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Stereo Review

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DECEMBER 1997

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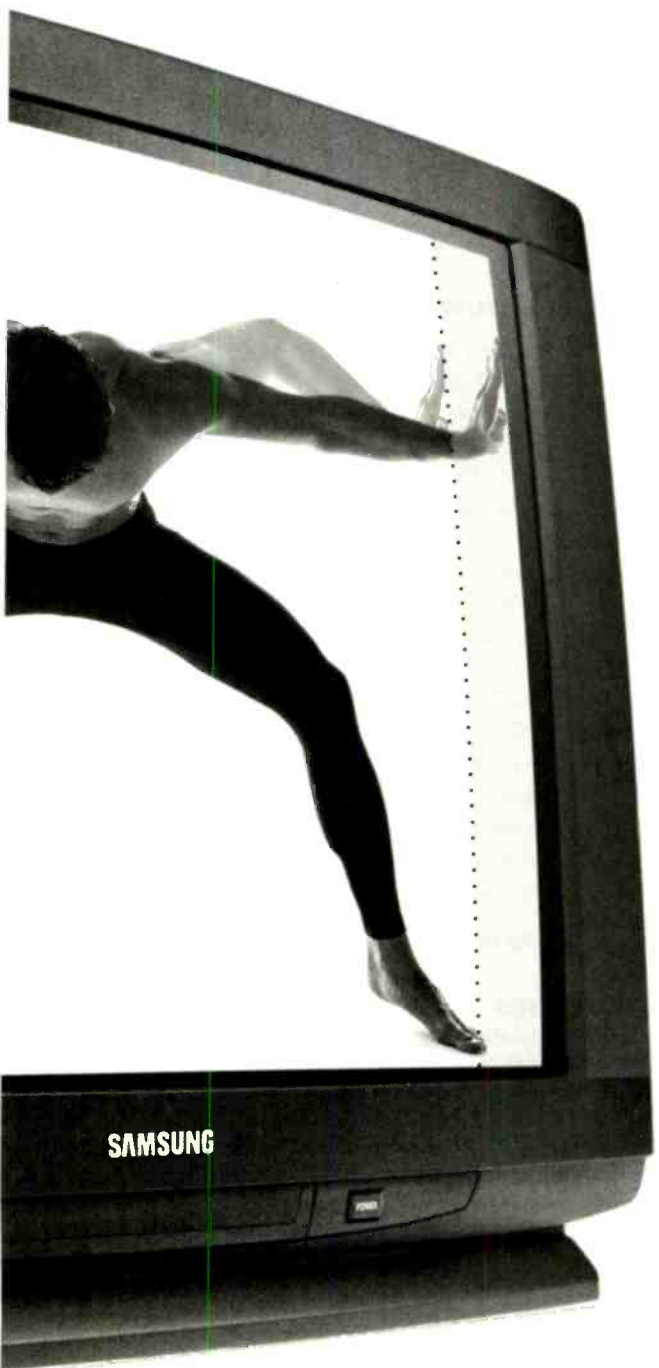
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BULLETIN

BY BOB ANKOSKO & WILLIAM LIVINGSTONE

NEW FORMAT WAR?

Recent demonstrations of proposed DVD-Audio systems has fueled speculation about yet another format war. On one side, Sony and Philips are promoting the Super Audio CD, a dual-layer disc featuring a standard-CD layer and a high-density layer encoded in the new Direct Stream Digital (DSD) format, which is said to accommodate 74 minutes of six-channel music with 120 dB dynamic range. The DSD process would require a new generation of recording equipment. On the other side, Pioneer, Matsushita (Panasonic and Technics), JVC, and Toshiba are plugging a system based on the 96-kHz/24-bit audio spec supported by the current DVD-Video standard, which they say offers superior sound quality.

Meanwhile, the International Steering Committee to coordinate evaluation of proposed systems and draft specs for a new DVD-Audio format by year's end is reportedly way behind schedule. Surprised?

HONOR ROLL

Home audio luminary Henry E. Kloss, who was a founder of Acoustic Research, KLH, Advent, Kloss Video, and Cambridge SoundWorks, received an Emmy Award for his pioneering work in developing projection TV. . . . Blues guitarist John Lee Hooker, 80, has been honored with a star in the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

DIRT CHEAP

Thanks to a recent ruling by the FCC, shock jocks like Howard Stern will save a bundle every time they utter what comedian George Carlin called "the seven words you can't say on TV," which refer mostly to lower body parts and activities associated with them. The FCC, which used to levy a \$12,500 fine per violation,

slashed the penalty to a mere \$7,000 per dirty word.

A/V DIGEST

Matsushita, the parent company of Panasonic and Technics, recently began selling a Walkman-type cassette player in Japan that's said to run for 85 hours on a single battery charge and to have a top search speed forty-five times normal playback speed. . . . The SolarVerter from Patrick Technologies of Lisle, Illinois is billed as "the first completely portable indoor and outdoor solar power unit." Four models are available, ranging from a 3 x 6-inch, 4-volt unit (\$25) to a 13½ x 6½-inch, 9-volt unit (\$100). For more information, call 888-858-2801 or visit Patrick's Website, www.solarverter.com. . . . A double-blind listening test comparing original master tapes of movie soundtracks with versions encoded using Dolby Digital and the MPEG Multichannel format chosen for European DVD releases revealed "no clear preference, according to Philips, which administered the tests to about thirty representatives of the Hollywood film and video community.

DISNEY DOES DVD

Following months of rampant speculation, Disney's Buena Vista Home Entertainment group announced plans to release eight DVD movies in December, including *George of the Jungle*. Days later, Disney announced that it would also support Divx, a new pay-per-view version of DVD scheduled for release next year (see page 36 for a full report). Paramount announced that it, too, would support the new Divx format, but without endorsing DVD, leaving Fox the only major Hollywood studio that has yet to support either DVD or Divx.

Meanwhile, the DVD Video Group estimates that some 500 DVD titles will



PRESIDENTIAL CULTURE

President Bill Clinton may play a mean saxophone, but his musical tastes are not limited to pop. In fact, he and the First Lady attended the opening of the 1997-98 season of the Metropolitan Opera in New York (*Carmen* with Plácido Domingo and Denyce Graves). Back in Washington, the Clintons presented the 1997 National Medals to twenty high achievers in the arts and humanities. Five of the honorees — all hand-picked by the President — represent a broad spectrum of American musical life: Don Henley, jazz singer Betty Carter, conductor James Levine (artistic director of the Met Opera), Latin percussionist Tito Puente, and bluegrass guitarist Doc Watson.

On December 7, the Clintons will host a reception for recipients of the Kennedy Center Honors for contributions to the performing arts: Bob Dylan, soprano Jessye Norman, Lauren Bacall, Charlton Heston, and dancer Edward Villella. Dylan (56) and Norman (52) are among the youngest performers to receive the honors. A gala performance following the reception will be taped for telecast December 26 on CBS.

be in stores in time for the holiday season.

OPERATION OPERA

If you were unable to attend the opening of the Met with President and Mrs. Clinton, don't fret. The 1997-98 Texaco-Metropolitan Opera International Radio Network will broadcast twenty Saturday afternoon Met performances live across North America and Europe and as far away as Australia and New Zealand. The season kicks off on December 6 with Mozart's *La Clemenza*

di Tito. Others this month are Puccini's *Turandot* (December 13), Rossini's *Barber of Seville* (December 20), and Verdi's *Don Carlo* (December 27).

FIT FOR PRINT

W. W. Norton has published *Virgil Thomson; Composer on the Aisle* (\$30), a biography of the composer/critic by critic Anthony Tommasini of *The New York Times*. . . . Now in paperback is *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* by Gillian McCain and Legs McNeil (Penguin, \$14.95).

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Cover. A DVD player such as the JVC XV-1000 or versatile minispeakers like the Energy Take 2 and Take 1 are some of the many gifts that a lucky audio/videoophile might find under his tree this year. Also shown under our tree are the Panasonic Shock Wave personal stereo, the VLS Cyclone 3D virtual surround processor, the ATC FMSounds ear radio, and some hot new CDs and DVDs.

Photograph by Ralph Masullo

Stereo Review

INCORPORATING HIGH FIDELITY

December 1997

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Gifts of CD sets that keep on playing
BY KEN RICHARDSON AND ROBERT RIPPS

105 Best Recordings of the Month

The Rolling Stones' *Bridges to Babylon*, Evgeny Kissin plays Beethoven piano concertos, Bob Dylan's *Time Out of Mind*, and Mozart opera arias with soprano Kathleen Battle



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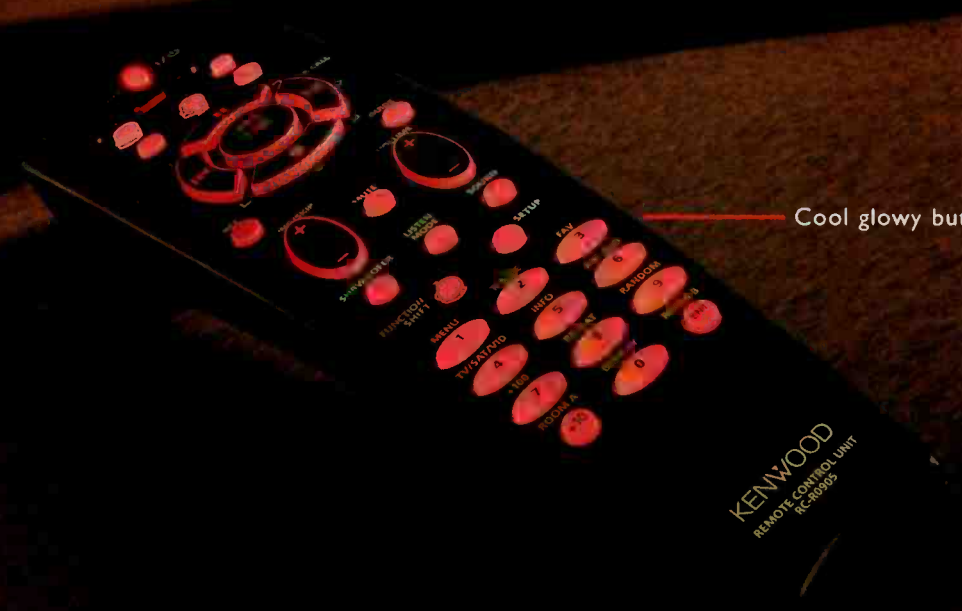
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LETTERS

I Want My DVD

Some of the reasons I want to buy a DVD player: lower prices than laserdiscs, slow motion (I like to "study" my movies), ultra-fast bidirectional search, easier storage (DVDs will fit in most CD racks), the ability to fit an entire movie on one side (no turn-over), and the ability to choose between letterboxed and pan-and-scan versions. But if the studios decide to "lock out" some of the best features, is DVD really worth buying? What can consumers do? **VINCENT LINJA**
Orlando, FL

If a studio doesn't make use of what you consider the best features of the DVD format, don't buy its releases. If enough like-minded viewers vote with their wallets and let studios know that they value certain features, they might get the message.

Home-Theater Calibration

I would like to calibrate my home-theater system to the reference audio level that soundtracks are mixed to (and supposedly screened to): 85 dB sound-pressure level (SPL), C-weighted, slow response from each channel when measured with pink noise recorded at 0 dB. My receiver has Dolby Pro Logic decoding, I have the Delos Surround Spectacular test/setup CDs, and a laserdisc player is my primary source. What level were the pink-noise and channel-balance tones on the Delos set recorded at? Which of them would be best for this calibration? Also, what is the best way to hold the sound-level meter? **PAUL GONG**
Fresno, CA

The last four tracks on the Surround Spectacular CD were recorded at -20 dBFS (decibels referred to digital full-scale) and should, as you indicated, be reproduced by an amplifier in Dolby Pro Logic mode at 85 dB SPL to approach theatrical conditions. Because program peaks will, of course, be even louder, you might prefer to calibrate your system for 75 dB. C-weighting, at the listening position, which won't distort the director's intention severely. Measure the level by holding the meter — at arm's length to minimize your body's effect — about where your head would be when listening.

Down-Firing Subs

In "What's New in Subwoofers" in August, Ian Masters wrote, "There is some disagreement as to which direction a subwoofer should aim." You can't "aim" soundwaves that are many, many times longer than their generating device. The major disadvantage of down-firing subwoofer designs is that gravity pulls the moving assembly (cone and voice coil) off-center, causing the equivalent of a DC bias and thus higher distortion, as well as downward,

causing early aging and progressively degenerating sound. **DREW DANIELS**
North Hills, CA

Clever manufacturing can compensate for the downward pull, and the cone can be centered at its rest position. With modern materials, wear is less of a factor than it might have been fifteen years ago.

Dolby Pro Logic Lives

One year ago, after it became clear that mass-market Dolby Digital was still at least two to three years away, I bit the bullet and upgraded to Dolby Pro Logic. Yes, that's right, Pro Logic. I had resisted for a long time, thinking that when I upgraded for surround sound it would be to Dolby Digital.

I must say that I am thrilled with the performance of Dolby Pro Logic, and it has added tremendously to my enjoyment of movies and television. Movies sound as good as any Dolby Digital (DD) demo I have heard, and they certainly sound better than in any mall theater. I am sure there are many readers who think Pro Logic is a poorly performing technology (if you believe all the DD hype). Not so! You can enjoy excellent surround sound for a very small investment. I spent a total of \$1,500 for a center speaker (Polk Audio), dipole surround speakers (Cambridge SoundWorks), a powered subwoofer (NHT), a Pro Logic receiver (Sony ES), and wiring (Monster Flat Cable). STEREO REVIEW's fine technical articles on proper surround installation, particularly Tom Nouseine's "Surround Sanity" in April 1996, helped me put it all together.

A year later, I am still happy with my decision, as DVD titles are very limited, expensive, and not available for rental, DD receivers are overpriced, and the future of DVD is still very much in question. Long Live Dolby Pro Logic! **FRANK HEILIGER**
West Lafayette, IN

Anti-Elvis

Far from blurring the racial lines, Elvis only emphasized them by giving a pale (no pun) imitation of the real thing. As a white boy growing up in the 1940s, I listened to Wynonie Harris, Roy Brown, Jimmy Witherspoon, and others, and I recognized R&B as a close cousin of jazz: it swung. Rock swung like a rusty gate. It was lame, corny, square. When Elvis arrived with those staccato hiccupps that sounded like someone was goos-

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.

ing him, the standard crack was, "Either stop jerking the station dial or shut it off." We couldn't believe anyone would sound like that on purpose.

Elvis Presley was a shitkicker who made good. The fact that a number of soundalikes rode in on his coattails is no grounds for defecation. Two and a third octaves? A hound dog has that. No wonder he was propped up with a male quartet that couldn't sing "Come to Jesus" in the key of C. Anyone would have sounded better by comparison, and certainly no one could have sounded worse, not even Elvis.

JOE BURNETTE
San Francisco, CA

In a Lighter Vein

Corey Greenberg's "Stooge-o-Phonics: More Better Stereo" in September ("The High End") was the most entertaining and humorous piece I have read in over twenty years of subscribing to STEREO REVIEW.

AL JOHNSON
Austin, TX

Telarc's Pride

In an October letter about the article "Can You Believe Your Ears?" (August), reader Chuck Currie refers to a wonderful recording of Holst's band suites by Frederick Fennell and the Cleveland Symphonic Winds. He said it was on Sheffield, but, in fact, it is a Telarc release.

GREGORY ROSE
Los Angeles, CA

You're right — indeed, the direct-to-disc LP of that recording was the very first release by Telarc, and the CD is still in the catalog.

Learning from History

In his "Signals" column for September, "Use and Abuse of History," Ken Pohlmann says, "If the CD had been inferior [to the LP], it would have failed, as so many new . . . products do." Well, the CD might be superior, but I'm not sure that's the best argument by which to prove it. For example, Beta lost out to VHS even though Beta was visually superior. The public doesn't always make quality its foremost criterion when it decides whether to embrace a new medium.

