The Long Run (Atlantic) 319-944

ZZ Top—Eliminator (Warner Bros.) 291-124
U2—the Joshua Tree (Island) 354-449

James Taylor—New Moon Shine (Columbia) 249-209

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Driving a Subwoofer

Q My main speakers are driven by a receiver and my subwoofer by a separate integrated amplifier. The main drawback is that levels have to be controlled separately. I could drive both from the receiver, but it doesn't have enough power. A separate preamplifier could drive two amplifiers, but I can't afford that option. How can I set a proper balance between my subwoofer and the rest of my system and control it with just one knob?

Although you don't say so, I assume your receiver lacks pre-out and main in jacks. If it had them, there would be no difficulty in using Y-cords to feed the preamplifier output to the receiver's own amplifiers as well as an external power amp. The subwoofer's amplifier could then be balanced to the main unit once and then left alone. Much the same thing can be achieved, however, by feeding the external amplifier from your receiver's speaker outputs. You will have to install a simple volume control in the cables between the amplifiers to pad the level down so it won't overload the inputs of the external unit. The receiver's level control will then affect both amplifiers (so will the tone controls, but the effect on the subwoofer will be minimal). Even simpler would be to feed the external amplifier from your receiver's headphone jack, if it has one. Appropriate cords are available for this purpose, and you can probably dispense with the in-line volume control as well. The main drawback would be a large plug permanently attached to your receiver's front panel, but you might be willing to live with that.

VU Meters

Q For years I have noticed that meters on audio equipment are calibrated in something called "VU." Does this have any relationship to watts or volts, and if so, why is it used instead of the more common units?

The initial for "volume units," a holdover from early radio days when VU meters were used to match levels throughout the broadcast chain. The reference level—0 VU—is very specific, representing one milliwatt of power in a 600-ohm circuit, and pure tones of that value were used to line up equipment. The professional meters also had very carefully controlled ballistics so that they would react to complex audio waveforms in a consistent way, indicating approximately the average audio level, rather than the peak level. VU meters are calibrated in decibels above and below the reference level.

When professional tape recorders appeared, the existing radio VU meters were used to set recording levels, the reference point being a somewhat arbitrary "acceptable" amount of distortion. Consumer-grade recorders imitated this practice, although very few used true VU meters. In recent years, electromagnetic meters have been almost entirely replaced by faster, peak-reading liquid-crystal or fluorescent displays, and only rarely do these even pretend to be VU meters.

Mono Remote Speakers

Q I would like to add some speakers to be driven by my receiver's remote-speaker outputs. Is there any way I can arrange things so that the remotes play in mono and the main system in stereo?

The only way to get mono from one set of speakers and stereo from another is to use separate amplifiers. Most receivers and integrated amplifiers do provide terminals and switching for extra speakers, but these are mostly a matter of convenience; behind the panel they are connected together in parallel. And if you strap the remote outputs together to get mono, you'll probably damage your amplifier. The internal impedance of an amplifier's output stage is very low; connecting one output section to another is like hooking up a speaker whose impedance is a small fraction of an ohm. The current skyrocket, and the amplifier is likely to fry.

Videotape Life

Q I have made a number of irreplaceable videotapes on my camcorder. At one time I was told that videotapes deteriorate in a relatively short period of time—five to seven years—after which the picture fades. Is there any way to prolong a videotape's life, or should I periodically make copies of the originals?

There is no inherent "half-life" for videotape; lots of us have tapes going back to the mid-1970's that look as crisp today as when they were recorded. Still, videotapes are fairly fragile, so they have to be treated with respect or deterioration may occur. The rules are different, but the basics are the same. Keep your tapes away from direct sunlight, extreme heat, and humidity. Don't write on the tape, and don't store your tapes on top of your VCR. Tapes are designed to be used, and when they are stored properly, they can last a lifetime. If you must store your tapes in a closet or attic, make sure they are in archival-quality boxes and are kept away from any potential hazards. And always replace your tapes as soon as they show signs of wear.
The new Santa Fe DCM 42 FM/AM cassette receiver with CD control stands out as a triumph of European design, the extraordinary integration of ergonomics and economics. The Santa Fe DCM 42 boasts a High Definition FM Tuner, a high frequency response autoreverse cassette deck and full featured CD Changer control circuitry. It’s just one of all the new very sophisticated and very affordable Blaupunks available at a dealer near you. Admittedly, the technology and design may be copied in a few years. But there will be pleasure in knowing you own an original. For the nearest dealer, call 1-800-950-BLAU, and start driving with the sound that’s worlds apart.

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essentially the same as for audio tapes. Store them in their boxes vertically, away from extremes of heat, humidity, or magnetic fields. Ideally, for long-term storage you should play them through and file them without rewinding, as this results in the most even tape pack. That's usually inconvenient, however, because you won't be able to watch the tape without a long rewind time first. Normal rewinding should not cause severe problems, but you should avoid using high-speed outboard winders.

The greatest enemy to videocassettes, particularly if they contain inexpensive tape, is simply playing them. One remedy is to put the tapes through your VCR only rarely. If that's not practical, you may indeed want to make an everyday copy so the original can be preserved (to make another copy later, if necessary). Use high-grade tape for the duplication, and if you have Hi8 or S-VHS equipment, make the copies on that to minimize picture degradation.

Dirty CD's

An audio salesman told me that playing dirty CD's could cause some critical part of the laser assembly to wear out prematurely because it has to work harder to focus on the disc. Is that true?  
BILLY JONES  
Lake Brownwood, TX

All CD players contain servo mechanisms that keep the laser beam focused on a disc, and it is true that such electromechanical elements are usually the first parts of an audio component to wear out. But the amount of movement involved in maintaining focus is extremely small, so an enormous number of adjustments would be required before the focusing mechanism began to deteriorate. If you had CD's dirty enough to put your player at risk—and they'd have to be pretty filthy—they would mute and skip so much that they would probably be unlistenable anyway.

Ultrasonic Response

Does it do any good to buy speakers or a preamplifier with frequency response wider than that of my power amplifier? If not, why do some components specify response above 20,000 Hz since humans can't hear above that frequency anyway?  
STEVEN D. PICERNE  
APO New York

Ah, the 64-kilohertz question! Two reasons are usually advanced for extra-wide-bandwidth audio components: first, that extended high-frequency response improves a component's transient performance—it's ability to react quickly to steep wavefronts—and second, that pushing the upper limit further up increases the likelihood of linearity within the audible range.

There have definitely been times when the latter reason has been valid: The prospect of four-channel sound in the LP era required that phono cartridges be able to respond up to 50,000 Hz, for instance, and their flatness in the audible band improved dramatically. Today, however, most designers can achieve that sort of linearity without resorting to such tactics. As for transient response, a wider bandwidth often results in measurably better performance, but no one has ever convincingly demonstrated that the improvement is audible. That's not too surprising, since hearing the change in transient response would actually require sensitivity to ultrasonic signal components.

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Boston Acoustics
Beam Me Up, Scotty

THE captain isn't going to like this. Not one bit. I'm already an hour overdue, and I've hardly scratched the surface. But what do they expect? When the Zoomakians raided the earth in June 1992, they scooped up more than 800 million metric tons of consumer audio electronics. Why they promptly dumped it all here on Neptune is something no historian ever figured out. The site must be a hundred meters deep in late-twentieth-century electronics—a real treasure trove for archaeologists like me.

Hey! Look at this! A handheld virtual-reality projector. No, wait—it opens up to reveal an LCD screen, and underneath, a disc drive. Hmmm... let me wipe away the dust... Data Discman Electronic Book Player DD-1EX. Must be some kind of ancient portable information storage and retrieval unit. Made by an outfit called Sony—perhaps some obscure American manufacturer. Let's see, here... miniature QWERTY typewriter keyboard, five function keys, YES and NO keys, and arrow keys. Looks like it could be powered from either batteries or AC line voltage. There's also a video output for connection to an external video monitor.

Here's a Nike shoebox... oh, it's full of 300-year-old baseball cards—how useless. Wait... the bottom's full of disc cartridges—an entire library of late-twentieth-century information. The cartridges look a lot like ancient computer diskettes, but they hold 3-inch optical discs inside. Since they're in protective caddies, the information on them is even better protected than on ordinary compact discs. The discs themselves appear to be CD-ROM discs, probably each holding the equivalent of about 100,000 pages of printed text, 32,000 graphic images, or a combination of both. Look at all these titles—Bibles, telephone books, airline schedules, sports almanacs, language translators, encyclopedias, dictionaries, profiles of major corporations, a wine guide, cookbooks, novels, games!

Wow! The batteries are still charged. Let's try Compton's Concise Encyclopedia. Nice legible display on the screen, backlit with contrast adjustment, 256 x 200 pixels displaying graphics or ten 30-character lines of text. Line-by-line or page-by-page scrolling capability.

There appears to be a firmware search engine on board the player. The user can choose from six standardized search-and-retrieval methods to locate text or graphic information. A word search lets you select topics by entering the first few letters of the topic word. An end-word search lets you enter the last few letters in a topic word. A key-word search lets you enter up to five words relating to a subject. A menu search locates subjects by selecting headings from a table of contents. A multisearch prompts the user to provide one-word answers to four preprogrammed search questions. A graphics search lets you locate topics from a graphic menu. In addition, a cross-reference "hot-link" system lets you jump to and from screens of additional text or graphic information.

Best of all, the whole thing is user-friendly and needs an owner's manual about as much as a paper book does.

The Sony Data Discman Electronic Book Player is user-friendly and needs an owner's manual about as much as a paper book does.
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Step Up To The Bose® Lifestyle® Music System Now!

The Bose Lifestyle® music system includes Direct/Reflecting® cube speaker arrays, Lifestyle® music center with built-in CD player and AM/FM stereo radio; remote control that works around corners and through walls. Also comes with hideaway Acoustimass® bass module (not shown).

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This might explain why CD Review magazine called XLII-S "head, shoulders and torso above the rest" in their analysis of high bias cassettes.

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That's not normal. That's not high. That's Maxell XLII-S with Black Magnetite.

TAKE YOUR MUSIC TO THE MAX.
TECHNICAL TALK

by Julian Hirsch

High Fidelity
In a Box?

COMPONENT high fidelity as we know it came into existence shortly after the Second World War. Until then, radios were constructed as single units, with tuner and amplifier on a common chassis. The loudspeaker was usually a single cone driver in an open-backed cabinet that also housed the electronic chassis. The record player, if one were included, was a single-speed (78-rpm) changer, or a single-play turntable in a small number of enthusiasts, or "audiophiles." The general public remained with the old single-unit radio format. To this day, most audiophiles consider component hi-fi to be the best way, if not the only way, to listen to music at home. Even mass-market all-in-one music systems attempt to imitate the appearance of stacked separate components.

In 1984, Bose Corporation introduced a novel one-piece home audio center called the Acoustic Wave Music System (AWMS). The oddly shaped AW-1 contained an AM/FM stereo tuner, a cassette deck, three amplifiers, and three small speakers. Measuring only 18 inches wide, 10% inches high, and 7 1/2 inches deep, and weighing just 15 pounds, it was designed as a complete, self-contained music system for nonaudiophile users, though with overall performance and sound quality much closer to that of moderate-price component systems than to mass-market products.

Bose recently announced an updated version of this unique product, the Acoustic Wave Music System Series II (AWMS-II). Externally, it is almost identical to the original version except for its light cream color (the AW-1 was a light gray). As before, all controls are flush-mounted on the top, and the cassette deck has now been replaced by a CD player. Recessed hand grips on the sides of the cabinet are a welcome addition.

The frequencies above a few hundred Hz are radiated by two 3-inch cone drivers, which are at the upper front corners of the molded-plastic cabinet and angled outward about 20 degrees. A single 4-inch cone supplies the combined bass output for both channels. Each driver has its own dedicated amplifier.

There are no published specifications for the AWMS-II because it is designed for nontechnical buyers, but it embodies some advanced and unique technology. For example, how do you get useful bass output down to about 50 Hz from a single 4-inch loudspeaker driver with no apparent enclosure?

The answer: Have the driver loaded front and rear by pipe resonators (Bose calls them "Acoustic Wave-guides") about 3 and 4 feet long, with their open ends exiting at the lower front corners of the cabinet. As Dr. Amar Bose has shown mathematically and demonstrated practically in this and other Bose products, such a system can produce a reasonably uniform response over several octaves (in this case from about 50 Hz to about 200 or 300 Hz). Furthermore, the high efficiency of the dual-resonator system enables a small driver and a low-power amplifier to generate a very useful amount of bass output.

Next question: How do you fit 7 feet of 4-inch pipe into a box the size of the AWMS-II, in addition to a CD player and the electronics for three amplifiers? In the original AW-1, the pipe was folded into a remarkable labyrinth. The Series II has a basically similar mechanical structure, but redesigned for easier production without sacrificing performance.

Other minor changes have been made, such as adapting the flush-mounted pushbutton and slider controls to a CD player instead of a tape deck. Some other changes are not immediately visible to the eye, such as the cooling slots hidden in the hand grips and elsewhere that make it possible to operate so much electronic circuitry in a small space without overheating.

On the back of the molded-plastic cabinet are a collapsible FM antenna, phono-type jacks for auxiliary input, microphone input, and line-level output (to drive an external amplifier). The volume control is a slider on the top of the cabinet. The single tone-control slider provides flat response at its center setting, cutting bass or treble as it is moved to either side (no boost is provided).

The tuner controls include an on/off button, five station-preset buttons (each assignable to both an AM and an FM channel), the AM/FM selector, and up/down tuning buttons. A small LED window shows the selected band, the tuned frequency, and whether reception is in stereo. The CD controls include pause/play, stop, and track skipping in either direction. There is no fast-scan mode. The CD display window normally shows the
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Said (Virgin) 10184
Hank Williams Jr.: Pure
Hard (Warner/Chase) 60351
Starship: Greatest Hits
(RCA) 90700
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Reprise: The Very Good
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TECHNICAL TALK

current track number and elapsed time; only when the player is switched to stop does it show the total number of tracks and playing time on the disc (unlike many other players, which provide this information when first turned on). There are no programming controls or other CD features beyond the basic functions.

Because of the AWMS-II's all-in-one design, it was difficult or impossible for us to make many of our usual performance measurements. We tried measuring the speaker's response in several different ways, driving the amplifier through the auxiliary inputs. The tuner and CD measurements were more straightforward.

The FM tuner section's 50-dB quieting sensitivity was 17 dBf in mono and 39 dBf in stereo, with distortion readings of about 0.1 percent in mono and 0.6 percent in stereo. Channel separation was 45 dB, and adjacent-channel selectivity was 61 dB. Altogether, it was a competent and listenable FM tuner, comparable to those of most medium-price home receivers. The AM tuner section's response was useful up to 5,000 Hz or higher, which is actually much better than we're used to seeing in modern hi-fi gear.

The CD player was comparable in some ways to early portable models. Its channel separation ranged from 58 dB at low frequencies to 43 dB at high frequencies—not as wide as that of most home units but more than sufficient for good listening quality. Similarly, the distortion, typically about 0.2 percent at most frequencies and signal levels, was higher than in most home players but far below the usual threshold of audibility.

Low-level linearity was excellent, with errors of less than 1 dB from -60 to -90 dB. The player's resistance to physical shock was only fair, and its defect-tracking ability was marginal (about 300 micrometers, the minimum requirement for a CD player).

As for the speakers, the acoustic frequency response of the system was ±10 dB from 20,000 down to 50 Hz, falling off rapidly at lower frequencies. Over most of the range above 400 Hz, the response was relatively flat, within ±5 dB up to nearly 20,000 Hz.

The sound quality was generally very good, though there was a tendency toward bass-heaviness on voices (the original AW-I system shared this characteristic). With most music the sound was very listenable.

The Bose AWMS-II is a product that should satisfy the needs and taste of a large sector of the listening public, including many who have invested in component hi-fi because it was "the thing to do." On the other hand, it is a bare-bones product in respect to features. This is particularly evident in its built-in compact disc player, which sounds perfectly fine when playing discs from start to finish but lacks the programming abilities of even some portable CD players.

There is another factor to be considered: The AWMS-II is not inexpensive. But although its $997 price seems high for a small portable system, there is little to compare it with except a low-price component system. Although it might be likened to a deluxe boom box, it is vastly more sophisticated and complex. An equivalent component system at the same price would comprise a receiver, a CD player, and two speakers. Such a system might sound a little better than the AWMS-II (not necessarily), but it would require choosing suitable components from a large field, setting them up, and interconnecting them. The contrast with the ease of installing and operating the all-in-one AWMS-II is striking.

In the AWMS-II, Bose has made an already successful product even better. It is available directly from Bose, which offers an in-home demonstration or a fourteen-day home trial. You can get more information by calling (800) 282-BOSE.