JEFFREY S. MENKES
Farmington, CT

Regarding Ken Pohlmann's "Use and Abuse of History" (September "Signals"): While I agree that some of the early CD's left something to be desired, the technology has come a very long way, and any new technology will always have growing pains. Of course, the quality of one's playback system has a great deal to do with what finally meets the ears. The first CD I bought sounds better now than when it was new, with no visible or audible deterioration, because I have seriously upgraded my playback gear.

Mr. Pohlmann said that the CD is a superior product, and he is absolutely right. How nice it is to be able to simply insert a disc, hit play, and then sit back and listen to the music as it emerges from a pleasantly

silent background, with details emerging clearly. And there's no wear and tear on the discs! And with that marvelous little gadget called a remote control, you can remain comfortably ensconced on the couch and select any track you like, scan to your favorite part, set the player to randomly select the music, or avail yourself of a host of programming options. Try *that* with vinyl.

Never before has such a vast quantity and diversity of music been available. Many of my favorite vinyl recordings are now on

CD, and in almost every case the transfer from the original is excellent. I only wish this technology had been around when I was collecting 78s back in the 1940s. What a library I'd have now!

DON CHARLES
Mt. Pleasant, SC

Correction

The photo credit was inadvertently omitted for "Convergence Closeup" in September. The photographer was Jook P. Leung. □

LED ZEPPELIN



BBC SESSIONS

Nearly 30 years ago, the group that continues to be the world's biggest rock band gave four special concerts for a select group of lucky fans.

Some of these performances were broadcast by the BBC . . .
Some of them were never heard again outside the concert hall . . .
Two songs were never recorded on any of their studio albums.

It's all available now. . . . And it's been worth the wait.

Over 2 1/2 hours of live classics
Compiled and mastered by Jimmy Page



www.atlantic-records.com
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A bullet-proof argument for the new B&W 600 Series.

The use of our patented Kevlar® cones is reason enough to choose the new B&W 600 Series.

After all, Kevlar has always been the standard in B&W's best and most expensive loudspeakers.

But that's just the start of our bullet-proof argument. Because B&W's top-gun engineers loaded a barrage of technical innovations into an entire family of affordable, high performance speakers—the B&W 600 Series.

- Our metal dome tweeters—borrowed from the Matrix 801s—provide near-perfect response to well beyond audibility.
- Beveled cabinet edges and solidly braced enclosures minimize box resonance and the effects of diffraction for truly transparent sound.
- Gold-plated speaker terminals allow for biwiring to reduce component cross-talk.
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- Prices start at just \$400 a pair.

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CIRCLE NO. 7 ON READER SERVICE CARD

NEW PRODUCTS



▲ ATLANTIC TECHNOLOGY

Atlantic Technology's System 450 THX speaker suite consists of one 453 C and two 451 LR speakers in front, two 454 SR surrounds, and a 452 PBM powered subwoofer. The front speakers have a 1-inch tweeter, two 3½-inch midrange drivers, and two 6½-inch woofers. Each surround has two

asymmetrically oriented 5¼-inch woofers and two ¾-inch dome tweeters. The 300-watt sub has a 15-inch driver. All are finished in a glossy black laminate. Price: \$5,050. Atlantic Technology, Dept. SR, 343 Vanderbilt Ave., Norwood, MA 02062.

• Circle 120 on reader service card



▲ HARMAN KARDON

Harman Kardon's Signature 2.0 Dolby Digital preamp/tuner has two A/V inputs with both composite-video and S-video switching, four with composite-video only. Four digital inputs are provided. The tuner has thirty AM/FM presets and Radio Data System capability. Besides

Dolby Digital and Pro Logic decoding, the Signature 2.0 has enhancement modes for classical music and mono programs and a two-channel bypass mode. Price: \$1,499. Harman Kardon, Dept. SR, 80 Crossways Park W., Woodbury, NY 11797.

• Circle 122 on reader service card



HITACHI ▶

The Hitachi HDS-220S Digital Satellite System receiver has an interface for connection to a compatible D-VHS VCR like Hitachi's VTDX-815. The digital signal from the satellite can be recorded on the VCR, then fed back through the receiver without any loss of the original broadcast's picture or sound quality. The included dish antenna has two

outputs. Price: \$599. Hitachi, Dept. SR, 3890 Steve Reynolds Blvd., Norcross, GA 30093.

• Circle 121 on reader service card

▼ PHILIPS

The Philips Electronics DVX8000 Multimedia Home Theater is a one-of-a-kind product that combines a personal computer, a DVD player, a TV tuner, an FM tuner, and a Dolby Digital A/V preamp in one package. The PC, built around a 233-MHz Pentium processor with MMX technology, has a 3.1-gigabyte hard-disk drive and 32 megabytes of RAM, and it can access the DVD player as if it were a DVD-ROM or CD-ROM drive. Its PC video circuitry

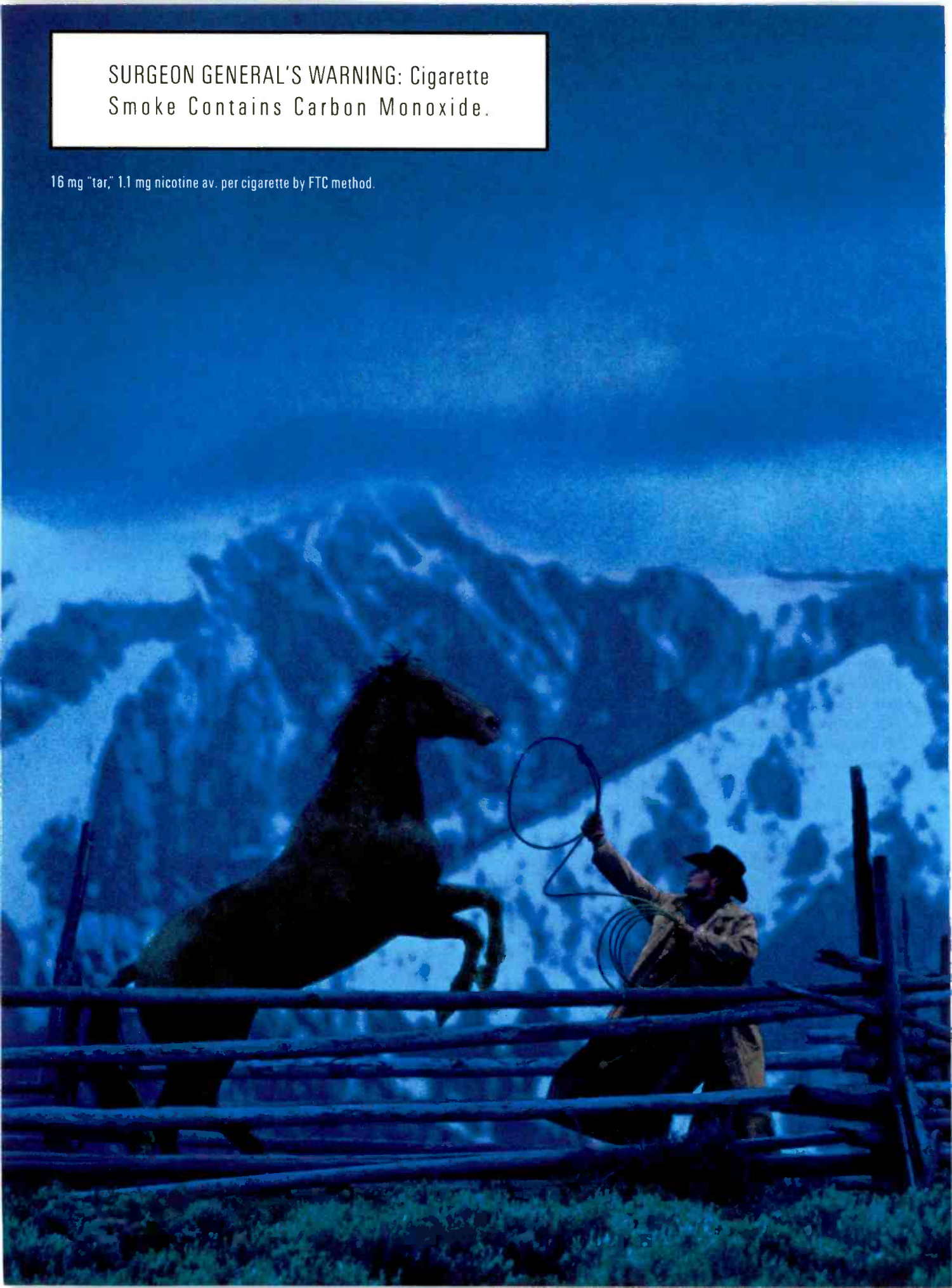
includes a 3-D graphics accelerator. The A/V section includes a Marantz preamp with five video and seven audio inputs; optical, coaxial, and RF digital inputs; a progressive-scan line doubler; and SVGA, composite-video, and S-video outputs. A Marantz RC2000 remote control and a wireless keyboard are included. Price: \$5,000. Philips Electronics, Dept. SR, 1070 Arastadero Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94303.

• Circle 123 on reader service card

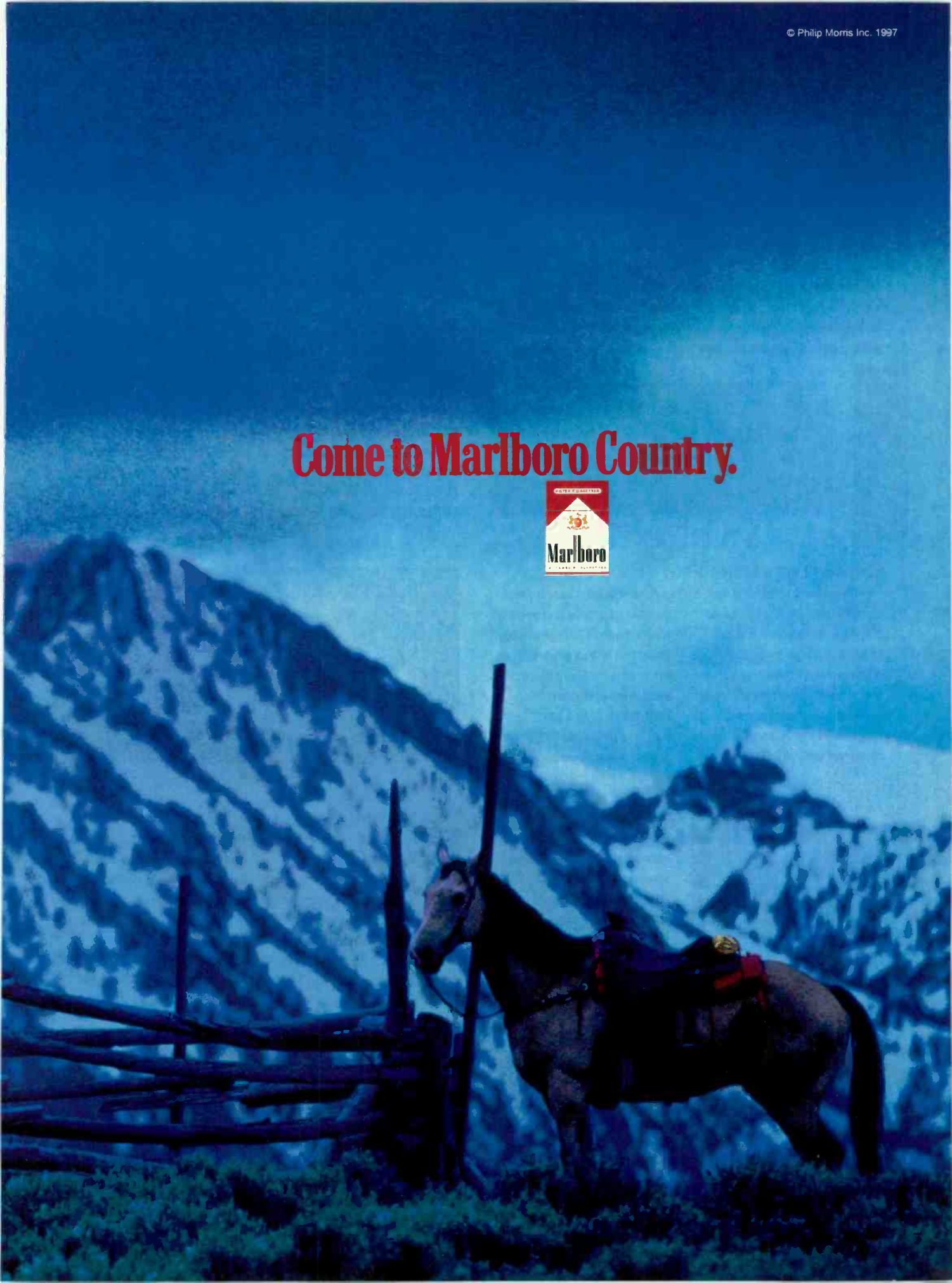


SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette
Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.

16 mg "tar," 1.1 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.



Come to Marlboro Country.



NEW PRODUCTS

▼ NAKAMICHI

The Nakamichi AV-1s five-channel A/V receiver is rated to deliver 100 watts each to the three front channels and 50 watts each to the surround channels. It features Dolby Pro Logic decoding and Natural, Hall, and Stadium ambience-synthesis modes. Seven stereo inputs are provided

as well as a six-channel input for connection to an outboard Dolby Digital decoder. The LFE input is passed through to a line-level output for a subwoofer. Price: \$850. Nakamichi, Dept. SR, 955 Francisco St., Torrance, CA 90502.

• Circle 124 on reader service card



► CHORD ELECTRONICS

The Chord Electronics SPM 400, a stereo power amplifier rated for 100 watts per channel into 8 ohms, has a high-frequency digital switching power supply that is said to help give it a quick, controlled response to bass frequencies and transients. Its electronic protection system uses

magnetic current sensors to monitor constantly for open and short circuits. Thermal-overload protection is also offered. Price: \$2,100. Chord Electronics, distributed by Audio Influx, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 381, Highland Lakes, NJ 07422.

• Circle 126 on reader service card



▲ AURASOUND

AuraSound's Line Source Series comprises a wide variety of speakers. The LSB-527M (\$300 a pair) and LSB-627M (\$400 a pair) are two-way bookshelf models. Floor-standing models include the two-way LST-627M (\$550 a pair), the three-way LST-827D (\$700 a pair), and the

three-way, four-driver LST-837D (\$880 a pair). The LSC-537M is a center-channel speaker (\$250), and the LSS-107A is a powered subwoofer with a 10-inch driver (\$500). Aura Systems, Dept. SR, 2335 Alaska Ave., El Segundo, CA 90245.

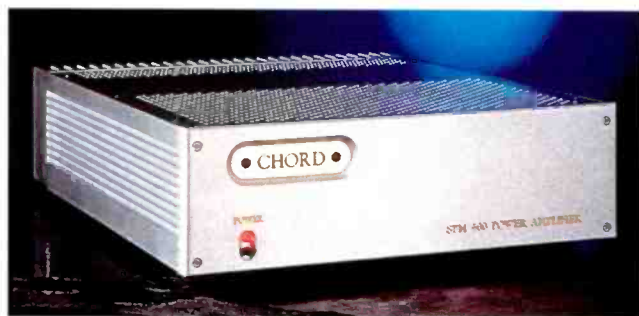
• Circle 125 on reader service card



◀ CANTON

The Canton Fomum AS 30 powered subwoofer includes a 100-watt amplifier and two 9-inch front-firing drivers. The ported bass-reflex enclosure measures about 10 x 24 x 16 inches and has a matte-black vinyl finish and a black fabric grille. Bandwidth is stated as 20 to 150 Hz, and the crossover frequency is adjustable between 50 and 150 Hz. A level control is also provided to help match the AS 30 with the system's main speakers. Price: \$995. Canton Electronics, Dept. SR, 915 Washington Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55415.