The Bose AWMS-II with optional base

TECHNICAL TALK

STEREO REVIEW MAY 1992 25
MULTIPLE CHOICES

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Stephen St. Croix
and his Lightning Studio

Stephen is an established producer, engineer, studio musician, president of Marshall Electronics, and writes a column for MX Magazine, the leading publication in the professional recording industry. His work accomplishments include studio mixes for Stevie Wonder and remakes of re-released movies like Gone With the Wind, The Wizard of Oz, Singing in the Rain, and various Disney cartoons. When Stephen wanted to duplicate his Lightning Studio in his car, he chose Hifonics. Ask him why Hifonics and he replies, "I chose your amps because after very careful comparison testing, it became clear that nothing else delivered the tight, solid, effortless sound quality that they do."
THE Harman Kardon TL8600 is a distinctively styled top-loading carousel-type CD changer. Its revolving tray, which holds up to five discs, is in full view through a clear window, about 13 inches in diameter, in the top cover. The cover rises slowly when a button near its front edge is pressed, but it must be closed manually. The TL8600 is a large, solidly built changer measuring 17½ inches wide, 16¾ inches deep, and 4 inches high and weighing about 15 pounds. On its rounded upper front edge are twelve control buttons and a display window, which normally shows the playing status (pause or play), the disc, track, and index numbers, the numbers of the unplayed tracks on the current disc, and the elapsed time in the track. Indicators for other operating modes, such as program, repeat, and random, are displayed as required. A second display, on top of the machine, shows just the track and index numbers.

The front-panel buttons are curved so as to be visible and operable from the front or top of the machine. They include the power switch, DISK SKIP (which rotates the carousel to the next position), and conventionally marked transport controls for track skipping and fast scan in both directions, play/pause, and stop. To the right of the window are buttons that turn the display on or off, toggle the time display between its default reading of elapsed time in the current track, the time remaining in the track or on the disc, and the total time on the disc. The remaining buttons select random play (which can include random selection of discs) and repeat play of all tracks on all discs.
At the lower righthand corner of the panel is a headphone jack. An adjacent volume knob controls the signal level to the phones and to the variable line-output jacks on the rear panel (another pair of jacks delivers a fixed-level output). A row of small round buttons in an arc around the edge of the disc door enables direct selection of any of the five discs on the carousel. Others enable you to program the TL8600 to play up to thirty tracks in any order from any of the discs, to check the programmed sequence, and to clear the program from memory. A second row of buttons along the player’s top front edge enables direct numerical selection of any track (up to No. 99).

The remote control that comes with the TL8600 duplicates all of its front-panel controls except power on/off and adds five others. These include Intro Scan, which plays the first 15 seconds of each track on each disc (or of each track in a programmed sequence), and Auto Space, which inserts a 4-second silent interval between tracks for convenience in taping a number of selections. The A-B Repeat continually repeats any selected program segment, and two buttons are provided for skipping to the next or previous index point on discs that have these markers. Finally, a pair of buttons adjust the level at the headphone and variable line-output jacks by means of a motor that turns the small volume knob on the front of the player.

The TL8600 employs 1-bit digital-to-analog (D/A) conversion, with a pulse-width-modulated (PWM) output at a clock rate of 33.868 MHz. Harman Kardon says that its low-level linearity is within ±0.2 dB at -90 dB and that its frequency response is flat within +0.2 dB from 4 to 20,000 Hz. Other specifications include total harmonic distortion (THD) of 0.003 percent, a dynamic range of 98 dB, and a signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) of 104 dB. The line-output level is specified as 2.0 volts into a 10,000-ohm resistance. Price: $699. Harman Kardon, Dept. SR, 8380 Balboa Blvd., Northridge, CA 91325.

**Lab Tests**

The TL8600's frequency response was as specified, perfectly flat from 100 to 8,000 Hz and down 0.2 dB at 20,000 Hz and 0.05 dB at 20 Hz. Channel separation was 118 dB at 100 Hz and 114 dB at 1,000 Hz, narrowing slightly to 90 dB at 20,000 Hz. Maximum interchannel phase shift was -0.35 degree at 20,000 Hz. Total harmonic distortion plus noise (THD + N) at 0 dB (maximum recorded level) was between 0.003 and 0.008 percent from 20 to 20,000 Hz. The 1,000-Hz distortion was 0.0025 percent at levels from -5 to -60 dB.

The changer's dynamic range was 100.4 dB, and its A-weighted S/N was 105.2 dB. Quantization noise was -92.1 dB. The linearity of the D/A converters was exceptional, with errors substantially less than 1 dB at levels from -60 to -100 dB.

Output (fixed-level or maximum variable-level) was 1.95 volts at 0 dB, and headphone volume was excellent. The player was able to track through disc errors (on the Pierre Verany #2 test disc) of 1,500 micrometers, but some mistracking occurred at 2,000 micrometers. The laser pickup slewed rapidly, moving from Track 1 to Track 15 of the Philips TS4 test disc in 1.8 seconds. The time required to cue from the first track of a disc in the first position on the carousel and the corresponding point on a disc in the fifth position was 11 seconds. Cueing from Disc 5 to Disc 1 required 17 seconds (the carousel rotates clockwise only). The player resisted impacts well, re-
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quiring a fairly hard palm slap on the side (and an even harder one on the top) to cause mistracking.

Comments

The Harman Kardon TL8600 is an excellent changer, and the few things we could fault about its design are relatively minor. There was considerable mechanical noise as the carousel rotated (a characteristic of carousel changers in general) but not so much that we considered it objectionable. Removing a disc from the carousel required a bit of care (and practice), since it is somewhat awkward to grip the edge of a disc after it is loaded into its carousel well. And, of course, a top-loading carousel changer requires

The Harman Kardon TL8600 is one of the most flexible CD players we have tested, and its 1-bit D/A converters delivered outstandingly linear operation.

that the player have nothing on top of it and enough room above it for the lid to open. The TL8600 needs about 16⅛ inches clearance above the shelf on which it rests. We also noted that the hinged top cover, which took a leisurely 9 seconds to open fully (about 45 degrees) after its button was pressed, had a tendency to gather visible dust when the changer was placed on an open shelf.

The TL8600 is one of the most flexible CD players we have tested, with its five-disc capacity and full programming capabilities. Its 1-bit D/A converters demonstrated their superiority in an unmistakable fashion by delivering outstandingly linear operation over the full 100-dB range of our test discs. In addition, the TL8600's ability to play through disc defects and conditions of shock and vibration was above average. We have tested compact disc changers that cost less or that have more features, but none that tops the TL8600 for styling or overall performance. They just don't come much better than this one.

Klipsch kg4.2 Loudspeaker System

Julian Hirsch, Hirsch-Houck Laboratories

The Klipsch kg4.2, a medium-size floor-standing loudspeaker, offers a number of unusual design and performance features at a surprisingly moderate price. It is a two-way system with a horn-loaded tweeter crossing over at 1,800 Hz to a 10-inch woofer. The 2-cubic-foot enclosure is tuned with a 10-inch passive radiator. The driven woofer and the passive radiator have carbon-graphite composite cones and compliant rubber surrounds. The woofer has a 2-inch-diameter voice coil and a 30-ounce magnet.

The tweeter's Tractrix horn, which has a mouth 8 inches wide and 4 inches high, is said to have a coverage of 40 degrees vertically, widening to about 100 degrees at the crossover frequency. Its rated horizontal coverage is approximately 90 degrees at 10,000 Hz, narrowing to about 50 degrees at higher frequencies. The woofer's rated vertical and horizontal coverage is 90 degrees at the crossover point, where the two drivers have similar directional properties. Klipsch says that the system's optimal listening axis is approximately 40 inches from the floor, with the listeners about 2 to 3 meters (6 to 10 feet) from the speakers. The system has a nominal impedance of 6 ohms and a rated sensitivity of 95 dB sound-pressure level (SPL) at 1 meter with an input of 2.83 volts.

The speaker cabinet, 31 inches high, 14 inches wide, and 12 inches deep, is available in oak, walnut, or black-lacquer finishes. Two heavy-duty metal binding posts, which accept single or dual banana plugs as well as bare wires, are recessed into the rear panel. The front is covered by a removable black cloth grille supported on a perforated molded plastic frame. Four 1-inch feet are supplied for raising the speaker slightly from the floor if de-
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The composite frequency response of the kg4.2, formed by combining its room response from two speaker positions with close-miked measurements of the woofer and passive-radiator outputs, was very flat and smooth (+/-1.5 dB) from 550 to 12,000 Hz. There was a 5-dB peak at 15,000 Hz, and the output level returned to its average value by 20,000 Hz. The output rose slightly below 500 Hz, and there was a broad plateau between 40 and 200 Hz (flat within +/-1.5 dB) that averaged about 5 dB higher than the upper midrange level. Relative to the bass plateau, the output fell to -4 dB at 30 Hz and -11 dB at 20 Hz.

Comments
The sound of the Klipsch kg4.2 was notably smooth and clean. It had none of the "horn" character that has sometimes been bothersome when horn-loaded tweeters were used in home music systems. The blending of the outputs of the cone woofer and the horn tweeter was excellent, with no anomalies occurring in the crossover region (probably because the directivities of the two drivers were well matched at that frequency).

Before setting up the kg4.2 speakers, we had been listening to a pair of much smaller speakers that lacked punch in the lower octaves. The kg4.2 was a real ear-opener, reaching almost an octave below the limits of most compact speakers we have used. It was interesting to note how effectively its relatively large woofer and horn tweeter had been blended without an audible clue to their disparate natures.

When we first unpacked and set up the Klipsch kg4.2 system, we didn't know its price. After a few minutes of listening, we looked it up and were quite surprised. Judging from the sound alone, $1,000 a pair or even more would have seemed quite reasonable. This sort of sound—and appearance—is not at all common in speakers in the $700 price range.

Since the creation of the Klipsch horns about fifty years ago, speakers bearing the Klipsch name have usually employed horn tweeters. But for many years horns were associated with public-address speakers of dubious fidelity, with the result that they almost vanished from the arena of fine home speakers. The kg4.2 serves as a reminder that there is still a place in high fidelity for a well-designed horn-loaded tweeter—one whose high efficiency is combined with the range, uniformity of output, smoothness, and dispersion we have come to expect from high-quality direct-radiating drivers.

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If you’re looking for the high-quality sound and engineering that have made the Nakamichi name legendary, and you’re willing to forgo a few costly frills, the company’s new Cassette Deck 1.5 may be just what you’re after. With three heads and three motors, a closed-loop dual-capstan tape transport, Dolby B and Dolby C noise-reduction systems, a unique tape-search facility, a bias-trim control, and a switchable FM-multiplex filter, the Model 1.5 boasts plenty of features. But to make it accessible to a wide range of users, Nakamichi has left out some of the features offered on most previous cassette decks in its line.

Nakamichi invented the three-head cassette deck, which enables instantaneous comparison between source and recording. The other important advantage of three-head design is that it enables use of both a relatively wide recording head gap, to maximize signal-to-noise ratio (S/N), and a relatively narrow playback head gap, to reproduce the highest audio frequencies. While the Cassette Deck 1.5 retains these benefits, it dispenses with the costly azimuth-adjustment systems used in most earlier Nakamichi recorders by housing the separate recording and playback head elements in a single case that fixes them in proper alignment to each other. Happily, that head case still incorporates another Nakamichi innovation, a pair of projecting bosses that prevent a cassette’s felt pressure pad from forcing the tape against the head. A well-designed transport system can supply the proper tape-to-head tension without noise-inducing pressure pads.

The tape-holdback tension is created by using slightly different diameters for the two capstans in a closed-loop drive configuration. The leading capstan tends to rotate slightly faster than the lagging one, holding the tape taut against the head, which protrudes slightly into the tape path. An additional benefit of the asymmetry is that the two capstan systems do not have any common resonance frequencies, which could actually increase wow and flutter, defeating the purpose of a closed-loop dual-capstan transport.

The capstans are driven by a DC servomotor, and a second DC motor handles the high-speed winding chores. A third DC motor powers a cam system that takes the place of solenoids to operate the tape-gate and pinch-roller mechanisms. The usual transport-control buttons are thus simple and quiet three-position switches.

Any tape slack is automatically reeled up when cassettes are loaded, but the Model 1.5 does not automatically detect the tape type in use. Instead, three pushbuttons, located behind a decorative pull-down front panel, are used to set bias and equalization for Type I (ferric), Type II (chrome and chrome-equivalent), and Type IV (metal) tapes. The cassette-well door is easily removable to facilitate cleaning and demagnetizing the tape path.

Thanks in part to backlighting, the narrow window in the cassette-well door affords at least an eye-level view.


**FEATURES**

- Separate recording and playback heads
- Three-motor asymmetrical closed-loop, dual-capstan transport
- Dolby B and Dolby C noise reduction
- Twelve-segment peak-indicating level indicators
- User-adjustable bias
- High-speed counter search
- Switchable FM multiplex filter
- Remote-control option

**LABORATORY measurements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fast-forward time (C-60)</th>
<th>93 seconds</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rewind time (C-60)</td>
<td>93 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed error</td>
<td>-0.16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dolby tracking error</td>
<td>Dolby B, +0.5, -1 dB; Dolby C, +1, -1.2 dB</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Wow-and-flutter</th>
<th>0.021% rms, 0.044% DIN peak-weighted</th>
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<tr>
<td>Line input for indicated 0 dB</td>
<td>55 mV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Line output at indicated 0 dB</td>
<td>0.71 volt</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meter indication at IEC-standard 0 dB</th>
<th>+1.5 dB</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tape</strong>: TDK AD (Type I, ferric)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEC 0-dB distortion</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meter indication at 3% THD + noise</td>
<td>+3 dB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signal-to-noise ratios (in decibels):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unwtd. A-wtd. CCIR/ARM</td>
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<tr>
<td>NR off</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dolby B</td>
<td>63.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dolby C</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Meter indication at 3% THD + noise   | +5 dB   |
| Signal-to-noise ratios (in decibels):|          |
| Unwtd. A-wtd. CCIR/ARM               |         |
| NR off                               | 59.4    |
| Dolby B                              | 66.0    |
| Dolby C                              | 67.9    |

| **Tape**: TDK SA (Type II, chrome-equivalent) |
| IEC 0-dB distortion                     | 0.63%   |
| Meter indication at 3% THD + noise       | +8 dB   |
| Signal-to-noise ratios (in decibels):     |         |
| Unwtd. A-wtd. CCIR/ARM                   |         |
| NR off                                   | 59.4    |
| Dolby B                                  | 66.0    |
| Dolby C                                  | 67.9    |

| **Tape**: TDK MA (Type IV, metal) |
| IEC 0-dB distortion                  | 0.0%    |
| Meter indication at 3% THD + noise    | +3 dB   |
| Signal-to-noise ratios (in decibels): |         |
| Unwtd. A-wtd. CCIR/ARM               |         |
| NR off                               | 57.1    |
| Dolby B                              | 63.0    |
| Dolby C                              | 64.4    |

| Tape: TDK MA with Dolby C |

| **Tape**: TDK SA (Type II, chrome-equivalent) |
| IEC 0-dB distortion                     | 0.63%   |
| Meter indication at 3% THD + noise       | +8 dB   |
| Signal-to-noise ratios (in decibels):     |         |
| Unwtd. A-wtd. CCIR/ARM                   |         |
| NR off                                   | 59.4    |
| Dolby B                                  | 66.0    |
| Dolby C                                  | 67.9    |

**Lab Tests**

Measurements of the Nakamichi CassetteDeck1.5 with our ferric and of how much tape remains on a side. That's important because the four-digit LED tape counter registers hub revolutions only, not elapsed or remaining time. The peak-reading LED level display has twelve segments per channel, covering a range from -40 to +10 dB. Although not so marked, the 0-dB indication appears to be calibrated at Dolby level (200 nanowebers per meter), a sensible, long-time Nakamichi practice.

Although it has no selection-programming capabilities, the CassetteDeck1.5 has an unusual preview feature that can help you identify the contents of a tape. If you press the fast-forward or rewind button twice, the tape fast-winds in the appropriate direction for 5 seconds, then plays from that point for 5 seconds; the deck repeats this process until the end of the tape is reached. The usual rewind-to-zero and repeat-play facilities are also included.

The noise-reduction and multiplex-filter switches are located behind the pull-down panel, as are the rather small recording-level and balance controls. There, too, is the user-adjustable bias-trim control. Again unlike some of the more costly Nakamichi decks, the CassetteDeck1.5 does not provide any calibrated test tones for determining the optimum setting of the bias control for a given tape. The user must therefore fall back on the less accurate expedient of recording a noise source, such as FM interstation hiss, at a low (-20-dB) level while adjusting the control to minimize the audible difference between source and tape playback.

The CassetteDeck1.5 has a front-panel headphone jack, but its output as well as the main outputs have a fixed level, with no volume control. In addition to the usual input and output jacks, the back panel has connections for an optional wired remote-control device.

Overall, the Nakamichi CassetteDeck1.5 measures 17 inches wide, 12½ inches deep, and 5 inches high, and it weighs a little less than 12 pounds. Price: $699. Nakamichi America Corporation, Dept. SR, 19701 S. Vermont Ave., Torrance, CA 90502.

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Ford was the first domestic car company to offer Digital Audio Tape and compact disc players in our premium sound systems. We're not stopping there.

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CrO₂ IEC-standard (BASF) calibrated playback test cassettes showed very flat response (± 0.5 dB) from 100 to 10,000 Hz, coupled with a rise of 2 to 3 dB at the extreme ends of the audio spectrum. The treble rise is typical of Nakamichi recorders, which use slightly different playback equalization from that of most other decks. Nakamichi has long contended that its approach to playback and recording EQ is the correct one based on the actual magnetization level of the tape and that its magnetic-flux measurements of the standard test tapes indicate they are "hot" at the highest frequencies, making the playback responses of inferior decks look better than they actually are.

Overall record/playback response, checked at the usual -20 dB level with our centerline samples of TDK AD (ferric), TDK SA (chrome-equivalent), and TDK MA (metal), was also within the CassetteDeck1.5's specification of ±3 dB from 20 to 21,000 Hz. At an IEC 0-dB level (1.5 dB above the deck's own 0-dB marking), high-frequency response still extended to 15,000 Hz with the metal tape, 14,000 Hz with the ferric, and 10,000 Hz with the chrome-equivalent. Even at this high recording level, with Dolby C noise reduction switched in the response with metal tape dropped by only 2.5 dB at 20,000 Hz.

A-weighted signal-to-noise ratios with Dolby C ranged from 74.6 to 78.9 dB for the three tapes, showing both very good performance and proper attention to head design. (With good heads, the S/N with metal tape should measure at least 4 dB better than with ferric.)

Wow-and-flutter was very low, measuring 0.012 percent on a rms basis and 0.018 percent by the more rigorous DIN peak-weighted method. Speed accuracy was also very good: the measured error of −0.16 percent means that a standard 440-Hz A would be reproduced at 439.8 Hz, which is a negligible discrepancy. The fast-winding time of 93 seconds in either direction for a C-60 cassette was about average for a deck in the Nakamichi 1.5's price class.

Dolby error was negligible, within +0.5, −1.0 dB for Dolby B and +1.0, −1.2 dB for Dolby C. The required input level of 55 millivolts for a 0-dB level recording and the output level of 700 millivolts from a 0-dB recorded test signal were both entirely normal.

Comments

While old Nakamichi hands are used to it, newcomers may at first find the need to select tape type manually a trial that results in occasional error.

The CassetteDeck1.5's human engineering lived up to our expectations for a Nakamichi product: Every operation was silent, smooth, and sure.

And the lack of a headphone volume control is a significant omission for those who frequently listen through headphones—ours were simply too loud to enjoy. For the rest, however, the CassetteDeck1.5's human engineering fully lived up to our expectations for a Nakamichi product: Every operation was silent, smooth, and sure.

We were surprised when playing back prerecorded tapes to find ourselves turning down the treble control on our preamplifier. Part of the reason was undoubtedly that the tapes we use for our listening evaluations tend—unlike most commercial releases—to have a slightly high hot end, which became excessive when played on a deck with a rising treble response. That rising response is likely to be a benefit rather than a drawback when listening to more typical prerecorded cassettes, however.

It was in dubbing from CD's that the true sonic merits of the CassetteDeck1.5 became most apparent. The frequency response and dynamic range were as wide as those of our sources, and the clarity was superb. Moreover, the stereo image did not seem to be altered in any way when we switched from source to playback. Indeed, we had to hit the stop button several times during our tests to be sure we were really listening to the tape and not to the source. Such high-quality record/playback performance in an analog cassette deck requires not only superb heads and electronics but very stable tape motion as well. All these Nakamichi hallmarks are now made more affordable by the splendid new CassetteDeck1.5.

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CIRCLE NO. 16 ON READER SERVICE CARD
Cerwin-Vega DX-7 Loudspeaker System

Julian Hirsch, Hirsch-Houck Laboratories

CERWIN-VEGA'S new DX Series consists of four models. The DX-7, next to the top of the group in size and price, is a floor-standing speaker measuring 15 x 34 x 14 1/4 inches and weighing about 64 pounds. It is a three-way system whose 12-inch cast-aluminum-frame woofer operates in a ported enclosure. At 250 Hz there is a crossover to a 6 1/2-inch cone midrange driver. The second crossover, at 5,000 Hz, is to a 1-inch dome tweeter, radiating through what is described as an "acoustic transformer," a short horn with a central phase-correcting plug. Both crossovers have slopes of 12 dB per octave.

Nominal impedance is 4 ohms, and the system's rated bandwidth is 34 to 20,000 Hz. The DX-7 is specified for use with amplifiers delivering between 5 and 255 watts per channel. Its rated sensitivity of 98 dB is unusually high for a home loudspeaker.

The cabinet, made of braced 3/4-inch particleboard, is finished in woodgrain (oak) vinyl on all the visible surfaces and behind the removable black cloth grille. The input connectors, spring clips on 5/8-inch centers that accept wire ends or banana plugs, are recessed into the back panel. Next to them is the holder for a 2 1/2-ampere system fuse. The tweeter is also protected by an internal self-resetting circuit breaker. The woofer port is at the bottom of the rear panel.

The drivers are mounted in a vertical array, tweeter at the top and woofer at the bottom. The high-frequency and midrange drivers are located about 1 1/2 inches to the left of the center-line of the front panel. The midrange driver cone is protected by a nonremovable metal grille. The brilliant pink-red flexible edge surround of the woofer cone is not visible with the grille in place. Price: $410 each.

Lab Tests

We placed the Cerwin-Vega DX-7 speakers about 8 feet apart, 4 feet from the side walls, and 2 feet from the wall behind them. Our microphone was placed on the forward axis of the left speaker and about 12 feet away from it, and we plotted the room response of each speaker on the same graph paper using a sweeping sine wave with a superimposed one-third-octave "warble." Their average formed a single room curve.

We measured the woofer response with a close microphone spacing, separately for the cone and port outputs. Combining the two curves (corrected for the different diameters of the woofer and port) with the room response created a composite frequency-response curve. The bass and room curves overlapped almost exactly from 60 to 500 Hz, resulting in a composite frequency response whose maximum output was between 130 and 220 Hz. The output fell off at lower frequencies, by about 8 or 9 dB at 40 Hz, then rose 3 dB at 27 Hz.

From 200 to 500 Hz the output fell about 5 to 6 dB, then it leveled off and remained within ±2.5 dB from 400 to 12,500 Hz. There was a peak of about 3 dB at 15,000 Hz that extended to 20,000 Hz. Overall, the system's response was quite uniform above 400 Hz, emphasized by perhaps 5 or 6 dB in the 130- to 220-Hz range and falling off at lower frequencies to a level only about 5 dB below the average midrange and high-frequency level all the way down to 20 Hz.

Quasi-anechoic response measurements confirmed the essential features of our composite room-response curve. In particular, they confirmed the reality of the output increases at 200 and 15,000 Hz. The DX-7's horizontal dispersion was not as broad as that of some other speakers. The on-axis and 45-degree off-axis response curves diverged above 2,000 Hz, with a difference between them of 8 to 9 dB from 3,000 to 9,000 Hz and of 16 dB at 20,000 Hz.

The minimum system impedance was 3.5 ohms at 130 Hz, and the maximum was 27 ohms at 50 Hz. Over most of the audio range, the impedance was comfortably above the 4-ohm rating. With a 2.83-volt input of pink noise, the sound-pressure level (SPL) was 99 dB at 1 meter, one of the highest sensitivities we have measured from a home speaker.

Bass distortion with an input of 1
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TEST REPORTS

volt (equivalent to a 90-dB SPL in our sensitivity measurement) was between 0.2 and 0.4 percent from 60 to 250 Hz. Below 60 Hz, output from the port was predominant, and distortion rose from 0.5 percent at 60 Hz to 1 percent at 40 Hz and 2 percent at 20 Hz. In single-cycle tone-burst power tests at 100, 1,000, and 10,000 Hz, the driving amplifier clipped before the speaker's output showed signs of overload or serious distortion. The clipping power level was in the range of 1,000 to 1,500 watts at all three frequencies, each of which was handled by a different driver.

Comments

With most program material, the Cerwin-Vega DX-7 sounded as uniform as the major part of its frequency response would suggest. Middle and high frequencies were smooth and well balanced, and the low bass was strong and clean.

Our greatest concern was the response hump in the upper bass and lower midrange, roughly between 100 and 300 Hz. Because of the speaker's flatness over much of the audio range, this effect stood out quite prominently in a number of measurements made using several very different techniques. It had to be a real characteristic of the speaker.

Well, it is, but under most conditions it was so much less audible than one might expect that it could easily be overlooked. Most speakers have a similar rise, though not always as prominent. It is most easily heard as an unnatural heaviness in male voices, especially when their bass content has been exaggerated by too-close miking. We were pleasantly surprised to find that with the DX-7 this effect was less apparent than with most other speakers we have used. This simply confirms once again that the correlation between loudspeaker measurements and sound quality is often poorer than one might hope.

At any rate, the frequency balance and smoothness of the sound were excellent, especially in view of the DX-7's moderate price. The low bass was very much present without being overpowering, and bass distortion was exceptionally low. The measured directivity of the high-frequency output was somewhat narrower than average, but this did not seem to impair the speaker's sound in any way. A number of speakers, in all price ranges, are meant to be "toed in" slightly to the center of the room, and that would probably be advisable with this one if optimum imaging is your goal. We did not find it necessary in our room.

The DX-7's sensitivity is extraordinary for a home system. Although this might seem to indicate an ability to play extra loud (which the DX-7 certainly can do), we found exploiting that capacity rather overwhelming in a 15 x 20 x 8-foot room. Another perspective on this quality is that it enables very high sound levels to be generated with little amplifier power. You really don't need a 100-watt amplifier with this speaker; 10 to 20 watts per channel should be quite adequate.

Either way you look at it (or listen to it), the Cerwin-Vega DX-7 is a lot of speaker for the money. Performance and appearance are both first-rate.
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TAKING delivery of a new car usually generates an enormous sigh of relief, signaling the end of the marathon of decisions, budget quandaries, and the thousand and one choices that buying a vehicle entails. But for the mobile audio fanatic, driving off the lot is only the beginning—the real fun comes in selecting, designing, installing, and enjoying a new sound system custom-tailored to the new set of wheels.

The options are only slightly less overwhelming than those of the automotive world itself. There are hundreds of car stereo components vying for attention, and when you’re assembling a system the possible combinations are very nearly beyond number. A little thoughtful planning, however, will narrow the field considerably. One of the very first things you should do is choose the system’s front end, or “head unit.” This is perhaps your most critical decision, for a car stereo system, like any hi-fi system, can be no better than its program sources.

Currently available complements for the ubiquitous road-going AM/FM radio include cassette tapes, compact discs, and, to a very small extent, digital audio tape (DAT). If you already own an impressive tape collection, selecting a primary source is easy: You’re going to want a cassette deck packaged with your radio. Similarly, if your shelves are well stocked with CD’s, a CD tuner or receiver is
The Jensen CD-9500 ($429) combines an AM/FM tuner, a CD player, and a 20-watt stereo amplifier on a removable DIN-size chassis.

Nakamichi's removable TunerDeck1 ($830) slips into any of the company's PowerPort sleeves for power and amplification.

Alpine's $900 Model 7980 is the world's first in-dash tuner/CD changer. Its slide-in magazines can hold up to three discs each.
the obvious choice. If you're starting from scratch, however, or if you're open to change, weigh the modest cost penalty for a CD player against its undeniably superior performance and convenience. With a CD player you can instantly cue up any selection, rapidly search forward or back with intelligible sound, and (depending on the model) avail yourself of all kinds of neat programming functions such as shuffle play (playback of tracks in random order), intro scan (which plays the first few seconds of each track), and automatic repeat.

On the other hand, you can't make your own CD's, which means taking your precious discs on the road. With reasonable care, they'll suffer no ill effects. But if you're the sort who stores tapes on the passenger-side floor among discarded soft-drink cans and burger wrappers, you'd probably be well advised to stick with cassettes. One advantage of a cassette player is that you can carry taped copies of your CD collection in your car instead of risking the originals. And you can even make special compilations on tape just for mobile listening.

Many prospective buyers wonder how well a seemingly delicate CD player can work in the rough-and-tumble of a moving vehicle. Are skips, mutes, and stutters inevitable? In fact, improvements in transport mechanisms, laser pickups, and error-correction systems have made the best car players nearly impervious to the bumps and shocks of all but the most primitive roads.

It's also perfectly possible to have your cake and eat it, too. You can combine a lunchbox-size six-, ten-, or even twelve-disc magazine-type CD changer, installed in the trunk or another out-of-the-way spot, with an in-dash unit that plays cassettes and AM/FM radio as well as controlling the CD changer. The only drawback is cost. Such a combo head unit will run 20 to 40 percent more than an equivalent tape-only model—and you'll still have to buy the CD changer itself.

**Powering Up**

After you settle the tape/CD question, the next basic issue is power. For a relatively simple system, a CD or cassette receiver with built-in amplifiers and outputs for two or four speakers may be all you need. These head units usually provide only a few watts per channel; even "high-power" car receivers are not, in fact, particularly powerful by home audio standards. But with careful speaker selection and...
The Denon DCC-9770 removable CD tuner ($750) has dual 18-bit D/A converters with eight-times-oversampling 20-bit digital filters, eighteen FM and six AM station presets, four line-level outputs, and controls for the company's CD changers. It also comes with a remote control (shown on facing page).

The Eclipse ECD-411 removable CD receiver ($700) has controls for the company's ECD-430 twelve-disc CD changer and EQS-1001 DSP Sound Processor. Its internal CD player has 18-bit D/A converters, and its stereo amplifier section is rated at 12 watts per channel.

The Coustic RX-739 pull-out cassette receiver ($280) features eighteen FM and twelve AM station presets, a rear input and front-panel switch for an outboard CD player, and a power amp rated at 5 watts per channel in four-channel mode or 15 watts per channel in two-channel mode.

Features of the Clarion Model 9772RT slide-out cassette receiver ($280) include automatic local/distant switching, fifteen FM and five AM station presets, a head-cleaning indicator, and a rated output of 15 watts each into four channels or 20 watts each into two.
MAYBE you can’t take it with you, but you might be able to keep it while you’re here. No matter where you live, if you have a nifty car stereo system, someone, someday, is going to consider separating it from your car without your consent. To inhibit this process, car stereo manufacturers have come up with some clever theft deterrents.

Actually, you can take it with you. Most of today’s head units, of whatever type, feature a removable chassis that slides into a metal sleeve installed in the dashboard. Usually a handle folds down to clip the unit into the sleeve and folds up to release it. When you leave the car, you just slide the whole unit out and carry it away. A few removables have locking clips so that they can be semipermanently stored in the dash.

Removable faceplates provide ultimate in dashboard security. Thieves can’t steal what isn’t there. But we humans are a lazy lot. Eventually even the best of us will forget to pull the unit out when we dash in for a coffee to go. Sometimes it’s inconvenient, too—what do you do with the thing while you’re putting mustard on your hot dog? So several manufacturers, led by Pioneer, now offer removable-faceplate designs. On these units, only the faceplate comes off, complete with all controls and some critical circuit connections. The faceplate is small enough to slip into a pocket or a purse, so there’s less excuse for leaving it behind, and without it the head unit is entirely—and obviously—useless.

Security-code models are usually not removable. The idea is that if the power-supply connection is broken—as it will be if, say, the unit is crowbarred out of the dashboard—a multidigit code must be entered on the front panel before the unit will work again. Most head units featuring security codes carry a prominent warning that the unit will commit electronic suicide if removed, along with window decals to make the message more obvious.

Unfortunately, car stereo thieves are not a particularly literate bunch and have been known in the heat of the moment to overlook (or disregard) such notices. Automotive security systems, whether factory equipment or retrofits, have the advantage of protecting your wheels as well as your stereo. They can at least slow down ambitious thieves and may discourage the less zealous altogether. Perhaps the best combination is a well-designed (and well-installed) car security system along with a removable or removable-face head unit—and an owner who religiously removes the chassis or faceplate every time the car is left unattended.

Professional installation, a car receiver can provide modest listening levels with reasonable sound quality, which may be all you’re looking for.