• Circle 127 on reader service card



▼ BLAUPUNKT

The Blaupunkt Toronto RDM126 stereo system for their different listening habits. The DIN-size head unit features Radio Data System compatibility and is rated to deliver 35 watts each (peak) to four channels. Price: \$570. Blaupunkt, Dept. SR, 2800 S. 25th Ave., Broadview, IL 60153.

The Blaupunkt Toronto RDM126 car CD receiver won't operate unless its matching KeyCard is inserted in a front-panel slot. Each receiver comes with two KeyCards, which also store a user's station-preset, tone-control, and other preferences, allowing two drivers to set up the same car

• Circle 128 on reader service card



“...by a wide and clearly audible margin, the Micro90t is the best small-satellite home theater speaker system I have ever reviewed.”

—David Ranada, *Stereo Review*, February 1997

Boston Acoustics Home Theater Options

Micro Reference

Big theater sound from small, sculpted satellites.

Compact Reference

Incredible sound from compact speakers.

Lynnfield VR™

Audiophile sound with the full impact of Dolby® Digital.

Boston Acoustics THX®

Dubbing-studio-quality sound.



The experts at *Stereo Review* listen to literally hundreds of home theater speakers each year. So it stands to reason that the Micro90t must be pretty special to warrant such praise.

The reason for this enthusiasm? Good old-fashioned engineering know-how.

Take the Micro90 satellites, for example. They feature a die-cast aluminum housing of incredible strength and rigidity. So the drivers' energy is projected as pure, clean acoustic output instead of being wasted as cabinet vibration. The result: a satellite that can fit in the palm of your hand, and still fill a room with astonishing sound.

Its anodized aluminum tweeter with AMD handles lots of power, yet reproduces highs with virtually zero distortion. And its swivel-mount pedestals make for simple shelf or wall mounting. The Micro90 powered subwoofer, with its clean 75-watt amp and 8-inch DCD™ bass unit, produces ample amounts of deep, tight, powerful bass.

Add the tonally matched Micro90 center channel and either direct or diffuse-field surrounds and you've got a system that beats all other satellite home theaters "by a wide and clearly audible margin." You can test-listen the Micro90t at your local Boston dealer. But rest assured, you won't be the first to listen with a critical ear.

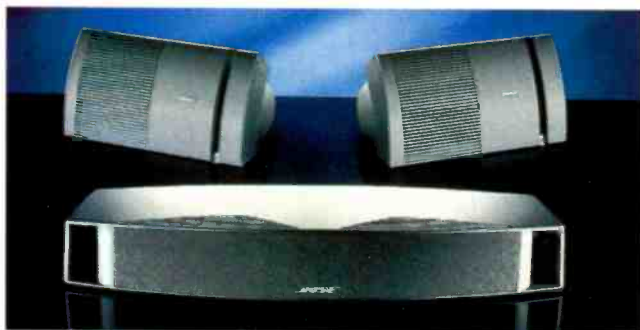


This Micro90t home theater system includes: Two Micro90 satellites, sonically matched center channel, powered subwoofer, and a pair of VRS Micro diffuse-field surrounds (available separately).

BostonAcoustics

300 Jubilee Drive, Peabody, MA 01960 (508) 538-5000. www.bostonacoustics.com/boston
Dolby is a registered trademark of Dolby Laboratories, Inc. THX is a registered trademark of Lucasfilm Ltd.
Lynnfield VR and DCD are trademarks of Boston Acoustics, Inc.

NEW PRODUCTS



▲ BOSE

The Bose VCS-30 speaker package, comprising a VCS-10 center-channel speaker (also available separately) and two surround speakers, is designed to upgrade a pair of stereo speakers for surround sound. The magnetically shielded VCS-10 has two 2½-inch drivers in a wide-dispersion array and two 2½-inch

compound-loaded drivers in a dual-chamber enclosure that's 21½ inches wide and only 3¼ inches high. The VCS-30 surrounds, each with one 4½-inch full-range driver, measure 5¾ x 11 x 6½ inches. Price: \$399. Bose, Dept. SR, The Mountain, Framingham, MA 01701.

• Circle 129 on reader service card



FISHER ▲

The Fisher PCD-7900 portable CD player has a 16-megabyte buffer memory that can store up to 40 seconds of music data so jolts and jars that cause the laser pickup to mistrack won't interrupt playback. When the antiskip circuitry is engaged, music data is read from the disc at twice

normal speed, stored in memory, and then fed out at normal speed for digital-to-analog conversion. A car adaptor kit, two Ni-Cd AA batteries, and an AC adaptor/charger are included. Price: \$200. Fisher, Dept. SR, 21605 Plummer St., Chatsworth, CA 91311.

• Circle 132 on reader service card

▼ OEM

The AW-700 in-wall outdoor speaker from OEM Systems features a 6½-inch carbon-fiber woofer with a butyl-rubber surround and a 1-inch weatherized titanium-dome tweeter. The crossover network is silicone-sealed. The speaker has gold-plated spring-clip terminals, a rustproof painted-aluminum grille, stainless-steel hardware, and rubber gaskets and hardware seals. It measures 8⅝ x 12⅛ x 3¼ inches. Price: \$300 a pair. OEM Systems, Dept. SR, 740 Freeport Blvd., Suite 106, Sparks, NV 89431.

• Circle 130 on reader service card



▼ CAMBRIDGE SOUNDWORKS

The PC Works three-piece multimedia speaker system from Cambridge SoundWorks consists of two 3-inch-cube magnetically shielded satellite speakers and a compact bass module that houses the woofer and a three-channel amplifier. Designed primarily for use with computers, the system



DUPE-IT! ▲

CD Dupe-It! from Corporate Systems Center makes it easy to copy or edit CDs or CD-ROMs. The built-in hard drive stores a bit-by-bit image of an entire CD or selected tracks from it. The data is burned onto a CD-R in a separate operation. More elaborate editing requires a Windows or Macintosh computer with a SCSI port. CD-editing software is included with CD Dupe-It! Price: \$1,295. A rack-mount version is also available. Corporate Systems Center, Dept. SR, 1294 Hammerwood Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94089.

• Circle 131 on reader service card

can also be used with any audio source with a headphone-jack output. The system operates on either 120-volt house current or 12 volts DC (as from a cigarette lighter). Price: \$100. Cambridge SoundWorks, Dept. SR, 311 Needham St., Newton, MA 02164.

• Circle 133 on reader service card



SONY



“

YOU ALREADY KNOW MY

HIGH OPINION

OF

DVD...”

“...AND **SONY** IS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT OPINION.”
STEREOPHILE GUIDE TO HOME THEATER



Presenting the "REFERENCE STANDARD" in DVD Performance.

Studio-quality digital video. Multichannel digital audio. Superb convenience. Unprecedented versatility. DVD is an amazing entertainment medium — and one that imposes incredible new demands on home entertainment components.

To meet these demands, Sony has created a "reference standard" DVD playback system featuring our **DVP-S7000 DVD Player** and **SDP-EP9ES Dolby® Digital Processor**. Taken individually, each component has won universal acclaim from the world's most demanding audio/video critics. But taken as a whole, they achieve a new level of sight and sound performance.

It was not mere coincidence that both of these components came from Sony. For years, Sony has accumulated expertise from co-inventing the Compact Disc, as well as from being one of the principal developers of the new DVD format. And Sony in-house expertise covers every aspect of DVD hardware and software, including everything from proprietary digital signal processing and laser optics to motion picture and concert video production, MPEG-2 encoding, disc authoring, mastering and replication.

Now you can benefit directly from this expertise and experience the full potential of DVD performance. Go with the only company that fully understands digital video and audio technology. **Sony - Defining the Digital Future™**.



SDP-EP9ES Dolby Digital Processor
and DVP-S7000 DVD/CD Player

Critics who rarely agree on anything are unanimous in praising the Sony **DVP-S7000** DVD Player. *Video Magazine* stated it "...sets the Reference Standard"³ and *Widescreen Review*⁶ declared it "...our reference DVD player..."⁴ *Audio* magazine hailed the S7000 for its "**dead-on accuracy**" and found it "**the most nearly perfect video product I've had on my bench.**"⁵

Audio/Video Interiors called the DVP-S7000 "...the hot piece,"⁶ while *FI* proclaimed that it "...has gained a reputation with videophiles as the best of the current batch of players..."⁷ And *Stereophile Guide to Home Theater* simply concluded "...using the Sony, I never felt the urge to change to another player. Its smooth-yet-sharp video performance results in truly film-like images and never disappoints."¹



DVP-S7000 DVD/CD Player



The DVP-S7000 incorporates a full complement of Audio/Video outputs.

The **DVP-S7000** achieves these unparalleled results by using unprecedented technologies. There's Sony's proprietary **MPEG-2 decoder IC** for superlative picture detail, plus **10-bit video D/A conversion** to extract every ounce of tonal gradation. **Component video** outputs preserve every last drop of color resolution, while our **Dual Discrete™ optical pick-up** provides uncompromised performance for both DVD and CD. And audio circuitry straight from Sony's most advanced CD players results in sonic clarity and detail far beyond the ordinary.



Now the **DVP-S7000** has been joined by the more affordable **DVP-S3000**. It retains much of the performance and technology of its top-of-the-line sibling, including both coaxial and optical digital outputs, while adding a new feature: **Audio Priority**. This Sony exclusive automatically selects the **5.1-channel mode**, regardless of where it's embedded on the disc. Best of all, there's no need to search through menus, making it the most convenient way to play.

Whether you choose the Reference Standard **DVP-S7000** or the more accessible **DVP-S3000**, you'll enjoy DVD Video performance that's pure Sony. And you'll have the ideal companion to one of our **Dolby Digital** processors or receivers.

“**A CUT ABOVE**
OF FEATURES, ERGONOMICS”

DVP-S7000 DVD/CD Player



**THE REST IN TERMS
AND PERFORMANCE.”**
HOME THEATER MAGAZINE

“**THE BEST** WAY I’VE FOUND OF
AUDIO SYSTEM **FOR THE NEW**”



SDP-EP9ES Dolby Digital Processor



READYING AN EXISTING DIGITAL SURROUND AGE."

AUDIO MAGAZINE

The Sony **SDP-EP9ES** Dolby Digital Processor has the critics applauding. *Stereophile Guide to Home Theater* declared that it "offers performance that approaches the state-of-the-art in digital surround processing..."⁹ while *HiFi News & Record* Preview called it "a truly magnificent example of digital engineering..."¹⁰

Furthermore, *H-Fi Choice* says that the **SDP-EP9ES** "seamlessly blends the digital sources of hi-fi and home cinema..."¹¹ And *Home Entertainment* states it "could be the one product that finally bridges the gap between high end digital hifi and the best home cinema has to offer."¹²

This remarkable component brings home all the excitement, impact and control options that Dolby Digital (AC-3[®]) surround provides. Unlike Dolby Pro Logic[®] decoding, Dolby Digital reproduces full bandwidth, with **more than 90 dB** of separation between all six channels. So you hear movie soundtracks and concert videos that are more dynamic, more dimensional and more convincing. In short, it's a crucial part of the total DVD Video experience.

And only Sony provides Dolby Digital decoding with a difference. For added realism, our exclusive **Digital Cinema Sound™** modes allow you to enhance DVD playback using

- ◆ **Digital Cinema Sound** soundfields that are exact acoustic replicas of actual Hollywood sound stages. You'll also hear Dolby Digital as it was meant to be heard, thanks to our higher performance

24-bit digital signal processing, as well as the same digital filters and D/A converters that are built into our acclaimed CD players.

Plus, unlike many Dolby Digital decoders, Sony products let you customize sound parameters to match your specific room requirements, including everything from digital equalization and dynamic range compression to bass redirection functions.

Finally, no one offers more Dolby Digital solutions than Sony. Both our reference standard **SDP-EP9ES** and our more affordable Dolby Digital Processor can be connected to any Dolby Digital-ready receiver. Or choose from four receivers with built-in Dolby Digital decoding, including our new flagship, the **STR-DA90ESG**. Each boasts the full bandwidth multichannel power and comprehensive control that you expect from Sony.

It all adds up to more ways to maximize your DVD experience.



STR-DA90ESG Dolby Digital Receiver

Dolby Digital Decoding with a difference.

Customize sound to match speaker placement.

- Front: Large/Small
- Center: Large/Small/No
- Rear: Large/Small/No
- Subwoofer: Yes/No

Adjust delay parameters to fit room requirements.

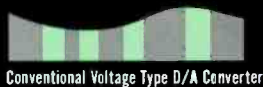
- Front: 3 to 40 feet
- Center: 1 to 6 feet
- Rear: 1 to 6 feet

Set volume for individual channels.

- Front L/R Balance -8 to +8 dB
- Rear L/R Balance -8 to +3 dB
- Center -10 to +20 dB/Mute
- Rear -10 to +20 dB/Mute
- Subwoofer -10 to +20 dB/Mute

Achieve the highest level of Dolby Digital performance.

- 24-bit DSP decoding
- Exclusive Digital Cinema Sound™ modes
- Virtual 3D modes
- Dolby Pro Logic backward compatibility
- Digital EQ or digital bass/treble controls
- Digital dynamic range compression
- Bass redirection function
- Calibration test tone
- Bypass mode (SDP-EP9ES, E800)
- Direct pass mode (STR-DA90ESG, DA80ES, DE1015G, DE915)
- Digital Master Volume (SDP-EP9ES)
- Multiple Dolby Digital inputs



A **SUPERIOR**
PLAYBACK SYSTEM
 DESERVES **SUPERIOR**
SOFTWARE

FOUR
DVDs **FREE!**



At Sony, we understand that even reference standard components require cutting-edge software to achieve outstanding performance. So if you purchase a **Sony DVD Player** together with a **Sony Processor or Receiver** with **Dolby® Digital** decoding between **October 1, 1997 and January 31, 1998**, you can select **two DVD Movies** and **two DVD Concert Videos** from Columbia TriStar Home Video and Sony Music Entertainment for **Free**, from the titles listed below – a **\$100 Value**. For **Coupon and more Information**, see your **Participating Sony Dealer**.

It's just one more reason why you should demand nothing less than **Sony**, if you want nothing less than "reference standard" DVD performance.

CHOOSE TWO MOVIES... Jerry Maguire • Sleepless in Seattle • Matilda • Legends of the Fall • Desperado • Cliffhanger



...AND TWO CONCERT VIDEOS Neil Diamond Greatest Hits Live • Gloria Estefan The Evolution Tour: Live in Miami • Stevie Ray Vaughan Live from Austin, Texas • Mary Chapin Carpenter Jubilee, Live at Wolf Trap • Luther Vandross Always & Forever • Sesame Street Elmo Saves Christmas



SONY

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TIME DELAY

30 YEARS AGO

HiFi/Stereo Review
MAY 1987 • 85 CENTS

Great American Composers Series: Edward MacDowell
A Nostalgist's View of 100 Years of Musical Comedy



The December 1967 Letters department was filled with readers' comments on recent "confessions" by our classical critics. "My Ten Favorite Composers" elicited this response: "How can you have so neglected my own particular favorite, George Frideric Handel? Here's hoping I see you in a more favorable light on 'that day.'" It was signed, "The Messiah, Cincinnati, Ohio." Referring to "Ten Composers I Hate," in which James Goodfriend admitted that "the greater part" of Verdi "drives me right up the wall," Phyllis Gordon of Baltimore wrote, "I am curious to know if that was a padded wall."



Allied open-reel deck, 1967

Among new products was the Allied Model 1040 stereo open-reel tape recorder (\$170) with two detachable speakers

and two microphones. Components tested included the Rectilinear III speaker system (\$269), whose 35-inch-tall cabinet housed a woofer, a midrange, two tweeters, and two supertweeters. The Hirsch-Houck Laboratories report concluded, "We have never heard better sound reproduction in our home, from any speaker of any size or price."

Reviewing *Are You Experienced* by the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Peter Reilly wrote, "I hear that during performances Hendrix often bies his guitar. I often found myself wishing it would bite him back."

20 YEARS AGO



"Of course it was inevitable, but to have it happen this soon comes as a slight shock: the videodisc has gone audio," announced technical director Larry Klein and technical editor Ralph Hodges in the December 1977 issue, reporting on Japanese demonstrations of what would eventually become the compact disc. But they cautioned that record com-

panies "will hardly be rushing into an entirely new and expensive recording format... without the assurance of a reasonable (and fairly prompt) return on investment."



Sony elcaset deck, 1977

Magneplan's MG-I and MG-III Magneplanar speakers (\$495 and \$895, respectively) were featured in new products, as was Teac's AL-700 elcaset tape deck (\$1,000). Another entry in the doomed format, Sony's EL-5 (\$630), was tested by Hirsch-Houck Labs, which said, "having lived with the EL-5 for some time now, we appreciate how much of a 'better cassette' the elcaset really is."

In "Roots of Jazz," Chris Albertson profiled three living pioneers: Sam Wooding, Alberta Hunter, and Eubie Blake. Elsewhere, William Livingstone offered "Ballet Disco," a discography of ballet recordings. And in "Discomania," popular music editor Paulette Weiss wrote, "Disco is not about to go away, so you might as well give in, dress up, and accept Irving Berlin's invitation to 'face the music and dance.'"

10 YEARS AGO

"Digital Revolution '87" was the theme of the annual Japan Audio Fair, covered in the December issue. Products shown included Luxman's DP-07 CD transport (\$2,860). Meanwhile, at the Berlin International Audio and Video Fair, the showstopper was Silbersand's mono power amp with a cooling system in a Plexiglas

Motorhead, 1987



tower that prominently displayed its blue-colored water.

Other new products included NEC's AV-350 surround-sound amplifier (\$579) and Kyocera's top-of-the-line CD player, the DA-710CX (\$800). In a special report, Julian Hirsch tested the a/d/s/ R4 AM/FM receiver (\$1,100), which he called "easily the most sophisticated product of its type."



Luxman CD transport, 1987

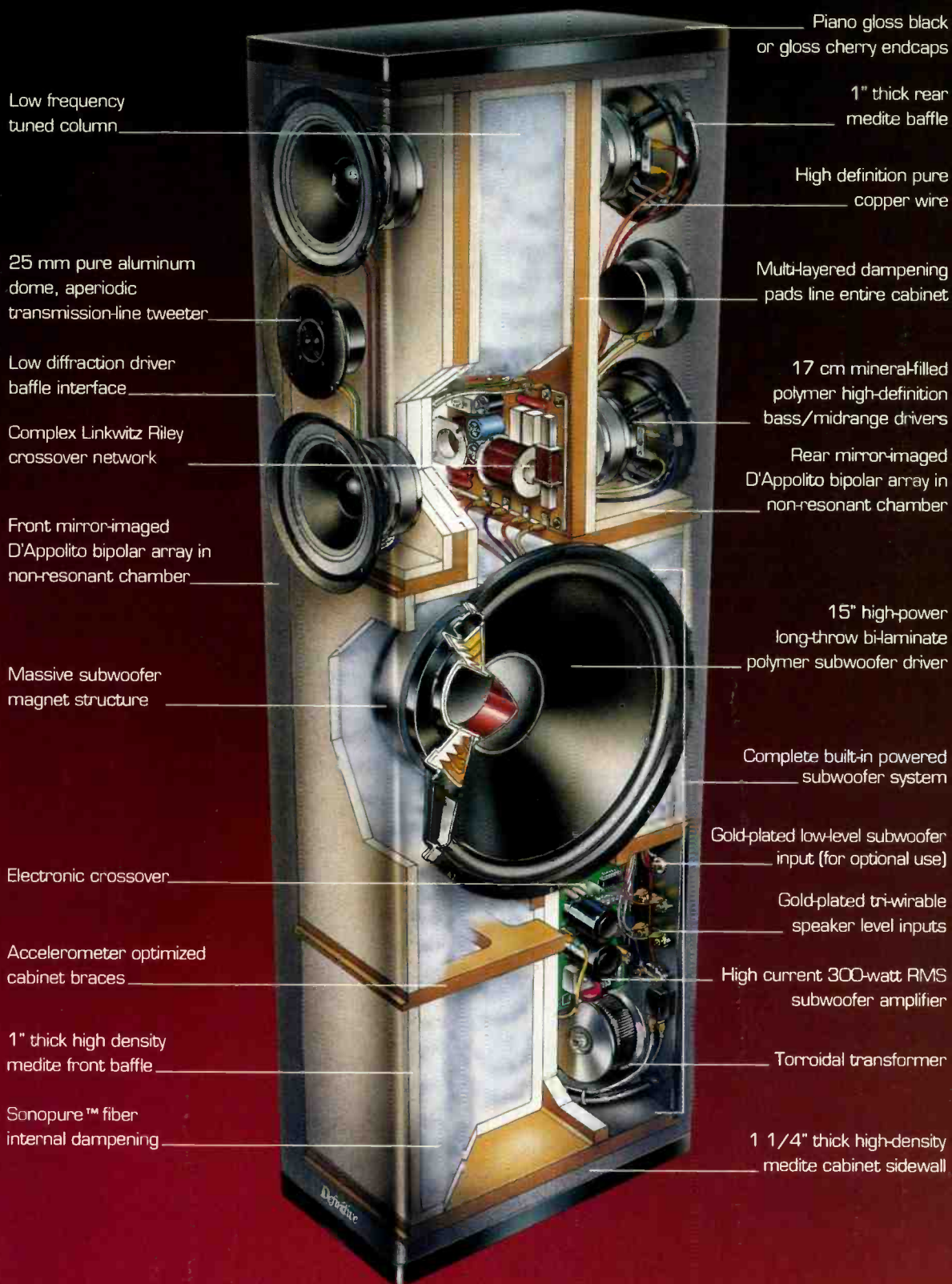
"It is, indisputably, the 'Oh, wow!' album of the year," wrote Steve Simels of *Psonic Pspot* by XTC posing as the Dukes of Stratosphear. Also in Best of the Month was a CBS disc of Mozart violin concertos by Cho-Liang Lin and Raymond Leppard, as well as Michael Jackson's *Bad*.



"What I like about Motorhead is the absolute lack of conceit," wrote Mark Peel of the band's *Rock 'n' Roll*. "They know they're beasts, and they don't come on as anything else."

— Ken Richardson

The Advanced Technology Inside Definitive's BP2000



"...I would choose these speakers for myself."

-Julian Hirsch, *Stereo Review*

Definitive's Amazing BP 2000 & 2002 Are The World's Most Highly Acclaimed Loudspeakers!

"The first speaker I have been able to audition in my own familiar surroundings that has given me that special thrill that usually costs ten or more times its price to obtain."

—Julian Hirsch, *Stereo Review, USA*

"Literally Staggering"

—*Home Theater, USA*

Top reviewers around the world agree that Definitive's amazing BP 2000s & BP 2002s combine highly advanced technology and superior build quality in order to achieve unsurpassed sonic performance plus unequalled value.

"Astounding...The Stuff of Dreams"

—*Home Cinema Choice, England*

Definitive's revolutionary BP 2000 & BP 2002 combine our incredible bipolar technology with dual built-in high-powered subwoofers (BP 2000: 15"/300 watts ea., BP2002: 12"/125 watts ea.) for extraordinary sound quality beyond anything you've ever heard.

"Absolutely Unsurpassed"

—*Prestige HiFi, France*

Both music and movies are reproduced with outstanding purity, transparency and life-like realism. And the astounding high resolution imaging, magnificent soundstaging, awesome bass and explosive dynamic impact totally envelop you in sonic ecstasy. It is simply amazing!



Definitive's Grand Prix award-winning BP 2000 and BP 2002 combine our revolutionary bipolar technology with awesome built-in powered subwoofers for unsurpassed performance.

"Amazing Music and Home Theater... Most Spectacular Speakers Ever"

—*HiFi Review, Hong Kong*

In addition to being an audiophile's dream, the BP 2000s & BP 2002s are also the main speakers in Definitive's Ultimate Home Theater Systems. These astonishing systems are absolutely the finest sounding available. They recreate a "you are there" virtual reality that actually puts you into the sound-space of the original cinematic action.

"The Best Performance You Can Get"

—*V.T.V., England*

Experts agree these complete Dolby Digital AC-3* ready systems deliver the ultimate listening experience. They combine BP 2000s or BP 2002s with perfectly matched center and rear surround speakers. Dual powered subwoofers are already built into the sleek towers. Experience them today!

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CIRCLE NO. 15 ON READER SERVICE CARD

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

Pay-Per-View DVD

BY GORDON BROCKHOUSE

In a capitalist democracy, citizens don't just vote in polling booths. They vote in stores; they vote with their pocketbooks. Over the next year, audio/video enthusiasts across North America will vote on the kind of home-video marketplace they want for the next decade. Specifically, they will be voting on Divx (pronounced div-ics), a pay-per-view version of DVD developed by Digital Video Express, a start-up company based in Virginia. Circuit City Stores owns 65 percent of Divx, while the other 35 percent is owned by a Los Angeles-based law firm.

In announcing the new format in September, Richard Sharp, chairman and CEO of both Circuit City and Divx, said that players and discs will be introduced in two test markets this spring, with a national launch scheduled for the summer. Zenith plans to introduce Divx players in time for the limited launch. Matsushita (Panasonic, Technics) and Thomson Consumer Electronics (RCA, GE, ProScan) say they'll introduce Divx players in time for the national launch. Although CEO Sharp said that Divx players will sell for \$100 more than equivalent DVD players, predicting that the premium would fall to

\$50 as volume increased, hardware companies are on record as saying that the initial premium for Divx players will be \$100 to \$200. The machines will play regular DVDs as well as Divx discs; Divx discs, however, will be unplayable on standard DVD decks.

Four movie studios — Disney, DreamWorks, Paramount, and Universal — have announced support for the new format. Divx's agreements with these studios call for all their new video releases to be made available on Divx discs at the same time they are released on VHS. The studios will license their material to Divx, which will be responsible for replication and distribution. Divx claims that 100 titles will be available for next summer's launch and that 500 titles will be available within a year of the format's introduction.

The discs will sell for a suggested retail price of \$4.99. For that amount, you'll get physical ownership of the disc but limited rights to its content. The initial price entitles you to a 48-hour viewing period starting from the first time you press play. During those two days, you can watch the movie as many times as you want. In short, it will work just like a regular DVD. After your two days are up, you

can toss the disc away or put it on a shelf. If you watch it again, you'll be charged an additional fee, and you'll have the right to watch it for another 48 hours. Divx expects the "rental fee" for subsequent viewings to be around \$3.

Before you can play Divx discs on a new Divx player, however, you must open an account with Divx. Among other things, you'll have to provide account information for a major credit card, even if you never intend to view discs after the initial 48-hour period. A Divx representative will guide you through the process of getting your player to call Divx's host computer using its built-in modem. The host computer will then validate the player's ability to play Divx discs.

Viewing activity will be stored in flash memory inside the player. Twice a month, the player will automatically transmit information on the discs you've watched to the company's host computers. Any charges you've incurred will be billed to your credit card.

With some titles, you'll be able to pay an up-front fee to Divx to have a disc "unlocked" so that you can view it without incurring additional charges. However, the unlocking option will be offered at the discretion of the studio involved. Not all discs will be unblockable, and viewing rights are limited even for unlocked discs. Owners of such discs can view them on their own players (or other players covered by the same account and connected to the same phone line) just like a regular DVD. But if you take an unlocked disc — or any Divx disc, for that matter — to a friend's house so that you can watch a movie together, your friend will be billed.

The Good Side of Divx

Because Divx is such a departure from the way we normally buy things, it's sure to cause some confusion, and probably anger. But it does have some attractive features, one of the greatest of which is the participation of movie studios whose support of DVD has ranged from nonexistent (Paramount) to lukewarm (Disney and Universal).

Unlike rented tapes and DVDs, Divx discs don't have to be returned, so you'll incur no late charges. The disc just sits on your shelf, ready for the next time you want to "rent" it.

Supporters say Divx will increase the chances that brand-new hit movies will be in stock at the video store because the low price of Divx discs will make it easier for retailers to keep an adequate stock of high-demand titles.