If, on the other hand, you want your mobile music loud, with significant deep bass and demo-quality fidelity, you’ll need to add an external power amplifier—or two, three, or more. In that case, a line-level head unit—one without any on-board power amplifier—is the better choice. There is also a middle way. Many car stereo receivers provide preamp-output jacks in parallel with speaker wires served by the on-board amplifier. These enable you to drive one or more speaker pairs with an external power amp while the built-in amp handles another, smaller pair—usually in the dash or front doors.

No matter what kind of head unit you select, it’s almost certain to come loaded with features. Autoreverse tape play, plentiful station presets, auto skip and intro scan for tapes and discs, random play for CD’s, and dozens more are almost universal. So instead of concentrating on the features a given model may have that aren’t standard, spend some time evaluating its basic performance.

Tuning In

Begin with the lowly radio. The fact is that many people spend most of their mobile listening time tuned in—usually to FM. But the FM-tuner performance of head units varies widely. The good news is that the best mobile tuners are true technological wonders, able to deliver terrific sound quality in a moving vehicle at considerable distances from the transmitter. The bad news is that not all car tuners are anywhere near that good, and the specs are not especially reliable predictors of in-the-car, on-the-road performance.

The best way to evaluate a head unit’s FM abilities is to drive around in a car in which it is installed, in your own neighborhood, tuned to your favorite stations. In the unlikely event that you’re able to do this, let your ears be the judge. You probably won’t get that chance, however, and you’ll have to take someone’s word for it—most likely the dealer’s. So finding a reliable dealer is a high priority.

Tapes and Discs

Next, tape. Nearly all automotive tape decks are autoreverse decks, which play an entire cassette without requiring you to flip it over. Although it’s certainly convenient, autoreverse
complicates tape-head and transport design. Be sure to listen to a prospective deck using both playback directions to check for extended treble and solid bass on both sides of the tape. Also make sure that the deck can adjust equalization according to the tape type, either automatically or manually with NORMAL-METAL buttons. Manual buttons have the advantage of allowing you to select the “wrong” EQ setting deliberately in order to extract more treble from low-quality or poorly recorded tapes (with a certain noise penalty), but automatic switching is more convenient and increasingly prevalent.

Dolby B noise reduction is pretty much standard in car decks these days, and Dolby C—a more effective but rather finicky system—is included on many higher-cost head units. If you play only store-bought prerecorded tapes, Dolby C will be of little use to you, as commercial cassettes almost universally use Dolby B. But if you have a good Dolby-C home deck and want to make your own higher-quality road tapes, consider buying an equivalently endowed car unit. The enhanced dynamic range afforded by Dolby C is worthwhile in some cases, particularly with jazz and classical music.

Sonic variations in compact disc head units are unlikely to be as profound or perceptible as those found among car radios and cassette players, but differences in disc-tracking performance and resistance to vibration are substantial. As with radio performance, these qualities are impossible to evaluate in the showroom; you’ve got to hit the road. If you can’t try the unit out before you buy it, make sure you can exchange it for another one if it falls short on the roads you drive. A player’s ability to keep the music going regardless of road conditions can have a profound effect on your long-term satisfaction.

The best head-unit CD players are remarkably resistant to skipping, even when subjected to axle-bending pot-holes, but lesser models can be troublesome on less-than-perfect road surfaces. Cost is often—but by no means always—a rough guide to quality. Once again, the best reality check is a ride in a car equipped with a candidate player; failing that, seek advice from a reliable source. Be aware, too, that the automobile itself can affect disc tracking. A player that mistracks and hangs up repeatedly in a Jeep is likely to do much better when it’s installed in a Cadillac.

Human Engineering

At least as important as performance considerations are ergonomic ones. Your head unit’s controls should be easy to distinguish and operate, its displays legible and simple to understand. A model that lacks these qualities will become increasingly irritating over time; worse, it can even be a road hazard by distracting you while you’re driving. Look for controls that are clearly marked, well lit, and not over-complicated; displays that are large and bright enough to read at a glance in daylight as well as at night (the best automatically dim in the dark); and minimal button-clutter. Often a head unit with fewer features but more thoughtful design will prove a better choice than one with a dense population of buttons, knobs, and indicators.

Appearance and fit are factors, too, particularly if you’re selecting a system for an apple-of-your-eye new car. Nearly all head units today, and most cars, conform to the German DIN dashboard-cutout standard, so major installation problems are relatively rare. But some incompatibilities remain, so be certain that a particular unit will fit in your car before you fall in love with it. Styling varies, so let your eye be the judge of what will integrate smoothly into your vehicle’s interior design. Night lighting is another consideration; several manufacturers offer head units whose illumination color can be changed from amber to red or green to complement a car’s interior.

Finally, consider all those features we mentioned earlier. If you have any money left in the budget after meeting your requirements for program sources, sound quality, performance, ergonomics, fit, and appearance, by all means move on up to a fancier model. Some head-unit tricks are truly useful, some merely glitter. As long as you satisfy the important selection criteria first, it won’t much matter. You’ll have a solid basis for your car stereo system in any case. Then you can go on to the next challenge—choosing, or upgrading, your car speakers, maybe adding a subwoofer. And that should make you do some thinking about adding an outboard power amp, perhaps an equalizer or ambience processor. Even a basic system can evolve gradually into a very sophisticated one. Think of it this way: Buying something new for your car stereo system every year is more fun than buying a new car—and a lot cheaper.
An Audio/Video Sanctuary

by Rebecca Day

MAYBE all audiophiles, at some point in their lives, threaten to mortgage the house so they can build a room devoted entirely to audio and video entertainment. David Rubenstein is one who actually did it.

A teacher and a part-time jazz musician, Rubenstein and friends built the 30 x 20 x 14-foot sanctuary next to his house in Mount Tremper, New York. In it he assembled a painstakingly researched collection of audio/video equipment: a California Audio Labs Tempest II Special Edition CD player, Nakamichi Dragon and Model 680ZX cassette decks, a Magnum Dynalab FT-101 FM tuner, a Pioneer CLD-3080 laserdisc player, a Mitsubishi HS-U70 S-VHS VCR, an Audio Research SP-11 Mark II preamplifier, a Lexicon CP-1 surround-sound processor, five Counterpoint SA-20/220 power amplifiers, a Technics JX-S300 video switcher, and a Mitsubishi VS-1200 ceiling projector. Infinity IRS Beta's are the main speakers, and five in-wall Infinity ERS-800's make up the surround ensemble.

Because placement of the projector needed to be exact (13 feet, 2 inches from the screen), Rubenstein "put the cart before the horse," installing the Draper Envoy motorized screen first, then the projector, then the rest of the equipment and the furniture. In designing the rest of the room, he added touches appropriate for an audiophile's retreat. The few components that were not rack-mountable were installed on shelves bolted to the black Formica rack, which also serves as the live end of the live-end/dead-end room. The ceiling is peaked to break up standing waves, and the 14-inch walls are filled with absorbent material to prevent sound from leaking into the main house. The system is also isolated electrically, powered from a dedicated 200-ampere transformer. The transformer feeds three Aris Model 615 power-distribution rack illuminators, which provide switched and unswitched AC outlets as well as surge protection.

To prevent heat from building up inside the cabinet, Rubenstein installed six Audio Research RMV-3 rack ventilator panels above each of the five power amplifiers and the preamplifier.

All his efforts have paid off, Rubenstein maintains. "My system has that live sound that I love," says the musician. "And it adds to the value of the house," says the homeowner. "And," says the teacher, "the kids are being schooled in classical music, jazz, and r&b." Just ask daughter Rebekah, who's five. Listening to the car radio recently, she correctly pegged the composer of a piece she had never heard. "That's Vivaldi," she announced, "just like The Four Seasons."
**Signal Processing**

**What to Do About Bad Sound** • By E. Brad Meyer

**Recordings** vary tremendously in quality. The ability of compact discs to deliver virtually perfect replicas of their master tapes has taught us that although the best recordings are thrilling, some sound pretty awful, and there are examples falling everywhere in between.

One reason is that every recording is optimized according to the producer's preferences, which may reflect goals having little to do with realism on high-quality audio systems and which are guided in any case by the sound of the speakers and room he or she uses to monitor the recording. For example, if the monitor speakers have lots of bass, as do those in many pop studios, then the final mix will probably sound thin on less-colored speakers because the engineer reduced the bass tracks to balance correctly on the monitors.

So despite the accuracy of digital recording and playback you will still need to tailor the sound of many CD's to fit your system. This is where signal processors come into the picture. For our purposes, signal processing is anything you can't do with the normal volume, balance, bass, and treble controls. Signal processors fall into three broad groups according to whether they alter tonal balance, stereo image, or dynamic range.

Alteration of tonal balance with an equalizer is the most common kind of processing. Equalization, or EQ, can be used to correct the response of an entire system, in which case the controls are set once and left alone, or it can be adjusted to compensate for the peculiarities of individual recordings.

Stereo-image processors expand the apparent source of the music—sometimes called the sound stage—making it seem to spread out beyond the area between and behind the speakers. Some image enhancers work with an existing two-channel setup, whereas others require additional speakers and amplifiers. Both types can be optimized for music or film sound.

Dynamic-range processors use compression—boosting soft passages and attenuating loud ones—to decrease the dynamic range or expansion to increase it. There are reasons for both, which we will go into shortly.

**Equalizers**

A graphic equalizer, the most common type, divides the audible spectrum into contiguous bands, each with its own slider control, arranged from left to right in order of increasing frequency. The sliders are moved upward or downward from their central "flat" settings to boost or cut output in the individual bands, their physical positions forming a rough depiction of the imposed response curve.

Graphic equalizers range from the simple five-band designs found in some receivers (with each slider controlling both channels at once) to stand-alone octave-band models with separate controls for the left and right channels. These are available in varying degrees of sophistication and accuracy at prices from $150 to $400.

Even if you don't use it regularly to tune your system or rebalance bad recordings, an octave equalizer can be both fun and educational. The audible spectrum is ten octaves wide; the lowest band, centered at 31.5 Hz, covers the range from 20 to 40 Hz and contains only the deepest bass-drums and organ sounds. Through using an equalizer you will learn that most of what we think of as low bass is in the next band, centered at 63 Hz and spanning 40 to 80 Hz; that few classical recordings contain much energy in the top octave, above 10 kHz, but that many pop recordings do; and that what happens between 100 Hz and 3 kHz determines the sound's basic character.

**Equalizer/Analyzers**

There are graphic equalizers that divide the audio range into thirty or more bands, but they are designed mainly for professional use and cost more than most of us would want to spend on such a device. Besides, a ten-band octave equalizer is difficult enough to adjust by ear; equalizers with many more bands are almost impossible to use without a real-time analyzer, an instrument that displays the instantaneous level of an audio signal in each band. Some equalizers designed for home use include an octave-band analyzer, a microphone, and a circuit called a pink-noise generator, which puts out a waterfall sound containing equal energy in each band.

With such a setup you can play pink noise through the system, put the mi...
The ultimate in signal-processing flexibility—for those who can handle it—is provided by Audio Control's one-third-octave-band R-130 real-time spectrum analyzer (top, $679) and a pair of matching C-131 single-channel graphic equalizers ($529 each). The R-130 has a built-in pink-noise generator and comes with a microphone.
crophone at your listening chair, and set the controls for flat response.

Unfortunately, the situation is too complicated for this procedure to work well. One problem is that a system that measures flat by this method will sound bright and thin with almost all recordings. The main reason is that what you measure at your chair is a combination of the direct sound from the speaker and the reflections and resonances of the room. Your ears hear these separately to some extent, so when you correct for the response of the room you may alter the direct sound for the worse.

Every room is different, but the best tactic in most cases is to place the microphone directly in front of the speakers' tweeters, about 3 feet away, and adjust the equalizer for flat measured response from 250 Hz to 1 kHz, with a gentle rise below that range and a gentle rolloff above it, so that the 31.5-Hz band is up about 4 dB and the 16-kHz band is down about 6 dB. Then move the microphone back to the listening chair, measure again, and move the controls about half as far as necessary to correct the new curve to the previous one. You may still find that you prefer your system's basic sound without room EQ, however.

**Stereo-Image Processors**

There are two basic types of stereo-image processor. The first type—using a process known generically as interaural crosstalk cancellation—mixes one channel into the other with a short delay and some equalization in order to prevent left-channel signals from being heard by the right ear and vice versa. The sonic effect is a broader and deeper sound stage extending horizontally well beyond the speakers. The biggest advantage of crosstalk cancellation is that it works with only two speakers, so no extra equipment, beyond the processor itself, is required. The drawbacks are that it almost always produces distinct colorations (alterations of tonal balance), the effect varies widely with recording technique (type and placement of microphones and so forth), and the image expansion usually works only if you listen from exactly on, or very close to, the center line between the speakers. In the rest of the room you will hear the coloration, but the spatial effect will be lost.

The second kind of image processor—called a spatial or sound-field processor or an ambience-enhancement device—requires two or more extra channels of amplification. Common to all these processors is that the original sound, or some part of it, is delayed before being fed to some of the extra speakers. Your ears can pick up the sound from the front speakers largely unaltered, augmented a few tens of milliseconds later by sound from the sides or back of the room, which increases the sense of spaciousness. This type of processing ranges from simple delays generated by conventional analog electronics to elaborate digital manipulations that duplicate the timing and frequency responses of reflections that would occur in real spaces.

The most sophisticated spatial processors work digitally, either taking analog signals and quantizing them or accepting digital signals directly from a CD player or another appropriate source. Once the sound is digitized, it is possible to mathematically generate artificial reflections whose timings and tonal balances mimic those of reflections in actual acoustic spaces, enabling the listener to choose any of a wide variety of halls or rooms in which to place the performers. These processors are effective within a broad central listening area, and the additional ambient sound is audible even outside the room.

We have been talking about image processors designed for music playback, but there is another type that is optimized for film and video soundtracks. The simplest of these are Dolby Surround decoders using analog circuits to separate the four channels (left, center, right, and surround) contained in most modern movie soundtracks. Dolby Surround decoders with a delay circuit and an extra power amplifier for the surround speakers can be found in audio/video receivers selling for as little as $200. More complex are Dolby Pro Logic circuits, which use a technique called steering to enhance the separation between side, center, and surround channels. Dolby Pro Logic works in the same way as the processors found in movie theaters and can be found in high-end A/V amplifiers and receivers as well as outboard processors.

**Dynamic-Range Processors**

A number of years ago a company called dbx introduced a family of processors that could either expand or compress the dynamic range of audio signals. Other manufacturers followed with similar products, and the category flourished for a while before nearly fading away. Now dynamic-range processors are making a comeback as digital versions begin to appear in CD players, preamplifiers, and outboard units.

Expansion increases level differences, making loud sounds louder and soft ones softer. Carefully used, it can restore something approximating the original dynamic range to the many recordings that have been compressed in production or broadcast.

The opposite process, compression, reduces dynamic contrasts. Compression can be a great help with modern classical recordings, whose dynamic range may be too great for casual or background listening—meaning any time you're not concentrating exclusively on the music. Compression is especially helpful when you're listening in a car or on the street, keeping soft passages audible over the background noise without letting the loud passages blast you.

**Noise Reduction**

Signal processing can also be used to reduce the noise in old recordings to some degree without seriously compromising the sound, although most
CD reissues have already been through such a process. Some dynamic-range expanders can automatically reduce their output whenever the input signal level drops below a preset threshold, to attenuate low-level noise that would become obtrusive in the absence of music loud enough to mask it. Such circuits, found in current components from Carver Corporation and in discontinued units from dbx, can reduce noise a few decibels in most recordings without audible side effects, but when asked to do more they often subtract some of the low-level music as well or cause the background noise to "pump" annoyingly up and down with the signal.

A similar approach, with similar benefits and drawbacks, is taken by processors that alter their high-frequency response according to the signal level in the treble range, reducing bandwidth to remove hiss when the signal is weak. The most prominent example of this kind of circuit is called DNR, or Dynamic Noise Reduction.

For LP fans there are tick-and-pop suppressors, some examples of which may still be available on the used-component market. Such circuits try to identify the steep waveforms produced by dirt or other defects in the vinyl and quickly substitute a small bit of the preceding sound, taken from a short-term storage circuit called a delay line, to smooth over the flaw. A well-designed tick-and-pop suppressor can deliver big audible improvements at small sonic cost.

The Nay-Sayers

Some audiophiles advise against the use of any signal processing on the grounds that every additional transistor or other electronic part in the signal path degrades the sound. Even with its sliders all set to zero, they say, an equalizer audibly compromises an audio signal's purity and transparency.