For many people, obtaining movies on Divx will be more economical than buy-



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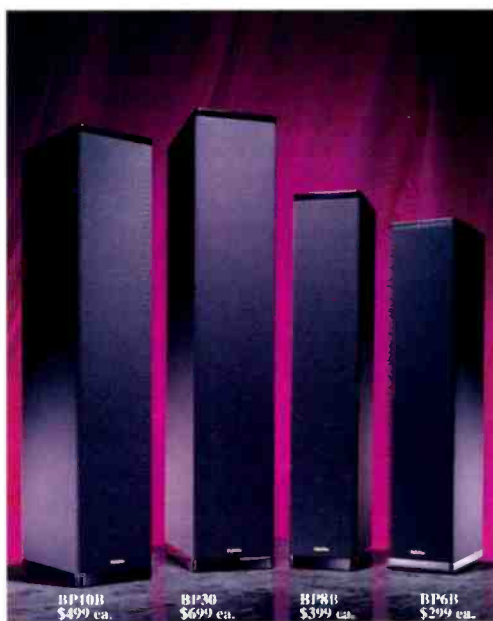
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AR- Custom Audio Video; Little Rock.
AZ- Jerry's Audio Video; Phoenix; Tucson.
CA- Access to Music; Larkspur* Accurate AV; S. Lake Tahoe* Ahead Stereo; Los Angeles* Audio Concepts; Long Beach; San Gabriel; Bay Area Audio; San Jose* Boots Camera; Fresno* Christopher Hansen; West LA* Coast Home Ent.; Atascadero; Orcutt* Creative Stereo; Santa Barbara* David Rutledge Audio; Palm Desert* DB Audio; Berkeley* Digital Ear;ustin* Dow Stereo Video; San Diego & Suburbs; La Jolla; El Cajon; Chula Vista; Escondido* Dynamic Entertainment; Danville* Lee's Home Theater; Visalia* Monterey Stereo; Monterey* Paradyme; Sacramento* Performance Audio; San Francisco* Systems Design; Redondo Beach* Videotek; Westminster* Wilson Home Theater; Woodland Hills.
CO- Listen Up; Denver; Boulder; Colorado Springs* Soundtrack; Denver & Suburbs; Boulder; Ft. Collins; Colorado Springs.
CT- Al Franklin's; Greenwich* Audio Etc.; Orange* Carltons Stereo Video; Danbury* Roberts Audio Video; New London* The Sound Room; Westport* Stereo Shop; Hartford.
DC & Washington Suburbs* Myer-Emco.
DE- Sound Studio; Wilmington.
FL- Absolute Sound; Winter Park* Audio Advisors; West Palm Beach* Audio Center; Deerfield Beach* Audio Video Stores; Tallahassee* The Audiohouse; Vero Beach* Bob's TV; Ocala* Cooper for Stereo; Clearwater* Hoyt Stereo; Jacksonville* Palm Audio; Destin* Sound Components; Coral Gables* Sound Ideas; Gainesville* Sound Insights; Ft. Pierce* Stereotypes; Daytona Beach* Stuart AV; Stuart.
GA- Laser Disc Enterprises; Atlanta* Merril TV; Columbus* Stereo Connections; Valdosta* Stereo Festival; Atlanta.
HI- Sam Sung Electronics; Honolulu; Waipahu.
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ID- Ultimate Electronics; Boise* Wise Buy; Idaho Falls.
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LA- Alterman Audio; Metairie* Mike's Audio; Baton Rouge* Wright's Sound Gallery; Shreveport.
MA- Cookin'; Chestnut Hill; Saugus* Goodwins Audio; Boston; Shrewsbury* Nantucket Sound; Hyannis* Northampton Audio; Northampton* Pittsfield Radio; Pittsfield.
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NE- Custom Electronics; Omaha; Lincoln.
NH- Cookin'; Nashua; Manchester; Newington; Salem; S. Nashua.
NJ- Hal's Stereo; Trenton* Monmouth Stereo; Shrewsbury* Sound Waves; Northfield* Woodbridge Stereo; West Caldwell; Woodbridge.
NM- Ultimate Elect.; Albuquerque* Sound Ideas; Albuquerque.
NV- Ultimate Elect.; Las Vegas* Upper Ear; Las Vegas.
NY- Audio Breakthroughs; Manhasset* Audio Den; Lake Grove* Clark Music; Albany; Syracuse* Stereo Exchange; Manhattan* Hart Elect.; Vestal* Innovative Audio; Brooklyn* Listening Room; Scarsdale* Rowe Camera; Rochester* Speaker Shop; Amherst.
OH- Audio Craft; Akron; Cleveland; Mayfield Hts.; Westlake* Audio Etc.; Dayton* Classic Stereo; Lima* Ohio Valley Audio; Cincinnati* Paragon Sound; Toledo* Stereo Visions; Columbus* Threshold Audio; Heath* Unique Home System; Cincinnati.
OK- Audio Dimensions; Oklahoma City* Photo World; Stillwater; Shawnee* Ultimate Electronics; Tulsa.
OR- Bradford's HiFi; Eugene* Chelsea AV; Portland; Beaverton* Kelly's Home Ctr.; Salem* Magnolia HiFi; (Portland.) Beaverton; Clackamas* Stereo Plant; Bend.
PA- Audio Junction; Pittsburgh* Gary's Elect.; State College* GRT Stereo; Lancaster* Hart Elect.; Blakely* Hi Fi House; Abington; Broomall* Hi Fi Unlimited; Camp Hill; Harrisburg* Listening Post; Pittsburgh* Palmer Audio; Allentown* Pro Audio; Bloomsburg* Stereo Shoppe; Selinsgrove; Williamsport* Stereoland; Natrona Heights* The StereoShop; Greensburg.
RI- Stereo Discount Ctr.; Providence.
SC- AV Design; Charleston* Custom Theater & Audio; Myrtle Beach* Upstairs Audio; Columbia.
SD- Audio King; Sioux Falls* Sound Pro; Rapid City.
TN- Koolhae HiFi; Chattanooga* Hi Fi Buys; Nashville* Now Audio Video; Knoxville* Modern Music; Memphis* Sound Room; Johnson City.
TX- Home Entertainment; Dallas; Houston; San Antonio* Tech; Temple* Audio Video; College Station* Bunkley's Stereo Systems; Abilene* Biom's; San Antonio* High Fidelity; Austin* Crystal Clear; Dallas* Marvin Electronics; Ft. Worth* Sound Quest; El Paso* Sound Systems; Amarillo* Sound Towne; Texarkana.
UT- AudioWorks; Salt Lake City* Crazy Bob's; St. George* Stokes Bros.; Logan* Ultimate Elect.; Layton; Murray; Orem; Salt Lake City.
VA- Myer-Emco; Falls Church; Tyson's Corner; Fairfax* Audio Connection; Virginia Beach* Audiotronics; Roanoke* Home Media Store; Richmond.
WA- Magnolia HiFi; Seattle & Suburbs; Tacoma; Silverdale; Spokane* Pacific Sight & Sound; Wenatchee* Tin Ear; Kennewick.
W.VA- Sound Post; Princeton.
WI- Audio Emporium; Milwaukee* Absolute Sound & Vision; Sheboygan* Flanner's AV; Milwaukee* Hi-Fi Heaven; Appleton; Green Bay* Sound World; Wausau.
WY- Precision Audio; Rio Piedras.
Canada- A & B Sound; Calgary; Edmonton; Kelowna; Vancouver & Suburbs; Victoria* Advance Electronics; Winnipeg* Bay Bloor Radio; Toronto* Canadian Sound; Brampton, Ont.* Digital Dynamics; Clearbrook* Harrington Audio; Peterborough, Ont.* Kebecson; Montreal* Lipton's; New Market, Ont.* Sound Decisions; Duncan, B.C.* Sound Room; Vancouver* StereoLand; Windsor* Treble Clef; Ottawa.
Mexico- Contact Grupo Volumen; Mexico City.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

ing them on DVD. If you watch a movie less than six times, it will be cheaper to watch it on Divx than to buy the DVD.

The Divx Downside

Given Divx's benefits and powerful backing, it would be a mistake to dismiss the format. Even so, it will have a difficult time gaining acceptance. Divx has a fundamental problem: a lot of people hate it. And not without some justification.

Divx's first problem is lack of compatibility. As noted previously, you can play regular DVDs in a Divx player, but you can't play Divx discs in a regular DVD player. The content on Divx discs is encrypted using a scheme called Triple DES (Digital Encryption System), which is different from the encryption used on DVDs. A secure processor module inside the Divx player decodes the signal.

There is no way to add Divx capability to a regular DVD player, which Circuit City's Sharp called "regrettable but unavoidable." He added, "In the consumer-electronics industry, new features come out every day. We regret that anyone would be unhappy that they purchased a DVD player, and . . . would now rather have one of these. But that kind of thing happens all the time in this industry."

But Divx isn't just a new *feature*, it's a new *format*. Early adopters accept the possibility of new features becoming available, just as they accept the likelihood that second-generation products will be less expensive than first-generation products. What they should *not* have to accept is restricted access to software.

While Paramount confirms that all new video titles it releases will be available simultaneously on Divx and VHS, it has announced no plans to support DVD. All but one of Disney's first eight DVDs, slated for December, will be live-action titles rather than its animated hits (the exception is *The Nightmare Before Christmas*). Two of the new Disney DVDs (*Scream*, *George of the Jungle*) will arrive on DVD at the same time as the VHS sell-through release. Disney's agreement with Divx calls for release of *all* its new titles on Divx at the same time as the VHS rental release. In July, Universal announced ten DVD titles for release by February, all of it fairly recent family fare. Universal has also licensed fifty titles from its backlog to Image Entertainment, a third-party publisher of laserdiscs and DVDs from various studios. But *all* of Universal's new video titles will go onto Divx.

To the extent that Divx restricts access

of DVD owners to desirable software, it constitutes a betrayal of the trust a standard like DVD represents. When people purchase a DVD player, they purchase it on the reasonable understanding that the unit will play current and future software. No amount of fact-spinning by Divx and its supporters can obscure this.

You could argue that a different encryption system is required to support Divx's pay-per-view functions. But why is Divx also promoting a nonstandard disc, Divx Gold, as a straight sell-through medium? Divx Gold discs will work just like DVDs — except that you can play them only on a Divx player with an active account. Divx Gold discs use the same encryption system as regular Divx discs, so they can't be played on a regular DVD player. Let the format wars begin.

Paul Brindze, president of Divx Entertainment (a Divx subsidiary that handles licensing arrangements with movie studios), explains that studios have always been unhappy with DVD's security provisions. "While standards discussions were going on, a number of Hollywood studios were consistently saying that they were concerned about DVD piracy," he told me. "Some of them did not get an answer that they considered sufficient."

But most of the companies supporting Divx — including Disney, Paramount, Universal, Matsushita, Thomson, and Zenith — were involved in the formation of DVD's copy-protection systems through their participation in the DVD Forum's Copy Protection Technical Working Group (CPTWG). As with any such group, each party had its own agenda. Studios wanted an encryption system to maximize security. Hardware companies wanted one that was inexpensive to implement. The system they all agreed on — Matsushita's Content Scrambling System (CSS) to prevent digital copying, and Macrovision to inhibit analog copying — was secure enough for the studios and cost-effective enough for the hardware companies, according to Dr. Alan Bell, a project manager at IBM's Almaden Research Center and chair of the CPTWG.

Bell told me that other copy-protection systems, including DES, were discussed by the group. They were rejected mainly for cost reasons, but also because there are import and export restrictions on sophisticated encryption systems.

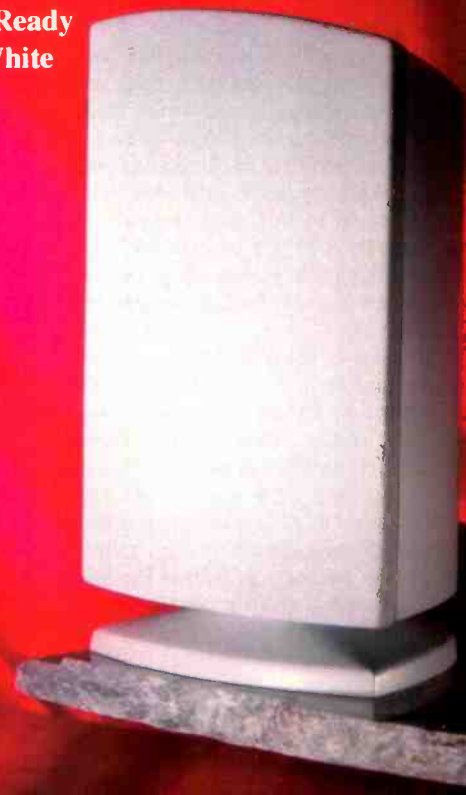
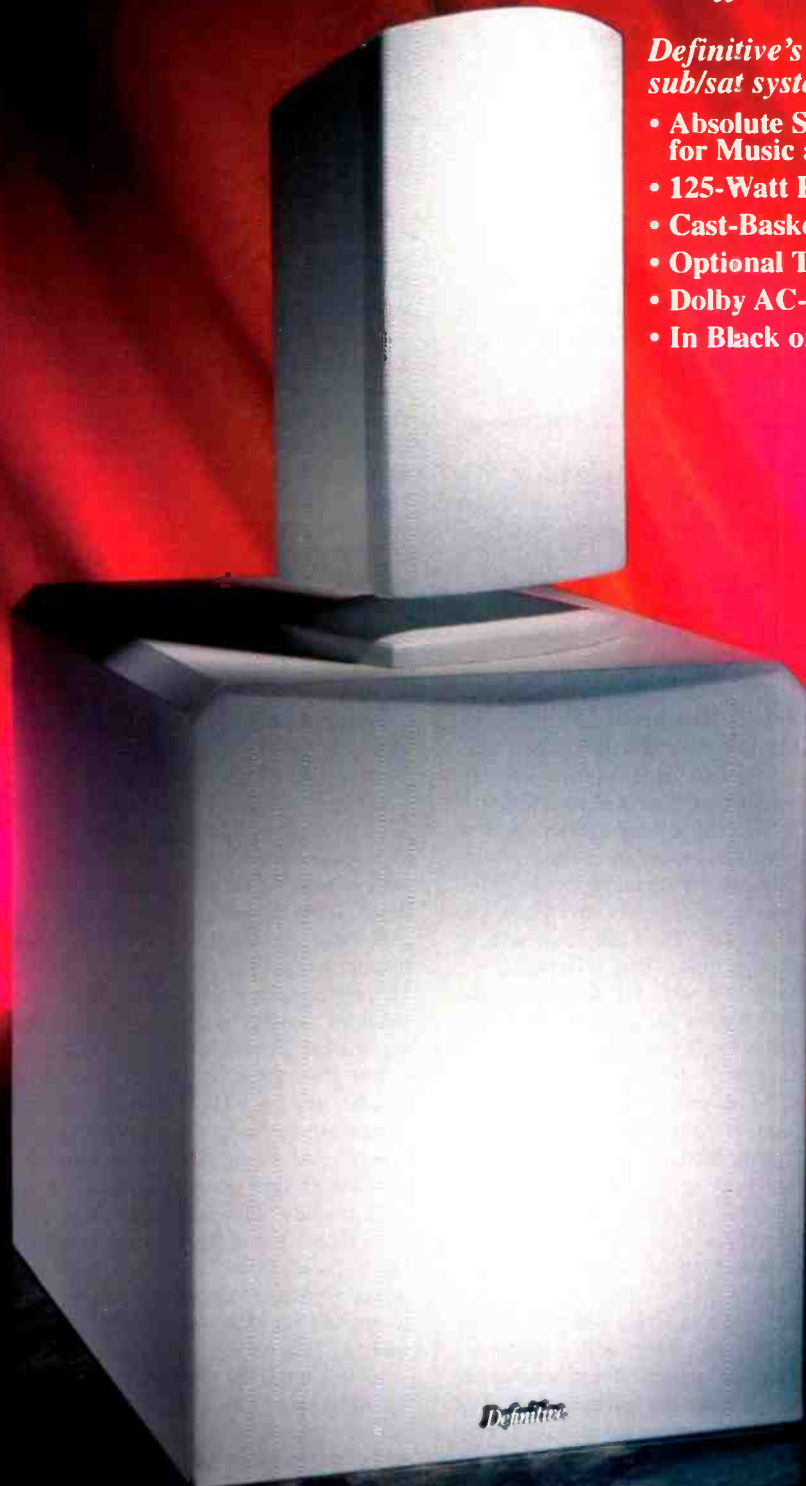
While Bell agrees that Divx's Triple DES is much more secure than DVD's CSS, he doesn't think that gives the system as a whole better safeguards. "All the

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—Jeff Cherun, *Home Theater Magazine*

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encryption does is protect the content on its way to the player," he explained. "Once the disc is inside the player, you have to strip off the encryption in order to play it, and you have to output the content to the display device. If you make an S-VHS or Hi8 recording off an analog output from a digital master, you get a high-quality copy. The protection on analog is Macrovision, which can be defeated with widely available devices.

"When you think of the total security," Bell continued, "you have to think of a chain made of links. One of the links is the encryption, another is the analog copy protection. There's not a lot to be gained by having one link made of titanium if another link is made of aluminum." So how much more protection does Triple DES offer studios than CSS? "In my opinion, very little, if any," Dr. Bell said.

While Divx may not offer much more protection against small-scale analog copying than regular DVD, it may be much more effective in combatting large-scale piracy because each disc has a unique serial number, and program content carries a digital "watermark." That information could help investigators trace the source of pirated material made from a Divx disc.

In announcing Divx, Circuit City's Sharp said studios wanted more secure encryption to protect movies in the early stages of release, when they're most vulnerable to piracy. With perennially popular titles, Divx Gold extends the same protection. All this makes studios more comfortable releasing their most valuable material in pristine digital form. But Sharp also stressed consumer benefits. "Consumers would rather rent than buy [software]," he stated. "Divx moves DVD into the rental domain." But getting consumers used to the idea that they have to pay to "rent" a disc that they bought at a store the week before might be an uphill battle.

The Divx Market

Divx's Brindze thinks release patterns on Divx and DVD may mirror those on VHS. The first video release of a movie is almost always priced for rental, about \$65 a tape wholesale. Six to eight months after the rental release, the movie is released at a sell-through price, usually around \$20 retail. In a similar vein, new movies could come out first on Divx, then later be released on regular DVD or Divx Gold. As long as they come out on DVD in the sell-through phase, the most serious concern of early adopters — lack of ac-

cess to attractive software titles — would be addressed. Still, titles would come out later on DVD than on Divx.

Without Divx, it would take a long time for a rental market to develop for DVD, Brindze says, and that would slow the sales of players, limiting the DVD market to the size of that for laserdiscs.

But Jeffrey Eves, president of the Video Software Dealers Association (VSDA), maintains that the chances a DVD rental market will develop are "superb." Many video stores have already started renting discs, he told me. And he noted that the \$4.99 price for Divx discs is a couple of dollars higher than typical rental rates for tapes and discs.