In my experience, it is sometimes possible to hear when a zeroed-out equalizer is in use, but only because the center positions of the sliders aren't exactly accurate. Using a high-quality analyzer to set each band to true 0 dB renders a properly designed equalizer inaudible (even some low-price models pass this test thanks to integrated circuits and modern manufacturing methods). And since equalizers usually go into a tape-monitor loop anyway, a push of a button takes them completely out of the circuit. Meanwhile, when you do run into a bad recording, you can do something about it.
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My idea is to try to bring something of the Old World to the New,” says Kurt Masur, who has just started a six-year term as music director of the New York Philharmonic. So far the sixty-four-year-old conductor from East Germany seems to be succeeding in a solid if unspectacular fashion, with programs and performances that have achieved approving reviews and, even more important from the Philharmonic’s standpoint, evident audience contentment. Listeners beyond New York will soon be able to pass their own judgment on the new combination, because Masur and the Philharmonic have launched a six-year exclusive recording arrangement with Teldec that will bring forth thirty-two CD releases in that period.

Masur, who was by no means the Philharmonic’s first choice to take over the podium left vacant by Zubin Mehta (the job was originally offered to Claudio Abbado, who preferred Berlin), represents something of a departure in style for the orchestra. The most recent Philharmonic music directors—Mehta, from India by way of Los Angeles; Pierre Boulez, the Parisian modernist; and the incomparable Leonard Bernstein—have all been glitzy as well as gifted. But Masur, who for twenty-two years has been the director of
the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, stands squarely in the tradition of solidly grounded Middle European conductors who play their music straight and are most comfortable in middle and late nineteenth-century Romantic repertoire. Perhaps this is what American symphony audiences are presently yearning for—at least the parallel appointment of the similarly inclined Wolfgang Sawallisch to succeed Riccardo Muti in Philadelphia would seem to point in the same direction.

Masur, who speaks excellent English, is as aware as anyone of his musical outlook. "I don't want to thrill people," he said in an interview at his Avery Fisher Hall office. "I'm not the type of conductor who wants to be glorious. I want to reach the hearts of people. Whether people come to the Philharmonic for one night or for many nights, I would like to touch them. I don't want them just to have a nice evening, but to go home thinking about what they've experienced."

While Masur says that it won't be until next season at the earliest that he expects to put his own personal stamp on the orchestra's policies and goals, he has already begun to make changes. He has rearranged the orchestra's seating, switching the position of the cellos and violas and ranging the doublebasses on risers in a line across the rear of the stage. He's working with acousticians on making alterations (again!) in the hall to enable the musicians to hear one another better. He is also seeking more direct contact with audiences by instituting "Philharmonic Forums," free 45-minute sessions at Avery Fisher at which the public is invited to ask questions and express their views.

Some of his musical tastes have also become quickly apparent. His choice of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony for the orchestra playing the interludes, bridge passages, and charming little odds and ends that other conductors always ignore. Audience and critics found it a ravishing experience.

Mendelssohn is generally credited with turning the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra into the best in Europe in the 1830's and 1840's, and he also founded the Leipzig Conservatory. But that didn't prevent the Nazis from banning his music and removing his statue from the Gewandhaus because of his Jewish origins in the years when Kurt Masur was growing up.

"That doesn't mean we weren't aware of him," Masur said. "My pi-

ano teacher told me about him and said, 'This is a banned composer.' Some people played Mendelssohn's music in their homes, even though it wasn't allowed in public and none of it was printed during the war. There were other things that went on like that—when Handel's Judas Maccabaeus was performed, it was under the title The Commander.'"

Masur believes Mendelssohn's music is both misunderstood and underestimated today. "People think of him as nice, gentle, polite," he said. "But he was a fighter, not just a midsummer night's dreamer. He wrote to the Lord Mayor of Leipzig demanding pay increases for the musicians of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, and he got them. I know that when I became

Recent Recordings by Masur

Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 ("From the New World"); Slavonic Dances Nos. 6, 8, and 10. New York Philharmonic. TELDEC 73244-2.
Schumann: Symphonies Nos. 2 and 3 ("Rhenish"). London Philharmonic Orchestra. TELDEC 46446-2.
R. Strauss: Don Quixote; Till Eulenspiegel. Heinrich Schiff (cello); Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. PHILIPS 426 262-2.

"Since I've read Mendelssohn's letters I've come to realize what a nice guy you are!" In New York I've learned that the Philharmonic musicians also like Mendelssohn's music. And they have as good a feel for it as any European orchestra. I have plans to play quite a lot."

Masur, who is tall and solidly built, with a close-cropped graying beard, cuts an imposing figure on the podium. Offstage he prefers sports jackets and string ties. He has conducted extensively throughout Europe and made a hundred and some recordings. His U.S. debut came with the Cleveland Orchestra in 1974, and his first appearance with the Philharmonic, also as a guest, was in 1981. He has conducted both the Leipzig Gewandhaus and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestras on U.S. tours, and he figures that altogether he has appeared in about ninety American cities.

But his base of operations has always been East Germany. He was born in Brieg, Silesia, in 1927, studied piano, conducting, and composition at the Music College in Leipzig, and went on to hold gradually more important posts at regional opera companies and orchestras — the traditional path to advancement for a middle-European Kapellmeister. In Leipzig he became a popular and influential civic personality, even playing a part in the East German democracy movement in 1989. When it succeeded, he is said to have briefly considered running for the presidency of his country.

Masur will continue to spend part of his year in Leipzig, for he will retain his post at the Gewandhaus. But he has relinquished the position he has held since 1988 as principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic, and he is eliminating virtually all other guest engagements.

Masur expects that much of his New York repertory will overlap with that of Leipzig. "Look," he said, "there are major points in the repertory that are the same everywhere. Every orchestra plays Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Dvořák, Tchaikovksy. We all try to educate audiences, but there are different tastes all over the world. In Japan, Bach and Beethoven are at the center. In England, audiences like cer-
Some certain things, such as Holst's *The Planets*, that German audiences aren't very enthusiastic about. Sibelius is well received in Russia and the northern countries, but not so much in central Europe and even less in southern Europe—Italy and Spain. Personally, I like Sibelius, but I have never been able to play his music very much because my audiences didn't understand the feelings of a composer from such an isolated part of the world.

"New York I find different from all other cities, American or European. In New York there is every nationality—they seem not to be minorities, but majorities! There is a special pride in New York—here they try to understand all kinds of music, art, languages. It is very interesting for me to meet and play for this variety of people.

"Sometimes I think that differences in tastes aren't as extreme as they used to be. When I played Schnittke's Cello Concerto, I had similar reactions in New York and in Leipzig. Or take Shostakovich—understanding of his music is growing in both places. I really believe that the world is moving closer together."

For Masur, one of the principal divergencies in repertory will always involve contemporary music. "It is necessary to play the contemporary music of the country you are in," he said. "I've been busy studying American scores."

The first fruits of his studies have already begun to show up, for his opening program with the Philharmonic included Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs*, with the baritone Thomas Hampson as soloist, and two short pieces by John Adams, *Tromba Lontana* and *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*. One of his most imaginative programs to date, devoted to several sets of variations by different composers, included the Variations on *America* by Charles Ives, arranged for orchestra by William Schuman. Asked whether he had ever played the Ives piece before, Masur laughed and said: "Played it? I never even heard it before! But it's music that gives you the feeling that Ives had fun writing it, making games with it. I enjoyed playing it."

This May Masur will have the opportunity to play another piece he never heard before, as he is scheduled to preside over the New York premiere of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Flute Concerto, with the Philharmonic's own Jeannine Baxtresser as soloist. Later in the month he'll wind up his first season by conducting Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem.*

The Masur-Philharmonic deal with Teldec represents the most extensive recording program the Philharmonic has had in many years. The 1992 releases will include three symphonies—Franck's D Minor, Dvořák's "New World," and Mahler's First—plus the "Variations" record devoted to Brahms and Max Reger in addition to Ives. Subsequent projected repertoire includes works by Brahms, Beethoven, Richard Strauss, Tchaikovsky, and others.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the project is that all the recordings will be made live, at actual Philharmonic concerts in Avery Fisher Hall, rather than in the studio. Economic factors aside, Masur insists that he prefers to do it that way. "You never know in the studio how good an orchestra really is," he explained. "A live recording gives you a much stronger connection to an actual concert. Too often a studio recording is just another example of frustrating perfection—a boring new recording of a symphony."

As for the problem of audience coughs and other extraneous sounds, the orchestra solves that by playing one runthrough without an audience, just in case an emergency splice becomes necessary. Incidentally, while Teldec's exclusivity rights cover the Masur-Philharmonic combination, the conductor and the orchestra are each free to make individual recordings for other labels. Masur will continue his long series of CD's with the Gewandhaus Orchestra for Philips, including a Beethoven symphony cycle of which Nos. 1 and 5 have already been released. Among others in the works are Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* and overtures by Mendelssohn and Weber.

Masur has been married three times. He and his present wife, the soprano Tomoko Sakurai, have a twelve-year-old son, and he has four other children from his previous marriages. Undoubtedly encouraged by his warm reception in New York, he is looking forward to celebrating two anniversaries in the 1992-1993 season—the 150th of the Philharmonic and the 250th of the Gewandhaus.

"When the offer [to lead the Philharmonic] came from New York," he has said, "I felt that being music director of both these orchestras would be like combining an old marriage with a new love, and that it would work. Being with the Philharmonic makes me fresh again because it's a challenge. I feel that I'm a little bit younger, and that makes me happy."

Herbert Kupferberg, a senior editor of *Parade* magazine, is the author of *The Book of Classical Music Lists* (Penguin) and other books on music.
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BUYING TIME

The Powers That Be

Amplifiers—sixth in a
series on the practical business of
buying audio equipment

M ost audio components deal
with very low-level electro-
ical signals. The voltages at a
tuner’s antenna terminals or
at a preamplifier’s phono in-
puts, for instance, are mi-
nuscule and must be boosted to what is
vaguely called “line level” for their
trip through the rest of the system. But
even line level is a tiny amount of
electricity, usually less than 1 volt.

In the end, however, the signal will
be called upon to do some real work. A
loudspeaker is a kind of electric motor
designed to push air about in a con-
trolled fashion that results in sound—
musical sound, one hopes. That takes
a considerable amount of effort, and to
accomplish it, the line-level signal
must be boosted to many times its
original strength while still retaining
the shape of its waveform. That task
falls to an audio amplifier, which uses
the output of a preamplifier to modify
AC current from your wall outlets to
produce a large-scale replica of the
original audio signal.

How large that signal has to be
varies considerably, depending on
your listening habits, your room, and
your speakers. But it is output power,
measured in watts, that determines an
amplifier’s suitability for a particular
situation; everything else is secondary.

The range of options on the market
is huge, extending from amplifiers
with a few watts output for use in small
spaces to huge components delivering
many hundreds of watts for truly
Brobdingnagian applications. In most
cases only a modest amount of pow-
er—from 50 to 100 watts, say—is all
that’s needed. Remember, however,
that doubling the power output results
in an increase in volume of just 3 dB,
which is not very much audibly. To
achieve real gains, massive power in-
creases are necessary. (Doubling the
perceived loudness requires a boost of
approximately 10 dB, which translates
to ten times as much power from the
amplifier.) Fortunately, watts are rela-
tively inexpensive, so it’s usually wise
to err on the side of too much power
rather than not enough; if you’re wor-
rried about your speakers, you can
always reduce the power being fed to
them by turning down the volume.

All audio systems require amplifiers
of some sort, but these can be pack-
aged in different ways. At the bottom
end of the scale are milliwatt amplifi-
ers used to drive headphones; these
are routinely built into components
like CD players and tape decks and are
rarely thought of as real amplifiers. In
some cases, amplification is built into
speakers, which simplifies amp/speak-
er matching but may not be appropri-
ate for your particular application.
More often the amplifiers are either
separate components, called power
amplifiers, that do nothing but amplify
(and can be hidden away, if space is a
problem) or are combined with control
functions as integrated amplifiers. By
far the most popular format, however,
is the receiver, which includes a tuner for radio reception as well as an amplifier for power and a preamplifier for control.

**WHAT MATTERS**

Whatever form it may take, the amplifier is critical to any audio system, and any flaws or shortcomings in it will affect all your listening. Fortunately, there is rarely much audible variation in performance between one high-fidelity amplifier and the next as long as both are operating within their power limits, so the factors you have to consider are usually relatively few.

- **POWER OUTPUT.** This is the biggie. Amplifiers are about power, so the main concern in choosing one is how much power you get, and at what cost. In practice, "too much power" is almost never a problem. Most modern speakers can safely absorb extremely high inputs on the brief musical peaks most likely to precipitate them, so you needn't shy away from buying a big amp. Remember, if an audio signal is loafing along at an average level that translates into an amplifier output of a couple of watts (not at all unusual) and a modest 20-dB peak comes along, it will require a hundredfold power increase, or 200 watts.

Most of us can't afford superpower amplifiers. Fortunately, most amps are able to put out levels 2 or 3 dB (sometimes more) above their rated output for very brief periods, so most applications don't really require amplifiers rated in the hundreds of watts. But many factors have to be taken into account in determining the amplifier capacity that will suit your needs: Output requirements increase if you like to crank up the volume, if your room is large or acoustically dead, or if you choose speakers with low sensitivity. For example, to produce the same acoustic output, a speaker with a sensitivity of 87 dB sound-pressure level, or SPL, will require twice as much power as a speaker with 3 dB greater sensitivity (90 dB SPL). In a sense, picking an amplifier is part of the same process as picking the right speakers, as the two components have to work very closely together.

- **MASSAGING THE POWER.** If you do find you require a large power reserve, one way to achieve that is to use two stereo amplifiers, each "bridged," or "strapped," to mono. Not all models permit this, however, so be sure that the one you select does. The owner's manual will tell you how to do it and will damage the amplifier if you try.

High outputs and difficult speaker loads can strain amplifiers in different ways. If you foresee a problem, or if your dealer suggests you may have unusual requirements, check for such things as thermal-protection circuits (or, in extreme cases, cooling fans) and a high current capacity. The latter is particularly important if you choose low-impedance speakers (rated at 4 ohms or less) or if you plan to run more than one pair of speakers simultaneously from a single stereo amplifier. You can tell a high-current amplifier by its ability to deliver more power as

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**The Lingo**

In some ways an amplifier is the simplest of components: It just takes a small signal and makes a big one of it. But there are various ways of going about this task, and of packaging the result, and these have given rise to some distinctive terms.

**POWER VS. INTEGRATED.** The workhorse of the audio system is the power amplifier, which just amplifies. This component is sometimes called a "main amplifier," but that may be a misnomer, as a multichannel system might have several "main" amps. The principal use of this variant term is in connection with the "pre-out/main-in" jacks provided on some integrated amplifiers and receivers, which enable you to insert a signal processor between the output section of the built-in preamplifier and the inputs of the power-amplifier stage. Some power amplifiers include output-level indicators, which are more ornamental than useful, and input-level controls, which can be helpful in matching the amplifier to the rest of the system. Anything more elaborate in the way of controls, and the component becomes an integrated amplifier, which combines the control functions of a preamplifier and the muscle of a power amplifier on a single chassis. (A receiver is the same thing plus an FM—and usually AM—tuner as well.)

**FEEDBACK.** Amplifier designers use a number of techniques to reduce nonlinearities. Perhaps the most common is "negative feedback," in which a small portion of the output signal is fed back to the input, out of phase, to cancel distortion. How much feedback is used, or whether the designer has chosen an alternative technique, such as feedforward, is a matter for his own conscience. These days, amplifiers routinely achieve such a high level of performance that the nuts and bolts of equipment design are of little relevance to most consumers.

**CLASS.** Amplifier circuits can be designed to operate in a number of modes, which involve different trade-offs between efficiency and basic linearity. These operating modes have been categorized as Class A, Class B, Class AB, and so forth, depending on which technique has been chosen. It seems intuitively correct that Class A should be the best, and many hybrid designs have been given names to imply that they use some form of Class A design. But traditional Class A amplifiers are large, hot, expensive, and usually deficient in output power. Practically all of today's hi-fi amplifiers use some form of Class AB operation, and they almost always perform flawlessly from a sonic point of view. The only other mode that might be worth consideration eventually is one that has been dubbed Class D, which indicates that it uses a form of digital amplification. There are many practical difficulties to the design of Class D amplifiers, which is why you won't find any in stores just yet, but when perfected, they will offer a unique combination of high linearity and extremely high efficiency.

GEORGE DICKEL N° 12
Amplifiers are about power, so the main concern in choosing one is how much power you get, and at what cost.

the load impedance is reduced (more into 4 ohms than into 8 ohms and, usually, more into 2 ohms than into 4 ohms).

- INPUTS AND CONTROLS. A pure power amplifier is likely to have only a single set of inputs and, perhaps, a pair of level controls, which are not essential but can be useful for matching the amplifier to the rest of the system in some circumstances. Occasionally a power amplifier will provide switching for multiple speaker pairs or a headphone output, but these features are found primarily on integrated amps and receivers. If you choose an integrated amplifier or receiver, take the same sort of care to make sure it has enough flexibility as you would in choosing a separate preamplifier. Such features as video switching, adequate inputs, tape loops, phono preamps, and so forth are as important in integrated components as they are in separates.