Brindze pointed out that \$4.99 is the suggested retail price. Retailers could sell Divx discs for a little over \$4 and still make a dollar profit, he said. Of course,

**Divx has powerful backing
and some attractive
features, but it faces major
resistance from retailers
and early DVD adopters.**

with Divx software, the number of transactions and total profit will be much lower than with VHS until the installed base of Divx hardware grows. And whether it grows at all will depend heavily on how well Divx is accepted by retailers. With Divx, studios will receive royalties for subsequent viewings and conversions, but retailers will not. Their only take will be the profit they make on each Divx disc.

"I don't see why any retailer would carry Divx for the paltry amount he's going to make on a one-transaction basis," John Thrasher, vice-president of video sales at Sacramento-based Tower Records/Video, told me. "It doesn't afford us enough gross profit or enough volume to justify the floor space. For Divx to interest us, the cost would have to come down significantly. At that point, I don't see how the people manufacturing it are making anything."

VSDA's Eves says that this response is typical. "I haven't talked with a single retailer who has expressed any interest in Divx, and I think it's extremely unlikely that video stores are going to want to carry this product. They're going to view it

as a poison pill. It's going to add to their inventory costs. They're going to contrast their margin on Divx with the \$3 they get now every time they rent a tape."

Why Now and What Now?

An unfortunate result of the Divx announcement is that it gives potential DVD buyers reason to wait, slowing hardware sales. Cynics might suggest that this is the reason Divx made its announcement when it did. After all, the more DVD players sold between now and the time Divx is introduced, the lower the chances of Divx's succeeding.

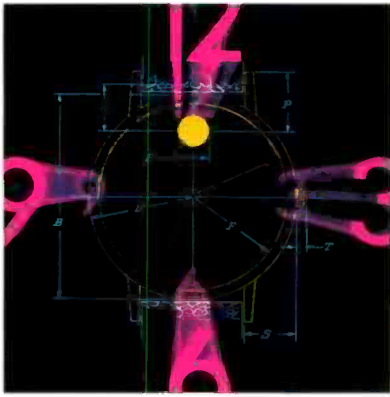
Divx did not want to make any announcements until it had achieved a critical mass of hardware and studio partnerships, Circuit City's Sharp said. Over the past three years, Circuit City has invested \$30 million in Divx. With the agreements in place, Circuit City had to invest an additional \$100 million, which had to be reported to shareholders. Having disclosed the investment in Divx, it made sense to announce the Divx system.

Now that Divx has been announced, will consumers thinking about buying a DVD player sit back and wait? If enough consumers decide to sit on the sidelines until the smoke clears, it could have a profound influence on the market for home video hardware and software. Here are some things to consider:

Divx has powerful backing and some attractive features. "We believe there will be much more Divx than DVD sold in Christmas of 1998," said Larry Pesce, DVD product manager for Thomson Consumer Electronics, when we talked. "We believe video renters will look at Divx's convenience and say it has very significant value to them. Even if a DVD rental market springs up, there are still significant advantages to Divx. You don't have to return the disc, and the chances of getting the title you want are much higher."

But Divx faces major resistance from retailers and early DVD adopters. If Divx bombs and the company ends up bankrupt, players will be unable to communicate with Divx's host systems, and Divx discs — including unlocked discs and Divx Gold discs — will be unplayable. (Regular DVDs could still be played, however.) Asked whether funds were being set aside to provide for such a contingency, Sharp said no. "Believe me, we'll be there."

At this time, the only thing that seems certain is that with DVD, and now Divx, we're witnessing the strangest product rollout in consumer-electronics history. □



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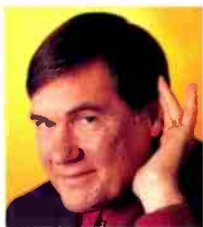
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AUDIO Q & A

IAN G. MASTERS

Finicky CDs

Q I recently purchased a CD that would not play on my home player even though there was no evidence of physical defect and my player has no trouble with several hundred other discs that I own. A replacement copy had the same problem, although it plays in both my car and portable players. Another disc I have refuses to play in my car but works fine at home. Is this a common problem? And is there anything I can do about it?

MICHAEL T. MORRIS
Ashburn, VA

A A lot of people have had similar experiences, and, as in your case, it usually affects only one or two discs. It's one of those audio mysteries.

One manufacturer's representative told me that his company's players seemed to have more trouble with the discs that came out of a particular pressing plant, and they thought it might have something to do with the shape of the leading edge of the data "pits." But only some discs and some players were affected.

Several years ago, when I had a minor part in the production of a CD, a small but significant percentage of the discs were returned because they couldn't be read by some buyers' players. We sent them ostensibly identical discs, and they had no problems with those. When we had a second run, there were no returns.

My only advice would be to wait a while before buying a replacement disc, to increase the likelihood that the new disc you buy will be from a different batch and will work in your player. Unfortunately, there won't be anything on the disc to tell you that it's from a different pressing (unless it was manufactured in a different country).

Full-Range vs. Sub/Sats

Q I am planning to buy speakers for a home-theater system in my new house. I could get a system with large left and right main speakers that each have a subwoofer built in, or smaller main speakers and one or two separate subwoofers. Which setup would produce the best bass?

DUKE HUNT
Spokane, WA

A Neither has an automatic advantage; there are excellent systems using both techniques. It seems to me that a speaker system that reproduces the whole audio spectrum, from highest to lowest frequencies, is simply a full-range speaker, and calling its low-end section a built-in subwoofer is a marketing ploy designed to take advan-

tage of the sub's popularity. It may, however, be a useful distinction if the low-frequency driver is powered by a separate, onboard amplifier. In any case, a pair of full-range main speakers has practical advantages and disadvantages in a home-theater context.

The main plus is that the speaker designer will have (presumably) matched and adjusted the speaker components so that all parts of the frequency spectrum are balanced with respect to one another. With a separate bass unit, it's not always an easy matter to do that. Also, there are those who believe that a pair of full-range speakers is more appropriate for music listening.

But full-range speakers are a lot less flexible than subwoofer/satellite arrangements. If you position full-range speakers so that they work well in terms of imaging and soundtrack directionality, but find that their bass output excites standing waves or other low-frequency anomalies, there's not much you can do about it. If the bass is handled separately, however, you can move the subwoofer around to smooth out the bass without disturbing the critical positioning of the mid/high-frequency drivers. A pair of full-range speakers may work well in a particular environment, but you won't know until you try them out.

Removing Clicks and Pops

Q I possess a sizable collection of vinyl recordings and still collect them. Some years ago, I heard a demonstration of a "click and pop suppressor" for electronically improving the sound from old, less-than-ideal discs. The results were spectacular. Does such a device still exist?

J. L. WILLSON
Rochester, NY

A I well recall one occasion where the demonstrator scratched a common nail across the surface of an LP and then played it through one of these processors with no audible ill effects. The results were dramatic, if a little gruesome to someone who loved records. Later I discovered that these machines tended to generate a lot of distortion and were difficult to operate. Sometimes you had to make adjustments partway through a track, and if you overdid it, you'd end up clipping off bits of the music.

Nowadays there are several computer programs that are very effective in tidying up noisy recordings, but they do require you to rerecord everything digitally onto a computer disk for processing. One analog answer is the Model 323A noise suppressor from Packburn (P.O. Box 335, DeWitt, NY 13214; telephone, 315-472-5644), which us-

es a number of different techniques to clean up old records, some reminiscent of the old click-and-pop devices. Whether you are willing to shell out \$2,650 for it is another matter.

Laser Cleaning

Q My music system, which contains a dual cassette deck and a CD player, is several years old and has never been serviced. I haven't had any problems with it yet, but would it be prudent to have the CD player's laser checked and cleaned by a professional?
ANDREA M. DENNING
Phoenix, AZ

A Probably not. The laser systems in most CD players tick along happily for years with little or no attention. So if yours is not acting up — skipping or muting unusually often — you shouldn't worry about it. There are accessories that can be used to clean the lens in your player, and you might consider giving one of those a try if you're concerned.

Unshielded Speakers with TV

Q I have a pair of favorite old speakers that I would like to connect to the B speaker outputs of the receiver in my home-theater setup and use for music listening. Do you have any guidelines for positioning these unshielded speakers on either side of my television?
WARREN KEATS
Milwaukee, WI

A Whether those old speakers will cause a problem depends on how much magnetism they emit, how far away from the television set they are placed, and how sensitive the set is to such fields. I'd set them up in what you feel is an ideal location and see what happens. I assume that you wouldn't want them snuggled right up against the TV for music listening anyway, and if they're 3 or 4 feet to either side, I doubt there'd be any effect. If there is any color degradation, try moving the speakers even further apart and see if that clears it up. (If your set has built-in degaussing circuitry, turning it off and on a few times will let it recover.) If you can't get the speakers far enough away from the set, placing a sheet of steel between each speaker and the TV might help.

Digital Surround on VHS?

Q I understand that both the Dolby Digital and Sony SDDS digital surround soundtracks on theatrical releases of movies are recorded on the film, while a synchronized CD-ROM is used for the DTS surround system. Would it be possible for the Dolby Digital soundtrack to be added to the edge of a VHS videotape?
JOHN SCIACCA
Orinda, CA

A Because the tape in a VHS cassette moves so slowly, its linear soundtrack, which is recorded on a narrow band along the edge of the tape, is one of the loudest audio media ever devised. At the slowest

speed, it can barely handle a full analog signal, let alone multichannel digital surround.

The hi-fi sound system used in virtually all commercially recorded videocassettes, and decodable by all but the most inexpensive VCRs, is another matter. Because Dolby Digital uses a lot less bandwidth than "straight" digital audio, it might well be possible to encode it on the hi-fi track. After all, Dolby Digital occupies the same space as one analog audio channel on a laserdisc, and the technique might work on tape as well.

But I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for that to happen. If you want to get the benefit of Dolby Digital, you'll have to switch over to one of the disc formats that have it — namely, laserdisc or DVD.

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

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SIGNALS

KEN C. POHLMANN

Feel the Burn

In the same way that the Information Revolution is changing our society in the late twentieth century, the Industrial Revolution changed society in the early nineteenth century. During that age of invention, machines displaced manual labor, bringing a flood of low-cost, mass-produced consumer goods. For example, the British garment industry was transformed by the introduction of mechanized looms. However, this transformation devastated the lives of thousands of weavers, who lost both their jobs and their heritage of acquired skills. A few militant weavers, who came to be called Luddites (after a legendary eighteenth-century saboteur, Ned Ludd), rebelled against the new technology and demanded good jobs, fair wages, decent working conditions, and a voice in determining the quality of their cloth.

Their not unreasonable demands were ignored, and the Luddites began roaming the countryside, at first sabotaging equipment, then threatening factory owners and smashing their mechanical looms. Finally, after the violence had become bloody, the British government responded by arresting the Luddite leaders. The revolt was crushed, and the juggernaut of the Industrial Revolution was barely slowed. However, Luddites are remembered, and today their story still warns us of the consequences of unplanned growth and runaway technology.

The fabric of our modern society ripples with the question of how new technology affects us, and that includes the technologies of recorded music and other forms of packaged entertainment. For example, as the consumer is given more powerful ways to access and manipulate recorded content, there must be counterbalancing ways for content owners to protect their property. If the imbalance becomes too great, then the great machine of capitalism will inevitably respond, perhaps with negative consequences. If content is not protected, and free copying is allowed, then there will be little profit in creating content, and individuals and companies will likely stop creating it. Consumers would be left with fabulous recording technology and nothing to record or play back.

These issues have been debated for

many years, and laws such as the Audio Home Recording Act have been passed, but the steady advance of technology requires that the issues be continually revisited. The rise of the Internet is forcing another rethinking. In addition, the advent of powerful new consumer recording technologies has again raised the issue of content ownership and copying. In particular, consumers can now purchase CD-R (recordable) and CD-RW (ReWritable) drives that allow digital recording of music, video, computer software, text, and any other kind of information or signal that can be represented as a binary file. A CD-R disc is a permanent recording that

**Almost any computer user
can afford to make
CDs, and it's as easy as
drag and drop.**

is playable on CD players and CD-ROM drives. A CD-RW disc can be erased and rerecorded and played on a CD-RW drive (which can also play regular CDs and CD-ROMs). CD-RW discs cannot be played on today's CD players or CD-ROM drives, but the next generations of the drives will allow CD-RW playback.

The advent of CD-R revolutionized the computer industry. The ability to "burn" your own CDs, using dye-polymer technology, gave ordinary users the opportunity to turn their desktop computers into small-capacity CD mastering and pressing factories. Overnight, computer enthusiasts began using CD-R for all kinds of high-storage-capacity applications including multimedia publishing, software distribution, data backup, and archiving. In addition, individuals could burn their own music CDs. Whether they were making compilations from purchased recordings, copying recordings borrowed from friends, or selling pirated copies, they could make discs that were bit-for-bit identical to the real thing. Moreover, the advent of high-speed CD-R recorders meant that huge volumes of data could be copied very quickly.

The introduction of CD-RW, using phase-change technology, amplified the copying possibilities. A disc could be recorded, erased, and rerecorded an essentially endless number of times. Moreover, since a CD-RW drive can also burn CD-R discs as well as play back audio CDs and CD-ROMs, it is a "universal" drive. With the street price of some CD-R recorders below \$400 and blank media below \$3, and some CD-RW drives and discs priced at \$500 and \$25, many computer users can afford to make CDs.

The only complication has been the awkward premastering programs needed to make a recording. However, with the recent advent of packet-writing technology, you can now simply drag-and-drop a file onto a blank CD, which your computer treats as just another disk drive. CD-R and CD-RW recording is now affordable and about as easy as using floppy diskettes. Moreover, discord among manufacturers has created several incompatible formats for DVD-RAM (the rewritable version of DVD) that will impede its growth. CD-R and CD-RW are thus serious products, and millions of units will be sold annually for many years to come.

Although the CD was originally an audio invention, most CD recorders have appeared as computer peripherals, in part because computer users have a more pressing need to write data. It is also because, historically, the computer industry has had a more laissez-faire attitude toward unlicensed copying. In contrast, the music industry has always taken a hard line against copying and pointedly uses the term "piracy" to describe the act of music copying. For those and other reasons, only a few consumer CD-R audio recorders have been marketed. However, at least one audio company appears ready to offer CD-RW audio recorders to consumers. These low-cost recorders will be able to play standard CDs, burn CD-Rs, and rewrite CD-RWs. They will thus offer the ubiquity of the analog cassette, the convenience of MiniDisc, and the sound quality of CD — unbeatable!

Clearly, new technology such as CD-RW is fabulously attractive to consumers. But the power of such technology must be appropriately restrained. In particular, prudent steps must be taken to prevent indiscriminate copying of copyrighted music. At the same time, however, legitimate use must be respected. In short, the owners of intellectual property and the manufacturers of recording hardware must find a middle ground on which both industries can prosper.

Given the power of today's technology, and its potential impact on our society, failure to resolve the question of recording rights would ultimately lead to a modern tragedy as sad as the wrecked lives of skilled workers, and the sight of a countryside littered with smashed machines. □

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Pioneer VSX-09TX Dolby Digital/THX Receiver

DAVID RANADA • TECHNICAL EDITOR

Pioneer has at last entered the Home THX fold, embracing with its VSX-09TX receiver a set of features and design guidelines set by Lucasfilm that are meant to improve the sonic quality of the home-theater experience.

While the standard set of Home THX features — re-equalization, surround-channel decorrelation, and surround-speaker timbre matching — serve to make soundtracks sound more theaterlike, Lucasfilm's design guidelines are actually more important. That's because they affect stereo as well as multichannel playback: to receive THX certification, a receiver has to meet stringent output-power, noise-level, and distortion requirements in addition to having a complete and correctly operating bass-management system.