Also look for such features as a built-in surround-sound decoder, additional channels of amplification beyond the usual stereo pair, stereo image-enhancement circuits, and so on, as these can extend the flexibility of your system considerably and are usually much cheaper when built into an integrated amplifier or receiver than they are as free-standing components.

WHAT DOESN'T
The basic performance of high-fidelity audio amplifiers—their ability to reproduce audio signals accurately—has reached such a high level that it is seldom possible to make meaningful distinctions among them on that basis. This situation has encouraged manufacturers to develop numerous special performance features and design wrinkles as inducements for you to buy their products instead of their competitors. Few of these are really significant, however—at least, not in any way that you will hear.

- EXOTIC CIRCUITS. There's no real mystery to amplifier design, and the simplest, most traditional techniques often yield the best results—or results as good as anybody else's—but at a lower price. (A good rule of thumb is that if a manufacturer gives an amplifier design a name, you're likely to pay a premium for it.) In most cases you can buy an amplifier on the basis of power, operational features, and price and ignore how the thing is wired together.

- TUBES, ETC. Ditto for the components inside the box. Expensive amplifiers often boast unusual devices within—toroidal transformers, oddball capacitors, and the like—and these rarely have a negative effect on performance. But any advantages they may provide are usually so subtle that they hardly justify their price. And the ultimate "in" component—the vacuum tube—can be a positive disadvantage. Even tube fans will admit that they tend to be hot, expensive, fragile, and unreliable. Most of the electronics industry abandoned tubes a quarter-century ago, for good reason.

- SPECIFICATIONS. Obviously, if there is some massive flaw in an amplifier you have to take that into account, but that's almost never an issue these days. The differences between one amplifier's electrical performance and another's, although easily measurable, are almost always inaudible. Even that minority of audiophiles who claim to hear variations routinely from one amp to the next have to work very hard to do so, and their claims tend to evaporate under close scrutiny.

- BELLS AND WHISTLES. The operating features of an integrated amplifier are important, and level controls can be convenient, even on a power amp. Nothing else is really necessary: Illuminated output meters and glowing status lamps serve little purpose other than to add some visual interest to what is in essence a black box.

GET WITH IT
Other than the sorts of things that are required for your audio system as a whole—decent cables, adequate shelving, and so forth—all an amplifier needs is ventilation. Modern amplifiers usually run pretty cool, but there is always some heat buildup, and it has to have some way of escaping or it could damage your equipment. In extreme cases this may mean the addition of a ventilation fan, but mostly it's just a matter of allowing a free flow of air around the amplifier.

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Bill Morrissey's Home Truths

The best songwriters—from Hank Williams to Bob Dylan to Joni Mitchell to Elvis Costello and beyond—are revered for their ability to distill universal truths into personal stories of the events and emotions that shape a life. More to the point, they communicate wisdom through beauty and, not incidentally, economy of language. In doing so, they marry moral passion and entertainment.

New Hampshire folk singer Bill Morrissey knows a lot about good songwriting. But rather than dissect it, he simply sets about doing it in his new album, "Inside." "Man from Out of Town," for instance, has these Raymond Carveresque lines: "The house burned down a rainy night / And they never did find out why / I just stood alone beneath the silver maple / Trying to keep my cigarettes dry / Waiting for the fireman / I couldn't save a thing / And deep inside my home / Above the roar of the flame / I swore I heard my telephone ring."

For this fourth album, Morrissey, who's forty, has moved away from his previous theme of the importance of work and its place in the psychological make-up. Now he puts more emphasis on examining failed romantic relationships—the sexually charged longing of Everybody Warned Me, the loneliness of Inside (where Suzanne Vega supplies the conscience and background voice), the solitude of Casey, Illinois—and the regret or nostalgia that accompanies the ghost of memory. Sometimes, he has a bit more to show for it: "Coughing up blood in a Motel 6 / Thinking this time it's for real." He's also expanded his solo acoustic folk guitar sound with delicate back-up instrumentation, at times reminiscent of Dylan's "Desire" album (with Johnny Cunningham replacing Scarlet Rivera on violin).

Yet Morrissey, whose voice sounds like a cross between an old, grizzled, black bluesman and a hip, friendly bullfrog, shines brightest here in his songs of social observation and biog-
Honest Mozart from Andreas Haefliger

WHILE there was a time when a recorded performance of a single Beethoven string quartet or Brahms symphony could be undertaken, enjoyed, and evaluated on its own, we’ve become conditioned now to having any such release serve notice of another complete cycle. Andreas Haefliger’s new Sony Classical disc of Mozart piano sonatas may indeed be serving such notice, but it would be no less treasurable if it should prove to be as far as this pianist plans to go with this material—and it is a treasure.

Haefliger, the son of the tenor Ernst Haefliger, neither uses a period instrument nor in any manner attempts to imitate one, but draws upon the resources of the modern piano to deliver bracing and insightful realizations of the Fantasy and Sonata in C Minor, K. 475/457, the Sonata in F Major, K. 332, and the Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333. His approach is at once unapologetically large-scale and uncontrivedly intimate. It is honest and direct musicmaking, totally free of that “studied simplicity” too often affected by performers of this material, favoring instead great subtlety in dynamics and an unfailing steadiness of pulse that does not put meaningful limits on flexibility. Personally, I have not enjoyed recorded performances of Mozart sonatas so much since London brought out András Schiff’s about a dozen years ago.

Haefliger’s approach in the four works here is similar to Schiff’s in broad outline. Both are enlivening in the best sense, both are unfailingly tasteful, and both keep the big gestures as well as those of lyric expressiveness within credible dimensions. Haefliger allows himself a somewhat broader expressive range here and there, and occasionally he shows a surer instinct for what works best—as in the final movement of K. 333, which in his hands asserts itself with remarkable spontaneity and conviction. He makes a stunning case for that sonata and K. 332 as truly big works, without allowing their proportions to be stinted in the process, and the two great C Minor pieces, which some musicians feel ought not to be combined, make superb sense as a unit here.

Sony, for its part, has come through with exceptional sonics, not merely realistic in a general sense but with the piano in ideal perspective for these particular performances.

Richard Freed

MOZART: Piano Sonatas in F Major (K. 332), B-flat Major (K. 333), and C Minor (K. 457); Fantasy in C Minor (K. 475).
Andreas Haefliger (piano). SONY CLASSICAL © SK 46748 (71 min).

Died Pretty: “Doughboy Hollow”

DOUGHBOY Hollow” from the Australian quintet Died Pretty is a left-field creeper, a gorgeous album whose unassuming grandeur probably dooms it to be lost in the shuffle of a marketplace where more clamorous music rules. But passing it up would be a big mistake, because it contains some of the choicest music yet made in the Nineties. Falling roughly in an electrified folk-rock vein, it’s doleful and pretty but surprisingly sturdy beneath the surface, a flawless album that ranks with the work of R.E.M., Joy Division, and the leading West Coast bands of the late Sixties—it is that assured and powerful. Every note and nuance is there to serve the songs, which stand solidly on their merits without distracting production fakery.

It’s the little things that count: the languorous bass lines bubbling under and around songs like Turn Your Head and The Love Song, the delicate, arpeggiated guitar intros to Doused and Sweetheart, the solid but unobtrusive drumming, the driving piano chords that give D.C. and Godbless their air of urgency and excitement (how refreshing to hear an acoustic piano in a rock context again!), the passionately tempered melancholy in Ronald S. Peno’s voice, recalling the likes of Gene Clark, Ian Curtis, and Marty Balin.

In short, without tricks, mirrors, or trap doors, Died Pretty creates and sustains a bewitching mood—ineluctably sad, but oddly compelling, even...
Died Pretty: music without mirrors

hypnotic once you get used to it—through the entire album. The textural subtlety of the arrangements sinks in after a few listenings; all the pieces fit together. Instruments are extremely well integrated into the framework of the songs. The U2-type guitar background in Godbless, for instance, is so tightly woven with the vocal that you don't specifically hear it; the atmospheric effect is more subliminal. Up front, meanwhile, surging chords from guitar and piano ground the song in an earthier dimension, and a steady buildup in intensity by the drums carries it to a churning climax.

Choruses, especially those of Out in the Rain and Satisfied, are so instantly attractive and hummable you'll swear you've heard them before. Occasional tasteful, sparing use of cello and violin reinforces the air of graceful melancholy. Mostly, though, it's just the five band members playing with minimal overdubs and no wasted notes. "Doughboy Hollow" ought to be required listening for all the MTV-adored hordes who dream of forming a band. It's a captivating album made the old-fashioned way: from the songs up, with skill, passion, and soul.

Parke Puterbaugh

Russian Piano Concertos from Rudy and Janssons

The new EMI recording of the two most popular Russian piano concertos, the Tchaikovsky First and the Rachmaninoff Second, represents surefire programming. But it is the topflight performances and the spacious, well-balanced sound that make the CD a winner. Recorded before the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. and the reversion of Leningrad to its original name of St. Petersburg, so it is still the Leningrad Philharmonic in the credits, these performances are so superbly integrated that they suggest chamber music; the soloist Mikhail Rudy, the conductor Mariss Janssons, and the orchestra seem to function as a single organism.

In the Tchaikovsky, Rudy adopts something of the same poetic lyricism as Van Cliburn in his celebrated recording, but there is a shade more brilliance—without, however, edging into display for its own sake. The lyrical episodes of the first movement can be played poetically, but it's not so easy with the nervously agitated main theme that follows the imposing introduction. The slow movement is elegance itself here, both in the songlike portions and in the nimble scherzando central section. The finale is wonderfully spirited, with beautifully proportioned pacing and dynamics. It is a pleasure not to hear the "big tune" overly inflated, but the famous double-octave cadenza still has wallop.

The Rachmaninoff concerto is similarly admirable in pacing, dynamics, and tempo relationships. I prefer a slightly more urgent tempo in the first-movement recapitulation, but tastes differ. The adagio reveals perhaps the most masterly and intense collaboration between the conductor and soloist: Every element fits perfectly, without any loss of vitality or poetic quality. The finale is a triumph of virtuoso musicianship, most vividly in the fugato passages toward the end and the superb phrasing accorded Rachmaninoff's "big tune."

The recorded sound from the orchestra's home auditorium (the Assembly Hall of the Nobles in Tsarist days) is very spacious, even a bit distant, as though heard from the higher reaches of the balcony, but it is effective within its own acoustic frame of reference. All told, I would rate this as the most satisfying digital recording of these two masterworks on one disc.

David Hall

BELLAMY BROTHERS: Rollin' Thunder. Bellamy Brothers (vocals); other musicians. All in the Name of Love: Down to You; She Don't Know That She's Perfect; The Strength of the Weaker Sex; Anyway I Can; Rollin' Thunder; and four others. ATLANTIC © 82232-2 (39 min), © 82232-4.

Performance: Trying to go legit Recording: Good

The good news is that the Bellamy brothers have made an entire album without including one of their trademark trite tunes about some current trend or with exasperating word play, such as If I Said You Had a Beautiful Body (Would You Hold it Against Me). The bad news is that there's little continuity to the album, and most of the offerings are about as deep as a fishbowl.

A couple of the songs—Anyway I Can, about a ballad and bewitching female, and Down to You—do show a bit of forethought and illuminate relationships that seem more complicated than the ones the Bellamys usually explore. And there's more good news—the Bellamys have opted for a fuller pop sound, demonstrating a fondness for Sixties-style jangling guitars and chugging melodies, though a couple of the riffs sound a tad too familiar. Howard and David Bellamy might as well be Chad and Jeremy in such lightweight pop songs as She Don't Know That She's Perfect and All in the Name of Love. But they were never really country musicians to start with, and the retro format here leaves plenty of room for their hand-in-glove vocal harmony to hang in the air like good cologne, a fairly pleasurable thing. Whether the Bellamys can sustain their wobbly career without smarmy, uppity-country hit material is a big question. But at least they're finally beginning to grow up and dump the pretense. A.N.

BUCKWHEAT ZYDECO: On Track. Stanley “Buckwheat” Dural, Jr. (vocals, accordion, keyboards); other musicians. Won't You Let Me Go?; Cry to Me; Cooking with Pierre; The Midnight Spe-

Photograph: John Cusimano/Stanley Zysman

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blue. It's a great combination, as this latest recording by him will attest.

The most fascinating thing about “On Track” is its tremendous variety, unified by Dural's folksy vocals and cascading accordion, the essential instrument in zydeco. He also wrote most of the songs and arranged all of them in an assortment of styles. Won't You Let Me Go? and Funky Filly sound like solid r & b. Everything Hurts (Just Que’s Chose Fat Mal) is a Creole ditty with accordion, guitar, and percussion bounding along at a fast clip. The folk classic The Midnight Special puts across its mournful message, and Hey Joe is served up as an irresistible blues. Ably assisted by Michael Melchione and Melvin J. Vezzie on guitar, Wilbert Miller on harmonica, and others, Dural and his band have stirred up an intoxicating cauldron of pleasing sounds. PG.

CRACKER. Cracker (vocals and instruments); Benmont Tench (piano); Teen Angst; Happy Birthday, Cracker Soul; I Saw the Light; St. Cajatan; Mr. Wrong; and six others. VIRGIN @ 91816-2 (51 min), © 91816-4.

Performance: Woolly Recording: Raw

I like Cracker a lot. but I think the band, or maybe just lead singer-songwriter David Lowery, is a little too smart for its (or his) own good. This album makes a lot of sense in a sprawling kind of way. When Lowery sings, "What the world needs now are some new words of wisdom, like lah lah lah lah lah lah lah lah" (Teen Angst), he conveys the ultimate precious reaction to life—clever enough to know it’s screwed up, clever enough to know nothing can be done.

Lowery, formerly of Camper Van Beethoven, knows enough to cut his jaded pretentiousness with a jaundiced sense of humor in wacky little narratives and sarcastic little details. But for all the intelligence behind these songs, there's a lot of emotion here. Only Another Song (Rain), a murky story about lost love, really seems to come as much from the heart as from the brain, and even it is coated in layers of protective irony. The music, which moves from electric folk to country-and-blues-flavored rock, is punchy and catchy and snappy enough to keep me interested, but not enough to keep me from concentrating on the guy who's singing. And wishing he didn’t think so hard. R.G.

MARTIN DELRAY: Get Rhythm. Martin Delray (vocals, guitar); Johnny Cash (vocals); other musicians. Get Rhythm; The Very Thought of You; One in a Row; If the Wind Blows Sand; New Wine; Little's White Lies; and four others. ATLANTIC @ 82176-2 (34 min), © 82176-4.

Performance: New way home Recording: Very good

Ex-schoolteacher Martin Delrey may be a honky-tonking chameleon of the Merle Haggard - Johnny Cash - Waylon Jennings schools of modern country music, but he's a chameleon who deserves attention for his own hues as well as those he borrows from others. For example, Delray's tender-tough, craggy-silk baritone makes the words of Johnny Cash's jumpin' Get Rhythm—done here in a souped-up blues version with a knife-wielding guitar moan—sound right in his mouth. But he also knows how to make a lushly romantic ballad like The Very Thought of You burrow into your heart.

Delray excels at finding songs like If the Wind Blows Sand, about an unlikely love affair, and Who, What, When, Why, How, about a cuckolded mate, that say the same old things in imaginative new ways. Most of all, he knows how to make a terrific country debut, handling with authority and aplomb everything from snappy Western-swing to left-field songs about romance. Looks like we'll have to make room for another hitmaker. A.N.

DIED PRETTY: Doughboy Hollow (see Best of the Month, page 66)

STEVE FORBERT: The American in Me. Steve Forbert (vocals, guitar, harmonica); Pete Anderson (electric guitar); other musicians. Born Too Late; If You're Waiting on Me; Responsibility; When the Wind Blows Sand; About a Woman; The Son, model; Do It Again, Don't; and four others. GEFFEN @ 82176-24459 (34 min), © GEFC-24459.

Performance: Still practicing Recording: Good

In “The American in Me,” Steve Forbert paints a bleak landscape of life in the Emergency Lane. From the album’s opening song, Born Too Late, in which he’s pursued by the memory of a wife in Cleveland who “hates my guts” and a wooden Indian who laughs at him when he loses his keys, to the closer, New Working Day, which lampoons the stress and anonymity of corporate toiling, Forbert sees the world as going to hell in a handbasket. That’s a hackneyed phrase, of course, but no more so than one Forbert employs—"Stop an' smell the roses"—in Responsibility.

Hailed as a new Dylan in the late Seventies and early Eighties, Forbert petered out without coming near to fulfilling his promise or his hype. In this comeback attempt he seems depressed about it all while demonstrating exactly why things turned out the way they have. His melodies, which lope along on acoustic guitar with harmonica lacing, are hummable and winsome, but his whispery, thin voice is barely able to convey his ideas. Yet his biggest problem is that he really doesn't have much

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to say. Writing occasionally with grace, but not much wit, he too often lapses into such meaningless lines as, "live long enough and you’re older." And in the album’s liveliest tune, the knotty blues Change in the Weather, he runs headlong into the writing problem that also dogs Born Too Late: The chorus, nifty as it is, isn’t supported in any way by the stand- zas. It’s as if he combined two songs into one without noticing that they were about different subjects. Rock While I Can Rock, an all-out raver, and the romantic plea Baby, Don't have a certain head-turning appeal, but they’re only brief excursions from Forbert’s extended plaint: "I don’t like this adult respon- sibility." Or, apparently, the notion that he should make music that’s out of the ordinary.

A.N.

MARVIN GAYE: The Last Concert Tour.

Marvin Gaye (vocals); vocal and instrumen- mental accompaniment. Third World
Girl; I Heard It Through the Grapevine;
Come Get to This; God Is My Friend;
What’s Going On; Ain't Nothing Like the
Real Thing; and seven others. GIANT ©
24436-2 (63 min), © 24436-4.

Performance: Mixed
Recording: Lo-fi

This album was recorded during Marvin
Gaye’s last concert tour, the summer of
1983. Gaye held his fans over the years
and greatly broadened his base after the
album “What’s Going On” cast him as
the soul balladeer of the protest genera-
tion. He had a rare charisma that made
you eagerly anticipate his next record,
and he could mesmerize a live audience
with the sensuality he projected.

He comes alive again here, though the
performances become riveting only after
he has warmed up. In the earlier selec-
tions he sings only in snatches and offers
more whoops, hollers, and “woo’s than
songs. He seems intoxicated with him-
self, but once he establishes a rapport
with the increasingly ecstatic audience,
the artist within begins to emerge.

The selections range from his earliest
hits, like Your Precious Love and I Heard
It Through the Grapevine, through the
most popular excerpts from “What’s
Going On” to Sexual Healing, one of his
later hits. The sound quality is not up to
current standards, however, since the
on-site recording was made using a two-
track analog tape deck without noise
reduction. But the technical shortcom-
ings are actually less irritating than the
truncated manner in which most of the
selections are presented. Nonetheless,
this album should appeal to those who
wish Gaye were still around to produce
at least one more record.

PG.

EMMYLOU HARRIS AND THE NASH RAMBLERS: At the Ryman.

Emmylou Harris and the Nash Ramblers (vocals and instrumen-
tals); other musicians. The Will;
(Share a Little) Shelter; I Think I Fell;
Dream Another Dream; Aragon; and five
others. Epic © EK 46968 (40 min), © ET
46968.

Performance: Busy
Recording: Shril

"Dream Another Dream" is the sort of
overwrought commercial pop that is ulti-
ately soiled by its own calculation and
compromise. It came as a shock to find a
real drummer credited, because the syn-
thetic rhythm tracks sound more like the
work of the Energizer Bunny. It was
similarly surprising to discover that Nu-
clear Valdez is a two-guitar band, be-
cause most of the time they’re buried
beneath characterless electronic treat-
ments. And after being prepared to dis-
band the band for sounding so L.A., I was
floored to learn that they’re from New
York and the album was recorded in
Miami. Lesson: In the world of market-
oriented pop, what you see isn’t neces-
sarily what you get. With their sleekly
manufactured songs about the age-old
travails of living with and without ‘em,
Nuclear Valdez is heir apparent to the
smarm of the late, gross Ambrosia. If
that doesn’t convince you to avoid this
album, then try this bon mot (from I
Think I Fell): “What’s love anyway?It’s
just a word you wanted me to say.” PP.

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The Sullivan Years

Sixties activists used to claim that "the revolution will not be televised," a comment on TV's pro-establishment bias, but in a way it was. Anyone who caught the Beatles' debut on the Ed Sullivan Show knows the rock revolution was born that evening. Clear to the end of the decade and on past Woodstock, Ed Sullivan gave rock-and-roll a forum on his Sunday night variety show. Awkwardly sandwiched in among European circus acts, aging vaudevillians, opera singers, and comedians whose shtick consisted mainly of Sullivan impressions, the rockers nonetheless impressed youthful America like a branding iron. An unlikely midwife, Ed Sullivan helped give birth to the rock counterculture, which in the end, ironically, made his kind of variety show obsolete.

The New York-based TVT label has begun releasing a twenty-five-volume series of CD's and videos taken from master tapes of the Sullivan shows. Four are out already, with big-band and comedy volumes joining the rock discs reviewed here. And though they have their occasional shortcomings—spotty sound and canned music among them—they're important as historical documents and a heck of a lot of fun. "Born to Be Wild—Rock Classics" features the more venturesome, FM-oriented bands. "Happy Together—Sixties Rock" pays tribute to the poppish, Top 40 side of things. Together-Sixties Rock: "John Lennon: Twist and Shout; Paul McCartney: I Want to Hold Your Hand; The Beatles: I Feel Fine. The Real People: I Can't Wait; For You; The Truth; Anymore) stuck to the proverbial wall. Peripherally identified with the synth-pop side of New Wave, they were really opportunists cutting in on a piece of the action with tacky, heavy-breathing sound effects. "Moment of Truth" finds Nunn on her own, but, sad to report, little has changed. If anything, the music behind her now is even more strident and nondescript. In the title track she's got purring, hot-to-trot pipes capable of arousing prurient thoughts, but the lyrics are so lame ("birth, love, pain, sex, desire," she chants breathlessly) that the song doesn't even get to first base. Lacking stylistic anchors, the album features such absurdities as a harmonica solo stuck in the middle of the chilly techno-funk of Desire Me and an inept rap in 89 Rhytime. As usual, technology and banality combined add up to an appalling mess.

These are odd groups, Berlin, was an intermittent entity that slung out audio pornography, some of which (the smutty Sex ... I'm a and It Doesn't Matter Anymore) stuck to the proverbial wall. Peripherally identified with the synth-pop side of New Wave, they were really opportunists cutting in on a piece of the action with tacky, heavy-breathing sound effects. "Moment of Truth" finds Nunn on her own, but, sad to report, little has changed. If anything, the music behind her now is even more strident and nondescript. In the title track she's got purring, hot-to-trot pipes capable of arousing prurient thoughts, but the lyrics are so lame ("birth, love, pain, sex, desire," she chants breathlessly) that the song doesn't even get to first base. Lacking stylistic anchors, the album features such absurdities as a harmonica solo stuck in the middle of the chilly techno-funk of Desire Me and an inept rap in 89 Rhytime. As usual, technology and banality combined add up to an appalling mess.

THE REAL PEOPLE. The Real People (vocals and instrumentals). Window Pane; I Can't Wait; For You; The Truth; Everyday's the Same; Wonderful; Open Up Your Mind (Let Me In); and five others. RELATIVITY © 88561-1080-2 (40 min), © 88561-1080-4.

Performance: Rich

Recording: Good

There is, it should be noted, no law that bands from Liverpool have to sound like the Beatles, although lately it feels that way. Witness, for example, the Real People, the second really wonderful and fairly Beatlesque band to emerge from that port city, following the La's. Of course, the Real People aren't a carbon copy of the Fab Four, but their irresistible hooks, catchy arrangements, and pretty harmonies do recall a time when rock could be both serious and cute.

The first five songs in the band's debut album overflow with inventiveness. The moods change from melancholy to regret to hope to enthusiasm to joy, and the melodies are as different as they are winning. Following that burst of creative heat, the remaining seven songs seem less than white-hot, but they definitely smolder.

I hesitate to pinpoint the roots of the Real People in Beatles music of the late Sixties, because none of these guys were even born then. But there are important similarities between the two Liverpoolian quartets. There is the same ambiva-
The Real People are slightly hippied up about what is in our life and times is broken and how it can be fixed. To mend a bruised heart, they suggest that you “dream a dream.” Social change, they argue, is up to us, meaning that we can make the world a better place for you and me: The Real People are the world, they are the children. But at the same time these guys seek nirvana, they understand that wishing won’t always make it so. The quality of thought in their album isn’t as convincing, however, as the music. The Real People put pop back into rock. Call it pop-and-roll—and stand back when this Fab Four begins to pop out. R.G.

THE SPONGETONES: Oh Yeah! The Spongetones (vocals and instrumentals). Not So; Always Carry On; Nothing Left to Hide; Oh Yeah!; Infatuation; Are You Gonna; Do You Need to Love Me; Return the Boy; and seven others. BLACK VINYLL BV 12064-2 (38 min), © BV-12064-4.

Performance: Good  Recording: Good

One of America’s best undiscovered bands is the Spongetones, a quartet from North Carolina that plays pure pop for now and then people. Those who grew up in the early Sixties on a daily diet of British Invasion music, especially the Merseybeat variety, will readily identify with the Spongetones, who have mastered the form. But in their four albums they’ve also taken the classic Brit-pop sound places it hasn’t been before, giving it a spiffy update.

Any two with a yen for melody, harmony, and a good beat will have a ball with the Spongetones’ latest release, “Oh Yeah!” It has the richest harmonies yet, with lush background vocals and sharp, close-harmony leads. The fourteen cuts are actually an embarrassment of riches, like a greatest-hits album from the land of ought-to-be. Infatuation, for instance, is an achingly gorgeous acoustic number with a touch of sitar on the break. Goodbye is an infectious sing-along whose surging chords are reminiscent of Freddie and the Dreamers’ great I’m Telling You Now. Are You Gonna; Do You Need to Love Me not only has a wonderfully ungrammatical title but is the sort of instantly engaging tune that would have kept teens on both sides of the Atlantic in thrall back in the golden age of Top 40. The title track is a high-octane rocker allowing the guitarist to trade off hot, Chuck Berry-style licks, and Brand New Start is a pure, high-energy Dave Clark 5 homage right down to the loudest, climactic snare-drum rolls. And in Always Carry On, under the guise of a love song, the band affirms its camaraderie and commitment to the music that inspired them.

The Spongetones lift the spirits and rekindle some of pop’s lost energy without getting mired in nostalgic sentimentality. “Oh Yeah!” is an instant party that will never go out of style. P.P.

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS: Apollo 18. They Might Be Giants (vocals and instrumentals); other musicians. Dig My Grave; I Palindrome I; She’s Actual Size; My Evil Twin; Mammal; The Statue Got Me High; Spider; The Guitar; Dinner Bell; and nine others. ELEKTRA © 61257-2 (43 min), © 61257-4.

Performance: Dizzying  Recording: Good

Listening to They Might Be Giants is like working a crossword puzzle. The words come at you like clues, propelled by a dizzying calliope of musical styles. One of these guys sings, “I palindrome I,” and you try to figure out what that could possibly mean—life is a palindrome that begins and ends with yourself?—and maybe the song begins to take on form and meaning. But maybe that doesn’t work at all and the song remains a jumble of elliptical word play set to a hyperkinetic soundtrack.

My problem with “Apollo 18” is that the ratio of sense to nonsense isn’t great enough—half and half by my reckoning. Not that I expect these wacky guys to be literal, or even rational, because the point of They Might Be Giants is to be artfully eccentric. I think My Evil Twin, for example, is a terrific song about schizophrenia: “I know he looks like me/Hates work like me/and walks like me/He’s even got an evil twin like me.” If more of the songs had this kind of focus, I’d be a happy postmodern guy. The title of the album, by the way, is a joke—NASA launched only seventeen Apollo missions. It’s perfect, because the album is out of this world. R.G.

JODY WATLEY: Affairs of the Heart. Jody Watley (vocals); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. I Want You; Call on Me; I’m the One You Need; Affairs of the Heart; Commitment of Love; It All Begins with You; and five others. MCA © MCAD-10355 (53 min), © MCAC-10355.

Performance: Good  Recording: Satisfactory

Jody Watley, immensely popular as a purveyor of instantly forgettable dance music, takes a step forward in this album of lyrical songwriting and production. Affairs of the Heart is an achingly gorgeous acoustic number with a touch of sitar on the break. Goodbye is an infectious sing-along whose surging chords are reminiscent of Freddie and the Dreamers’ great I’m Telling You Now. Are You Gonna; Do You Need to Love Me not only has a wonderfully ungrammatical title but is the sort of instantly engaging tune that would have kept teens on both sides of the Atlantic in thrall back in the golden age of Top 40. The title track is a high-octane rocker allowing the guitarist to trade off hot, Chuck Berry-style licks, and Brand New Start is a pure, high-energy Dave Clark 5 homage right down to the loudest, climactic snare-drum rolls. And in Always Carry On, under the guise of a love song, the band affirms its camaraderie and commitment to the music that inspired them.

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American Musical Classics

As our century nears its end, the best works of American musical theater of the past seventy years finally seem to be winning wider recognition as musical classics. Happily, the CD revolution has come along just at the right time to spur fresh recordings of many of these scores, often in their original versions, by casts that mix top operatic and popular performers.

The most interesting new release is the original, 1927 version of George and Ira Gershwin's Strike Up the Band, which closed before ever reaching Broadway. The second Elektra Nonesuch release in a restoration project sponsored jointly by the Library of Congress and the late Gershwin, managed to survive. An extensively rewritten version that added two endearing ballads-The Man I Love (also sung in the show as The Girl I Love) and The Queen of Terre Haute. In 1987, the show's long-lost original materials were found in a private Manhattan library. The Alliance Française presented the complete restored score in a 1991 concert performance as part of the Porter centennial, and New World recorded that production. The cast includes some of the best young musical-theater talent around today, under Evans Haile's sprightly direction.

Mrs. Ira Gershwin, and supervised by orchestral conductor Tommy Krasker, it turns out to be a genuine musical delight, spiritedly performed by a wonderful cast conducted by John Mauceri. Most theater historians blame the book (a cynical George S. Kaufman satire about war profiteering) for the show's failure, but the ambitious, cleverly book-integrated Gershwin score may have been ahead of its time, too. It includes extended choral passages and sophisticated patter songs but only a few long-lined Gershwin ballads—The Man I Love (also sung in the show as The Girl I Love) is the only one that managed to survive. An extensively rewritten version that added two endearing ballads, Soon and I've Got a Crush on You, fared moderately better on Broadway in 1930, and its seven new numbers are performed at the end of the album.

Although Fifty Million Frenchmen was Cole Porter's first big Broadway hit, it virtually disappeared after the show closed in the spring of 1930, mainly because few regional companies could afford the enormous cast it needed. Some of the songs, however, have endured as standards (You Do Something to Me, You've Got That Thing) or cabaret specialties (I'm Unlucky in Love, Taste of the Oyster, and The Queen of Terre Haute). In 1987, the show's long-lost original materials were found in a private Manhattan library. The Alliance Française presented the complete restored score in a 1991 concert performance as part of the Porter centennial, and New World recorded that production. The cast includes some of the best young musical-theater talent around today, under Evans Haile's sprightly direction.


Annie Get Your Gun (Irving Berlin). Kim Criswell, Thomas Hampson, Jason Graae, Rebecca Luker, David Garrison, others; Ambrosian Chorus; London Sinfonietta, John McGlinn cond. EMI ® CDC 54206-2 (79 min).


Annie Get Your Gun (Irving Berlin). Kim Criswell, Thomas Hampson, Jason Graae, Rebecca Luker, David Garrison, others; Ambrosian Chorus; London Sinfonietta, John McGlinn cond. EMI ® CDC 54206-2 (79 min).

KISMET (Robert Wright and George Forrest). Samuel Ramey, Julia Migenes, Jerry Hadley, Ruth Ann Swenson, Mandy Patinkin, Dominique Swain, others; Ambrosian Chorus; Concert Chorale of New York; London Symphony Orchestra, Paul Gemignani cond. SONY BROADWAY ® SK 46438 (68 min).

Julia Migenes and conductor Paul Gemignani: stars of a new Kismet

Photo by John Montes-CDON SONY CLASSICAL
with material of a slightly less ephemeral nature. As in the past, she and André Cymone co-wrote most of the selections, but this time they’re somewhat more thoughtful. Songs like Commitment of Love are about more than simply having fun. And this is one of those rare occasions when an album’s title track is its best song: Affairs of the Heart is a hypnotically lovely piece about love and music. Even the dance songs seem to have a bit more meat to them this time, the most captivating being I'm the One You Need. Watley may not yet have a distinctive voice or style, but she seems to be developing a healthy respect for craftsmanship. Good move.

Jazz

JOHN BEASLEY: Cauldron. John Beasley (piano, synthesizers); Bob Sheppard, Steve Tavaglione (reeds); Dean Parks (guitar); John Patitucci (bass); Ricky Lawson (drums); other musicians. Run and Hide; Catalina; I'm Outa Here; Zula Kung; Sierra; and four others. WINDHAM HILL JAZZ © 10134-2 (55 min). © 10134-4.