The VSX-09TX's bass-management facilities, for example, include selectable frequencies for the crossover between the main-channel and subwoofer outputs, with a choice among 80, 100, and 150 Hz (80 Hz is the THX standard). It also allows you to apply a

high-pass filter to any speaker output. The receiver's power specs are likewise generous, with 110 watts per channel into 6 ohms in stereo (0.09 percent distortion) or 100 watts per channel into 6 ohms in its multichannel modes (0.8 percent distortion). That much power should let you reach theaterlike sound levels, which are quite loud, in your home with typical-sensitivity speakers.

With the VSX-09TX we encountered for the second time a relatively new THX feature, the somewhat confusingly named Bass Manager. Not the same as Dolby Digital bass management, the Bass Manager is a programmable signal-limiter applied to the

line-level subwoofer output to prevent any attached subwoofer (or subwoofer amplifier) from being overdriven. It is easy to set up, at least in theory. Using the receiver's on-screen menu system, you operate the cursor keys on the remote, or behind a fold-down door on the receiver's front panel, to activate a special subwoofer-output test tone, which turns on at a low level. You turn up the test tone until "just before distortion begins to appear," as the manual puts it, although in practice you have to actually hear some distortion before you can set the volume control to "just before." You then hit Enter, and that is the level to which the subwoofer output will be limited. The manual doesn't tell you this, but the way to de-activate the receiver's Bass Manager (which you might want to do if your subwoofer has its own limiter, as many do) is to turn the receiver's volume control up past its front-panel 0-dB marking during the setup procedure (I strongly recommend turning your subwoofer *off* while you're doing this). We deactivated the limiter for nearly all of our tests.

Aside from its THX features, the VSX-09TX is a conventional Dolby Digital receiver. It has six surround-sound digital signal processing (DSP) modes suitable for ambience enhancement of music programs (labeled Jazz, Dance, Theater 1, Theater 2, and Hall) as well as Dolby Digital and digital-domain Dolby Pro Logic decoding.

DIMENSIONS: 18 inches wide, 6¾ inches high, 17¾ inches deep

WEIGHT: 35½ pounds

PRICE: VSX-09TX, \$1,750; VSX-07TX, \$1,450

MANUFACTURER: Pioneer Electronics, Dept. SR, P.O. Box 1540, Long Beach, CA 90801-1540; telephone, 800-746-6337

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TEST REPORTS

Along with the built-in thirty-preset AM/FM tuner, the VSX-09TX has connections and switching for four audio-only inputs, including CD, two analog recorders, and a moving-magnet phono cartridge. The five A/V inputs, with both composite-video and S-video connectors for each, include two VCRs, a DVD player or TV, a laser-disc or satellite-broadcast decoder, and a front-panel video input. The laser-disc/satellite input is provided with a coaxial digital audio jack as well as an RF input for receiving Dolby Digital signals from suitably equipped laser-disc players. The DVD/TV input also has a coaxial digital audio connector. Both the laserdisc and DVD inputs share the receiver's sole Toslink optical digital audio connector. All of the digital audio inputs can also accept Dolby Digital bitstreams, with the receiver's Dolby Digital decoder switching on automatically. The rear panel has spring connectors for the supplied AM loop antenna and FM wire antenna (no F-connector).

Rear-panel outputs include one for a TV monitor (composite- and S-video connectors) and the five main speaker outputs (front left, center, and right, and surround left and right). There are also connections for a second pair of front left/right speakers, presumably for multiroom operation. All speaker connectors are multiway binding posts that accommodate stripped or tinned wires or single banana plugs (they are spaced too far apart for double banana plugs). There is a complete six-channel set of line-level outputs, of which only the subwoofer output is likely to be used in most installations. There are three AC convenience outlets, two of them switched. Finally, there are the seemingly obligatory provisions for multiroom operation: stereo and composite-video outputs as well as an input for an infrared sensor (Pioneer's MR-100).

Controlling everything is the receiver's remote control, which is of unusual — but very comfortable — shape and styling. In addition to selecting surround modes and tuning the radio by station frequency, the handset will also control other Pioneer components. For the other brand TVs, VCRs, laserdisc players, and CD players, you can either recall preprogrammed codes according to the component's manufacturer (using the on-screen menu system to guide you) or activate the handset's learning function, which enables it to memorize infrared com-



The Pioneer VSX-09TX receiver sounded excellent, especially with Dolby Digital program material. Five-channel power output was outstanding.

mands from another remote. A rather complicated macro procedure lets the remote issue sequences of up to ten preprogrammed or learned commands at a time.

Except for its noise performance, the VSX-09TX did well on our test bench. As you can see from our measurements, in stereo the receiver had ample power reserves, especially into impedances of 6 and 4 ohms, more realistic than the nominal — and I do mean nominal — 8-ohm impedance rating of most speakers. With continuous power outputs this high, the small measured dynamic headroom is less important than it would be with lower-power receivers. Dolby Digital performance was very good, with adequately low noise levels and outstanding output power delivered to all channels simultaneously. Dolby Pro Logic decoding was also very good, with slightly higher noise levels than Dolby Digital,

but these should not be bothersome with most program material. The VSX-09TX's bass-management facilities worked correctly but are optimized for THX-certified speakers, or similar models, by having asymmetrical high- and low-pass rolloffs and a response that's down 6 dB at the subwoofer crossover's rolloff point. Tuner performance was average overall.

The receiver's noise levels became noticeable when we used an analog input in any mode other than stereo with the front-panel Direct button pressed (this apparently bypasses some sources of internal noise). Noise was even more prominent when we used any DSP ambience mode with any input. Playback in these modes can sound hissy if the volume is close to live or theatrical levels (any setting above 11 o'clock). Fortunately, the noise seemed to be plain, old-fashioned hiss, and while it was audible with program material of wide dynamic range, it was relatively benign.

Sharp-eared listeners with too much free time may eventually come across program material that activates an undocumented "feature" of the VSX-09TX's line-level analog inputs: a noise "gate" that essentially mutes the receiver when an analog input signal falls below a certain very low level (approximately 0.23 millivolt) if any of the speaker settings are "small." While I could hear the action of the muting with a specially constructed test tone, I wasn't able to find program material that was clearly affected by its action. In any case, the receiver's analog inputs would most likely be used for playback from LPs, cassettes, or videotapes, all media whose inherently high noise levels would never activate the noise gate. Our analog-input noise measurements were made with the noise gate deactivated to more closely simulate the noise levels encountered while listening.

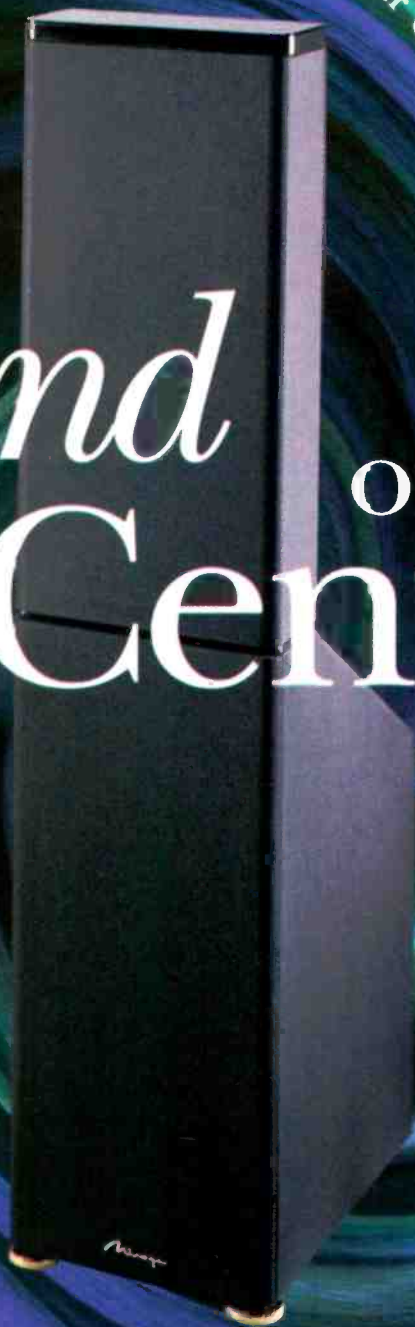
The VSX-09TX sounded excellent, especially with Dolby Digital material. My favorite spherical-shock-wave-from-dying-star-destroys-planet-and-Enterprise sequence from *Star Trek: Generations* on Dolby Digital laserdisc was as thunderingly "realistic" as I've ever heard it (it's been a while since I attended a live planet-disintegration). The receiver's ample power outputs saw to that. Dolby Pro Logic playback, which was inherently quite good, was improved by the THX mode's surround-channel decorrelation, which had a less "swimmy" coloration than

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TEST REPORTS

usual, and the new THX surround-channel timbre-matching curve did, with the help of specially devised test tones, provide a closer sonic match between surround and front speakers. At times, however, the slight high-frequency rolloff of THX re-equalization dulled some soundtracks, forcing me to revert to straight Dolby Pro Logic (some THX components allow you to switch out re-equalization).

Their slightly elevated noise levels aside, the DSP ambience modes were sometimes too subtle in their operation. While this is better than the typical over-spacious exaggeration, I kept

wanting to fine-tune each mode's behavior, principally by turning the effect up, but no DSP adjustments are provided. Theater 1 and Theater 2 sounded very subtly different, and it took me an hour in the lab to determine why: the only difference is that the artificial reflections of Theater 2's right surround channel come out in reversed polarity (phase) compared with the input. I preferred Theater 2's effect, particularly for operas.

Setup guided by the on-screen menu was easy, and so was operation of the remote. However, you will find that the Bass Manager's test tone stimu-

lates all manner of in-room vibrations of loosely fastened objects, which could be confused with woofer distortion. I'd rely on a subwoofer's built-in limiting, assuming it has any, and dial the Bass Manager off.

Overall, I liked Pioneer's VSX-09TX receiver. It's quite good looking, too. (For less money you can get the VSX-07TX, the same receiver without the wooden side panels or the spectacular copper-plated chassis.) It was smooth and easy to operate, with no major ergonomic difficulties. It is certainly one of the finest home-theater receivers ever made by Pioneer. □

MEASUREMENTS

DOLBY DIGITAL (AC-3) PERFORMANCE

All data except frequency response obtained with Dolby Digital signals from Dolby Labs' AC-3 test DVD using "small" speaker settings. Except for maximum output-power and channel-imbalance measurements, the speaker-balance controls and volume control were set together to produce 2.83 volts into 8 ohms from a -20-dBFS* signal from all channels. All input signals were dithered (which limits noise and distortion performance).

OUTPUT AT CLIPPING (1 kHz, into 8/6 ohms)
one channel driven approx 101/134 watts
all channels driven (10 seconds) 94/118 watts

DISTORTION AT 1 WATT (THD+N, 1 kHz)
worst case (front left) 0.081%

NOISE (A-wtd)
worst case (left surround) -70.2 dB

EXCESS NOISE (worst case, with signal)
16-bit +6.78 dB
18-bit +17.1 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (20 Hz to 20 kHz)
worst case (front left) +0.3, -0.5 dB

CHANNEL IMBALANCE (individual channels set at 0-dB gain) 2.2-dB spread

SUBWOOFER OUTPUT FREQUENCY RESPONSE
24 dB/octave rolloff above -6-dB point at 80, 100, or 150 Hz

HIGH-PASS-FILTER FREQUENCY RESPONSES
12 dB/octave rolloff below -3-dB points at 80, 100, or 150 Hz

MAXIMUM SUBWOOFER OUTPUT
(peak-limiting off) 3.8 volts

SUBWOOFER DISTORTION
worst-case signal 9.68%

THX RE-EQUALIZATION ERROR <0.5 dB

THX SURROUND ERROR <0.5 dB

* dBFS = decibels referred to digital full-scale

DOLBY PRO LOGIC PERFORMANCE

Except where noted, all data obtained with tones from a digital test-signal generator. Other test conditions same as for Dolby Digital.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE
front 20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.24, -1.21 dB
center 20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.1, -1.16 dB
surround 20 Hz to 6.9 kHz +0, -3 dB

NOISE (A-wtd)
worst case (surround) -67.7 dB

DISTORTION (THD+N, 1 kHz)
worst case (surround) 0.06%

SURROUND-CHANNEL NOISE-REDUCTION CALIBRATION ERROR
re THX level (-23 dBFS*) 0 dB

SURROUND-DECODER INPUT-OVERLOAD MARGINS (analog inputs, at 1 kHz)
front (re 2-volt input) +0.25 dB
center (re 1.4-volt input) +3.25 dB
surround (re 1.4-volt input) +3.25 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION
worst case (left out, center driven) >36 dB

* dBFS = decibels referred to digital full-scale

STEREO PERFORMANCE, DIGITAL INPUTS

Same test conditions as above.

OUTPUT AT CLIPPING (at 1 kHz)
8 ohms 101 watts
6 ohms 133 watts
4 ohms 191 watts

CLIPPING HEADROOM
(re 110-watt, 6-ohm rating)
8 ohms +0.82 dB

DYNAMIC POWER
8 ohms 96 watts
6 ohms 128 watts
4 ohms 191 watts

DYNAMIC HEADROOM
(re 110-watt, 6-ohm rating)
8 ohms +0.66 dB

DISTORTION AT RATED POWER (6 ohms, 1 kHz)
110 watts 0.094%

DISTORTION AT 1 WATT
(8 ohms, 1 kHz) 0.017%

LINEARITY ERROR
at -90 dBFS* +0.8 dB

NOISE (A-wtd, de-emphasis off/on)
Direct on -71.1/-72.5 dB
Direct off -67.1/-67.9 dB
worst case (Jazz DSP mode) -61.1/-63.7 dB

EXCESS NOISE (without/with signal)
16-bit +4.15/+4.15 dB
quasi-20-bit +21.41/+21.41 dB

STONE-CONTROL RANGE
100 Hz +6.4, -6.0 dB
10 kHz +5.7, -4.0 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (20 Hz to 20 kHz)
de-emphasis off +0.33, -1.1 dB
de-emphasis on +0.59, -0.44 dB

* dBFS = decibels referred to digital full-scale

STEREO PERFORMANCE, ANALOG INPUTS

SENSITIVITY (for 1 watt at max volume)
CD 32.32 mV
phono 0.44 mV

INPUT-OVERLOAD LEVEL (re 2-volt input)
CD +0.35 dB

NOISE (re 1-watt output, A-wtd, Direct on)
CD (500-mV input, see text) -78.2 dB
phono (5-mV input, see text) -68.7 dB

RIAA PHONO-EQUALIZATION ERROR
(20 Hz to 20 kHz) +0.64, -1.03 dB

ANALOG-INPUT FREQUENCY RESPONSE
20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.33, -1.1 dB

TUNER SECTION

All figures for FM except frequency response.