Performance: Hackneyed Recording: Good

From Louisiana-born pianist John Beasley’s bio—his grandfather played trombone in Twenties territory bands, his father taught jazz and brought him records by Charlie Parker and Art Blakey, and his mother was a band leader—one could reasonably expect him to play music that is well rounded and deeply rooted. But then comes the clincher: “My dad brought home Herbie Hancock's 'Maiden Voyage' and it was all over.” Indeed. Beasley’s album is wrapped in synthetics and mined in hackneyed New Age noodling. The only positive thing I can say about this kind of formula-ridden music is that it has encouraged many young players to go for the real thing. “Cauldron” is characterless elevator music for the Nineties, and even the occasional decent solo can’t take it beyond that.

SUSANNA McCORKLE: I'll Take Romance. Susannah McCorkle (vocals); instrumental accompaniment. A Beautiful Friendship; My Foolish Heart; It Never Entered My Mind; I Concentrate on You; That Old Feeling; I Thought About You; and eight others. CONCORD JAZZ © CCD-4491 (58 min). © CJ-4491.

Performance: Soft-lights mellow Recording: Ditto

Whether she’s singing a ballad or a lightly swinging upbeat tune, Susannah McCorkle has the kind of voice that conjures up soft lights and romantic surroundings. She’s very much in that mood in this toposet of fourteen mostly amorous songs by the likes of Rodgers and Hart, Mercer and Van Heusen, Styne and Kahn, Loesser and McHugh, and a few others. As always, she gets behind the lyrics of each song in a way that few other singers of her generation even try, which makes you forgive her tendency to slip almost too casually into the exact pitch of certain notes (a failing shared with a few more famous jazz-oriented singers). Even an old curmudgeon like me can’t help but enthusiastically toast an album as good as this one.

THE RAYMOND SCOTT PROJECT: Volume One—Powerhouse. Raymond Scott (piano); other musicians. Twilight in Turkey; In an 18th Century Drawing Room; Christmas Night in Harlem; Oil Gusher; Dinner Music for a Pack of Hungry Cannibals; and twenty others. STASH © ST-CD-543 (69 min).

Performance: Stomping coconuts Recording: Excellent transfers

If you are not familiar with Raymond Scott’s name, you have certainly heard his music transport rabbits, wolves, and assorted Warner Bros. cartoon creatures across your TV screen on Saturday mornings. And if you’ve been around long enough, you may also remember him from old radio shows or TV’s Lucky Strike Hit Parade. In the mid-Thirties, Scott formed a sextet, but he called it the Raymond Scott Quintette because that was easier on the ear. The group’s music was easy on the ear, too. It was neither jazz nor pop, combining both elements along with a rich sprinkling of skillfully crafted novelty sounds. Technically, the Quintette was quite good.

“The Raymond Scott Project” offers radio transcriptions and rehearsal recordings that have been collecting dust in Scott’s garage. It’s a grab bag of sounds that will delight anyone who appreciates unpretentious musical spoofery. There’s a bit of Willie Bryant and Cab Calloway here, and this is clearly where Spike Jones came from, but it’s all dastardly clever and zany. Scott never painted himself into a stylistic corner.

His groups included such noted jazz players as Bunny Berigan, Babe Russin, Artie Shaw, Jerry Colonna, and bassist Stewart Jackson (who became “Chubby” and went on to jazz fame in the Woody Herman band). In later years Scott also experimented with electronic music, inventing the Electronium, an “instantaneous composing machine,” and he even did research for Motown’s Berry Gordy. I don’t know just what Gordy did with Scott's work, but the possibility that Scott may have had a hand in the Motown Sound is certainly intriguing.

C.A.
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Performance: Colorful Recording: Splendid

In Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, Neeme Jarvi eschews the stern touch of a Mariss Jansons or a Pierre Boulez, opting instead to go all out for color and atmosphere. His pacing is marginally more expansive than theirs except in the second movement, yet he does not prettify or sentimentalize. The magical opening pages set the tone for the whole work. Although the percussion seems a bit loud in the bright ambience of Glasgow's Henry Wood Hall, it shows Jarvi's flair for Bartókian wit. Notable in the brilliantly played finale is the highly effective lateral imaging of the instrumental groups in the fugato episodes.

Enesco's dazzling First Romanian Rhapsody and lyrical Second Rhapsody receive exemplary readings—gorgeous in coloration and wonderfully clear and precise in textural balance and clarity. There are, of course, many competitive recordings of these works, but if you want state-of-the-art sound for all three, this Chandos CD will certainly deliver the goods.


Performance: Civilized Recording: Excellent

What a mellowing effect time can have on a musical ensemble. In the mid-1970's, the Vermeer Quartet was a blustery, untamed group led with sweaty earnestness by Shmuel Ashkenasi. He is still the group's focal point, mostly because of the grace and poetry of his phrasing, but there are times in these recordings when the playing seems cool and refined to a fault. Though much of the group's old fire can be heard in the impassioned slow movement of the Second Quartet and in the dark opening movement of the Fourth Quartet, it's always clear that the main attraction in these performances is the music's internal workings, not an artificially pumped-up drama. They do not present Beethoven the fledgling Romantic so much as Beethoven the contemporary of Haydn.

I occasionally miss the bite in the sfzorandos as well as snap and lilt in the rhythm, but not since the Quartetto Italiano's has a recording of Beethoven quartets given such a clear sense of the music's vertical sonorities. All sorts of coloristic effects come out, such as the hairpin texture changes in the Sixth Quartet, revealing the music's powerful chiaroscuro. Because the Vermeer Quartet has a lean and focused sound, there's never any danger of its imposing an artificial lushness on the music. The recording, made in the Siemensvilla, Berlin, has a subtle glow that audiophiles will prize.


Performance: Brilliant Recording: Close-up

Someone discovered only a few years ago that the Berg Lyric Suite, far from being a twelve-tone abstraction, was actually a secretmissive in an illicit love affair. That justifies, I suppose, this rather unexpected coupling of Berg and Verdi. But these are two very different kinds of lyricism. The extreme passions of Berg swirl and scramble in a hailstorm of notes and rhythms, emotions, numerical theories and hidden messages. Nothing like that in Verdi, who, like a good Italian dramatist, tells it to us plain and straight.

Vermeer Quartet: Beethoven without bluster

Apparently the complexity of Berg's musico-sexual psychopathology appeals to the musicians here; they show an almost devilish glee in sorting it all out. Next to that brilliant performance, the Verdi pales. The wisdom of his piece is that of age and of another, simpler time and place. The Vogler Quartet is too young, too German, too much of our time quite to carry it off. Get this CD for the Berg; the Verdi is a pleasant extra. The close-up, high-level recording is surrounded with a lot of big-room reverb, making everything sound larger than life.


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E.S.


Performance: On the surface Recording: Lifelike

A well-known pianist remarked recently that the sonatas Opp. 1, 2, and 5 are

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Copland: El Salon Mexico: Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra, Music for the Theatre; Connotations for Orchestra. Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli on Deutsche Grammophon have found more poetry in these pieces, and so does Gerhard Oppitz, whose midprice Eurodisc recording is especially warm and more vibrant than in the old London recordings there with Ernest Ansermet. The only blemish is a slight imbalance favoring the horns, most noticeably in the first movement. While this may not be a Mahler Fourth for all tastes, on its own terms it is very well performed.

D.H.

The remarkable clarity of texture and the flowing line, minus the Viennese lilt, in the first movement are immediately striking. The second movement, with its subtly diabolic solo fiddle (tuned up a whole tone), takes on a chamber-music aspect. An even flow, like that associated with the Perfect Good Friday music, characterizes the superb variations slow movement, but there is no apocalyptic surge in the transcendent E Major climax. The child's vision of heaven evoked in the finale's touching soprano solo comes off well, though I was conscious of Edith Wiens's rapid vibrato. Erato has achieved beautiful recorded sound in Geneva's Victoria Hall, considerably warmer and more vibrant than in the old London recordings there with Ernest Ansermet. The only blemish is a slight imbalance favoring the horns, most noticeably in the first movement. While this may not be a Mahler Fourth for all tastes, on its own terms it is very well performed.

D.H.
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both works here—not only on the part of the two soloists, and between them and their conductor, but also, one might say, between all three and the composer. There is brilliance to spare, but it is never allowed to be an end in itself. The shifting moods of the great Sinfonia Concertante are captured fully and uncontrivedly, and the Concerto has never sounded more substantial or more ingratiating. The handsome recording does full justice to the performances. R.F.

RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto No. 2 (see Best of the Month, page 67)

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: The Golden Cockerel. Artur Eizen (bass), King Dodon; Elena Brileva (soprano), Queen of Shemakha; Oleg Biktimirov (tenor), the Astrologer; others. Chorus and Orchestra of the Bolshoi Theatre, Evgeny Svetlanov cond. MCA CLASSICS ® AED2-10391 two CD's (116 min).

Performance: Engaging
Recording: Good

Like Puccini's Turandot, Rimsky-Korsakov's The Golden Cockerel, based on a satiric fairy tale of Alexander Pushkin, mixes brutality with gentle fantasy, violence with romance. The story tells of King Dodon, old and weary of monarchy, who accepts from an astrologer a golden cockerel that will crow in time of danger. For this rather unusual security alarm, the king promises the astrologer to grant a wish. Dodon later marries the entrancing Queen of Shemakha, only to be challenged by the astrologer, who demands the queen as his due. Upon Dodon's refusal to forfeit his royal bride, he is pecked on the head by the cockerel and dies. Thus the opera ends, save for a brief epilogue offered by the astrologer, who suggests that the entire affair has been a figment of fancy and that he and the queen are the only real people in it.

Certain sections of the score are generally known: the introduction, Dodon's Dance, the Wedding March, and the celebrated Hymn to the Sun, a difficult and highly chromatic coloratura aria. Throughout the score are strains of delightful melody, but its chief interest is Rimsky's vivid orchestral colorations.

The cast in this 1988 Russian recording (only recently released here) is a good one. As Dodon, Artur Eizen employs his strong bass effectively—the siesta scene and his colloquy with the queen are especially engaging—and manages, despite the language barrier, to limn the king's personality touchingly and comically. Elena Brileva, as the queen, is at her vocal best in the Hymn to the Sun, but when she is called on for more dramatic utterance, she often sounds rather waspish and strident.

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Performance: Rich and passionate Recording: Very good

Among the excellent recorded Parsifals, this new one is certainly an outstanding ensemble effort and perfectly captured in appropriately rich sound. Daniel Barenboim paces this gargantuan and immensely self-indulgent work sensibly, resisting the temptation for undue expansion and further indulgence. Perhaps other conductors have made more of certain passionate climaxes, but Barenboim offers a serene, majestic statement of this complex drama. The choral and orchestral work are both excellent, though the rich and transparent orchestral perspective is sometimes accomplished at the expense of the singers.

The cast, all Bayreuth veterans, could hardly be bettered today. In many ways, Siegfried Jerusalem is a model Parsifal. In the first act, the naïveté he projects is entirely convincing, in the second act he addresses the Flower Maidens in tones of Mozaritan delicacy, and he manages the transformation into a heroic presence in Act III with unexaggerated realism. Waltraud Meier is a vocally sumptuous Kundry with an impressive, ringing freedom in the upper extension of the part. José van Dam is as noble and immensely self-indulgent work sensitive to texts made up of clichés. The fragile Baroque cantatas can seem musty after the Karajan or Solti sets need not be supplied it. But for the most part here rich musical resources are used with unusual care and musicality instead of a generalized grandness.

Performance: Splendid Recording: Ideal

Jessye Norman has made some excellent lieder recordings over the years, but none better than this "Salzburg Recital." Though not recorded live in the Austrian city but in a New York City studio, it offers the same program that Norman and James Levine gave there in 1988. Little spontaneity was lost in the transition from the stage to the studio; all of Norman's vocal and interpretive idiosyncrasies, however—such as the thickening of her middle register and her tendency to overdramatize the words—are either minimized or nowhere to be heard. Perhaps Levine is to be thanked for balancing Norman's innate authority with more subtlety, yielding some of the most restrained singing of her recent career. Of course, when the Wolf songs require an operatic wallop, she is certainly ready to supply it. But for the most part her rich musical resources are used with unusual care and musicality instead of a generalized grandness.

There's nothing generalized about the wildly different moods of the Wolf lieder, in which Norman's portrayals handily run the gamut from an infatuated girl to a hysterically angry wife. Particularly remarkable is the tranquility and stillness she gives to "Nun lass uns Frieden schliessen" ("Now let us make peace") against the gently rocking rhythm of Levine's piano part. This is great singing, and worth the price of the CD all by itself. So are the Debussy chansons, which feature some of Norman's most penetrating insights and graceful phrasing, even if she doesn't quite capture the light, quicksilver cross-cutting of poetic images in Mandoline. The Beethoven set seems to be her usual underdog choice—there's none in commercially Norman recital—and it is an eccentric, ungratifying one. But in this generously filled CD, it's easily skipped over.

D.P.S.
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LATELY I've been thinking about this really great movie moment in George Lucas's American Graffiti. Well, actually, there are several great movie moments in American Graffiti, but the particular one I have in mind (for reasons that will become clear later on) is when the coolest aging greaser in town, played by Paul Le Mat, accidentally gives a ride to a gawky younger girl, played by McKenzie Phillips. The greaser, of course, is mortified at being seen with such pimply jailbait, so the two bicker constantly until (this being 1963) an early Beach Boys song comes on the radio, prompting Le Mat, disgusted, to change the station. Phillips, however, changes it back. "Don't you think the Beach Boys are bitchin'?" she asks. "I can't stand that surfin' shit," Le Mat snarls in reply. "Rock-and-roll's been all downhill since Buddy Holly died."

What's wonderful about the scene, of course, is that the fate it sums up comes to us all—that moment when whatever pop music we were weaned on begins to strike folks younger than us as quaint. But while Le Mat's greaser was the victim of the first such sea change in rock history, he could have had the last laugh. By the early-Eighties New Wave boom, his beloved rockabilly was in fashion again.

Actually, if truth be told, no rock style ever really goes out of date, not completely. On rock's fringes, there are always earnest, purist bands flogging supposedly outmoded genres before like-minded crowds. Sometimes, when you least expect it, one of those bands even succeeds commercially, the most recent example being the Black Crowes' multi-Platinum, letter-perfect recreation of early-Seventies British blues rock.

Of course, the Crowes, who are in their twenties, are atypical; most revivalist bands tend to be—well, geezers. That might explain why the more successful keepers of the (various) flames tend to be on the blues/soul side of the street (Southside Johnny, say, or Danny Gatton) rather than the pop/rock one. Face it, forty-olds look kind of silly singing about teenage romance (which may be why a great pop band like Shoes never plays live). Besides, it's an open secret that getting old has long been the one truly taboo subject for rock songwriters.

In any case, what inspired these musings was "Loud, Fast and Aging Rapidly," a genuinely exciting, and very funny, CD by a group of CBGB's punk veterans (the oldest is forty-one) called Iron Prostate. Strictly speaking, these guys (formerly known as Greycian Formula, heh heh) aren't revivalists—they're more like true believers, blasting out Ramones-style three-chord racket with all the fervor of people who think it's still 1978. But, as you can tell by the album's cover photo—a bottle of Jack Daniel's and a bottle of Geritol atop a Marshall amp—they also appreciate the inherent ridiculousness of schlepping band equipment out of a scuzzy Bowery night club at that point in your life when your hair has begun to thin and you're late with the car payments.

And so on their debut album, amidst the de rigueur punkish minimalism (complete lyrics of Gilligan: "I wear a white hat/I wear a red shirt/They all think I'm stupid/One day I'll kill them/I am Gilligan"), you also find something like Hell Toupee, the hilarious saga of a "middle-aged man with middle-aged needs" who sells his soul to the devil for a long-haired wig that lets him score with babes at rock clubs ("When I'm bored I'll take off my hairpiece just for kicks/And the label will say 'inspected by No. 666' "). Even better is Rock 'n' Roll Nursing Home, a Xerox-quality Ramones pastiche in which the hero "tools around in a black leather wheelchair" and propositions blue-haired old ladies with the line, "Baby, let me take you for a ride on my Craftmatic bed."

What all this proves, of course, I haven't quite sorted out. Maybe it's that any music remains valid as long as it's performed with passion and commitment. Or perhaps it's that adult concerns and essentially adolescent idioms need not be mutually exclusive. Or maybe it's just that loud noises are cathartic at any age. Whatever. The basic point is that Iron Prostate's "Loud, Fast and Aging Rapidly" (from Skyclad/Screaming Skull Records, P.O. Box 666, Middlesex, NJ 08846) is the kind of smart punk album the Dictators were supposed to have made but never really did. Both touching and funny, the album amounts to a Wayne's World take on the Who's famous dictum, "Hope I die before I get old"...not!
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