SENSITIVITY (50-dB quieting)
mono 23 dBf
stereo 34 dBf

NOISE (at 65 dBf)
mono -55 dB
stereo -57 dB

DISTORTION (THD+N at 65 dBf)
mono 0.56%
stereo 0.50%

CAPTURE RATIO (at 65 dBf) 2 dB

AM REJECTION 60 dB

SELECTIVITY
alternate-channel 70 dB
adjacent-channel 10 dB

PILOT-CARRIER LEAKAGE
19/38 kHz -32/-63 dB

HUM -72 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (1 kHz) 42 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE
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AM 160 Hz to 3 kHz +0.2, -6 dB

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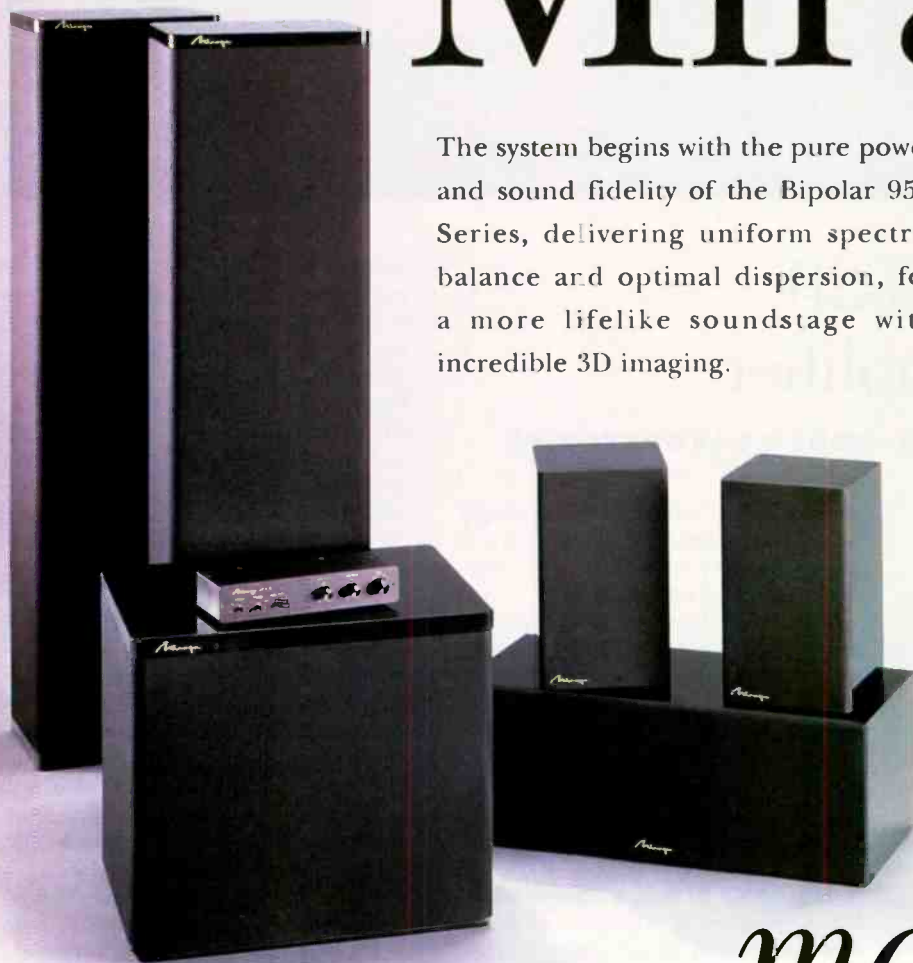
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LOOK P. LEUNG

AMC Model 3020 Integrated Amplifier

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

Most of the emphasis in consumer electronics in recent years has been on home theater, typically involving the use of sophisticated signal-processing circuitry, powerful A/V receivers, and several loudspeakers beyond the familiar stereo pair. Home theater has, at least to some degree, overshadowed the role of traditional hi-fi components. Nevertheless, new stereo components continue to make their appearance, albeit with somewhat lower frequency (no pun intended) than heretofore.

One of the most basic and familiar components of any audio system is its amplifier. A few decades ago, new amplifiers were announced almost daily (or so it seemed), often with inflated claims of superiority over previous designs.

A host of technological developments have altered that situation. Much of the "magic" has been deleted from the design process, replaced by hard science, with the result that good amplifiers today are commonplace, although they are more often than not incorporated within a receiver and therefore rarely seen or appreciated by their users. "High end" separate amplifiers, of course, are very visible, and their (usually) high performance can inspire passionate feelings in their

owners. These amps' correspondingly large dimensions, weights, and prices also distinguish them from more mundane and affordable products.

Fortunately, there are still affordable alternatives like the Model 3020 stereo integrated amplifier from AMC. In its high value/cost ratio, plain appearance, and simplicity of operation, the AMC 3020 is reminiscent of some of the popular amplifiers of bygone years, although its design and performance clearly reflect more recent technological advances.

The AMC 3020 is a compact, all-black component whose front panel contains a green power button, a headphone jack, and six knobs. The function of each knob is clearly labeled in white above it, and the volume knob is larger than the rest and placed at the far right.

Except for one unique twist, which we'll get to in a moment, the control functions are conventional, including

balance, bass and treble tone controls (each center-detented), source/tape selection, and input selection. The input selector is a rotary switch whose six positions are marked Phono/Aux, CD, Tuner, Multimedia, DVD, and Mix. All of the inputs have identical gain and frequency-response characteristics, so if you want to hook up a turntable you will need an outboard phono preamp. The Mix setting, a feature that is foreign to conventional home amplifiers, allows the signals from any or all inputs to be combined in any proportion and delivered to the speaker outputs. This feature, intended for multimedia applications, allows you to listen to a CD and monitor computer-generated audio simultaneously, for example. The mixed signal also appears at the Model 3020's recording outputs so that it can be recorded or fed to a computer's sound-card input.

The rear apron of the AMC 3020 is populated by five pairs of RCA-jack inputs, a ground terminal, tape-recording in/out jacks, and preamp-out/main-amp-in jacks, which are fitted with removable jumpers. Above each of the main input terminals is a small Mix knob that adjusts the level of its source program: the Mix knobs have no effect unless the amplifier is in its mixing mode. The speaker outputs are insulated binding posts that accept wires, lugs, or single or dual banana plugs. The Model 3020 is designed to drive speakers with impedance ratings between 4 and 8 ohms.

About half of the top of the amplifier case is slotted to provide convection cooling for most of its active circuitry, including the power supply and the output stages with their heat sinks.

DIMENSIONS: 17 inches wide, 3¼ inches high, 12 inches deep

WEIGHT: 11¾ pounds

PRICE: \$250

MANUFACTURER: AMC/Weltronics, 1414 Fair Oaks Ave., #7, South Pasadena CA 91030; telephone, 818-799-6396

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*- Wes Phillips on the PS-1000,
Stereophile Guide to Home Theater Vol. 2, Number 2*

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TEST REPORTS

During our operation and testing, the exterior of the case always remained at comfortable temperatures.

The AMC 3020 is rated to deliver 20 watts per channel into 8-ohm loads, with a clipping-level output of 33 and 42 watts into loads of 8 and 4 ohms, respectively. Our measurements showed that it is very conservatively rated, delivering 36 watts into 8 ohms and 46 watts into 4 ohms. Not only was it a first-rate performer in every important characteristic, but it proved to be a rugged and reliable amplifier that withstood being repeatedly driven to and beyond its limits without mishap.

With both channels driving 8-ohm loads at the rated 20 watts, the AMC 3020's distortion was about 0.01 percent between 20 Hz and 2 kHz, and it rose to only 0.025 percent at 20 kHz. At 30 watts, the distortion readings were similar above 100 Hz, but they increased appreciably at lower frequencies. The low-level frequency response (at 1 watt) with the tone controls centered was an excellent ± 0.1 dB from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. The tone-control characteristics were conventional.

In summary, the AMC 3020 integrated amplifier offers unusual versatility at a very reasonable price. It can do justice to demanding program material, yet it is compact and inconspicuous, and its Mix feature will be especially attractive to computer users who want to add power and flexibility to their sound systems. □

MEASUREMENTS

All data per channel, both driven.

OUTPUT AT CLIPPING (at 1 kHz)

8 ohms 36 watts
4 ohms 46 watts

CLIPPING HEADROOM (re 20-watt rating)

8 ohms 2.55 dB

DYNAMIC POWER

8 ohms 88 watts
4 ohms 115 watts

DYNAMIC HEADROOM (re 20-watt rating)

8 ohms 6.4 dB

DISTORTION AT RATED POWER

8 ohms 0.01%

SENSITIVITY (for a 1-watt output into 8 ohms) 28 mV

NOISE (re 1-watt output) -95 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

(with tone controls centered)
20 Hz to 20 kHz ± 0.1 dB

TCNE-CONTROL RANGE

100 Hz +8, -9 dB
10 kHz +7.5, -8 dB

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"...smooth...refined...I've heard highly regarded \$2,000 2-way 6-inchers that could not keep up with the Mini Monitor." - Corey Greenberg, Audio Magazine

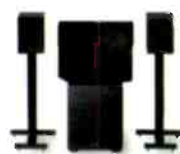
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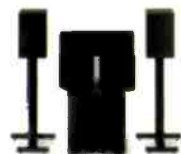
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TEST REPORTS



PHOTOS BY JOCK P. LEUNG

Polk Audio RT-1000p Speaker System

JULIAN HIRSCH • HIRSCH-HOUCK LABORATORIES

For decades, high-fidelity loudspeakers have followed a more or less standard pattern. They range from relatively small “bookshelf” designs, typically housing two-way two-driver systems, to floor-standing models whose larger size can accommodate a three-way or four-way driver configuration.

In recent years, in response to the growing popularity of home theater, low-bass performance has been enhanced by the availability of subwoofers that can extend the lower-frequency bass coverage of even a modest speaker system. While subwoofers can be purchased separately and added to

existing installations, they are also frequently packaged with other speakers as a dedicated part of a three- to six-piece system.

An impressive variation on the latter theme is the “all in one” speaker, combining a full driver complement with a powered subwoofer in a single tower enclosure. This is one of the most space-efficient designs, requiring only the addition of a conventional amplifier or receiver to create a highly effective, state-of-the-art music system with a minimum of impact on the surrounding living space.

Until recently, the downside of this approach has been the bulk, weight,

and cost of such speakers, which have restricted their appeal to a limited segment of the high-fidelity market. With the introduction of the Polk Audio RT1000p system, the basic advantages of the all-in-one speaker are now within the reach of a larger range of music lovers.

The RT1000p is a conventional-appearing tower speaker whose cabinet is largely constructed of ¾-inch medium-density fiberboard (MDF). The speaker baffle, 1 inch thick, is covered with an acoustically inert material called Velvin.

Functionally, the upper third of the cabinet is a separately enclosed and sealed speaker system covering the range from the upper bass through the high frequencies. Its 1-inch tweeter has a soft polymer dome with a vapor-deposited coating of stainless steel and aluminum, a design that the manufacturer says combines the stiffness of metal with the damping properties of softer materials.

The woofer, located just below the tweeter, is a 6½-inch cone driver, operating below 2.3 kHz. Both drivers in the upper section are mounted on a raised bezel, weighing nearly 3 pounds, that is molded from a dense mineral-and-glass compound. This construction is designed to minimize diffraction and reduce unwanted reflections that could affect system imaging.

The RT1000p’s separate upper section is, by itself, an excellent two-way speaker system. However, the bulk of the enclosure’s volume is devoted to the powered subwoofer, which operates below 80 Hz and whose output is rated to be down 3 dB at 36 Hz.

The two compartments of the subwoofer structure extend over the full width, depth, and height of the cabinet except for the portion devoted to the built-in amplifier and its controls and to the upper drivers. The subwoofer section is heavily braced and gives the enclosure a rigidity reminiscent of a concrete block.

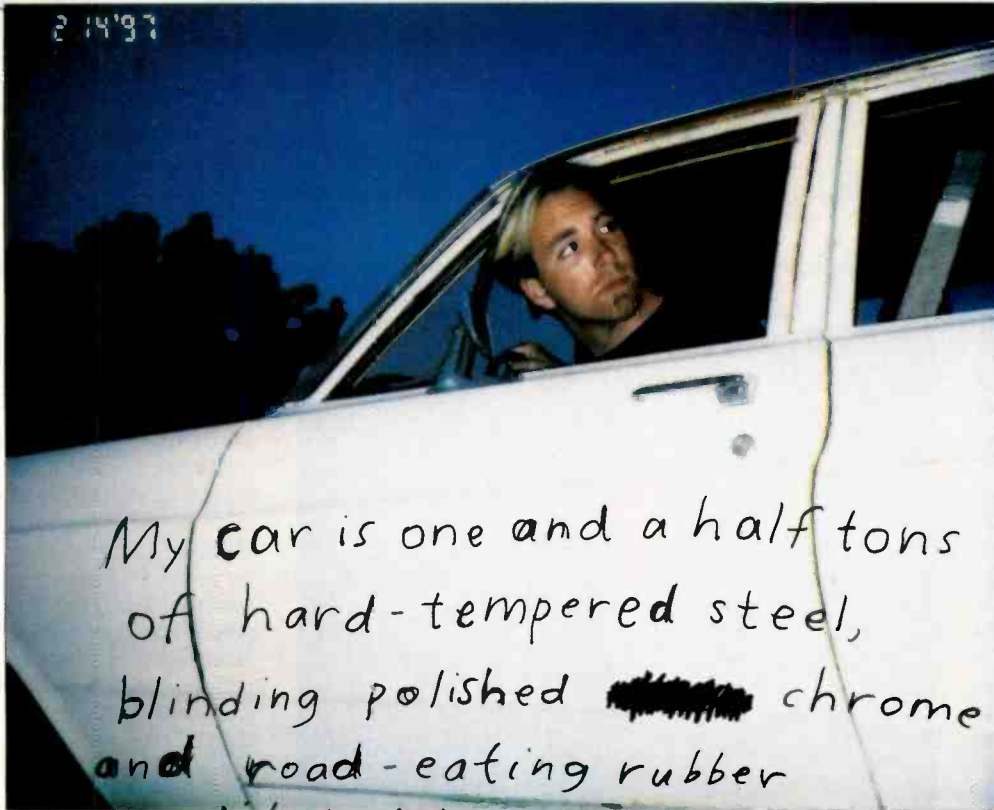
DIMENSIONS: 42¼ inches high, 8 inches wide, 13 inches deep

WEIGHT: 63 pounds

FINISH: black woodgrain vinyl; real rosewood veneer (as shown) at extra cost

PRICE: black, \$560 each; rosewood, \$660 each

MANUFACTURER: Polk Audio, Dept. SR, 5601 Metro Dr., Baltimore, MD 21215; telephone, 800-377-7655



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TEST REPORTS

The subwoofer itself has a single 6½-inch cone similar to the upper-bass/midrange driver. The low-bass frequencies exit through a 3-inch-diameter port and a conical deflector at the bottom of the cabinet, which is raised a couple of inches by the speaker's base, and emerge omnidirectionally at floor level. The 80-watt subwoofer amplifier is in a protected area of

the cabinet's rear panel, behind the bass driver.

The subwoofer control panel, which also serves as a heat sink for the amplifier, has its own speaker-level and line-level inputs, normally connected in parallel with the upper speaker with gold-plated jumpers, so that the system can be biwired. The amplifier can be left in its automatic mode and con-

nected to a 120-volt AC line; it will come on automatically when a signal is present and shut off a few minutes after it ceases. Alternatively, it can be switched on and off manually. The subwoofer level is smoothly adjustable with a volume knob. The setting is not critical and should be made to satisfy individual taste.

Our room-response measurement of

POLK AUDIO RT1000 HOME THEATER SYSTEM

POLK AUDIO'S new RT1000 Home Theater System is built around the RT1000p tower speaker reviewed by Julian Hirsch. For \$1,870 Polk supplies a pair of standard-finish RT1000p towers (black wood-grain vinyl; rosewood veneer is shown), a CS275 center-channel speaker (\$300), and a pair of RT f/x surround speakers (\$450 a pair). For extra oomph in playing movie soundtracks, Polk suggested adding the PSW150 10-inch powered subwoofer (not shown, \$649).

The CS275 center speaker has two 5-inch horizontally arrayed woofers flanking a 1-inch trilaminate-dome tweeter. The magnetically shielded, bass-reflex enclosure measures 6 x 18 x 8 inches and weighs 10 pounds. The top is "sliced" at the back so that you can turn the speaker upside down and mount it underneath a TV, angled upward. Rated frequency response is 80 Hz to 25 kHz, and rated sensitivity is 90 dB sound-pressure level (SPL) at 1 meter. Nominal impedance is 8 ohms.

The RT f/x surround speaker has a single 5¼-inch woofer and a pair of the same 1-inch dome tweeters as the CS275 in a trapezoidal enclosure. The woofer and one tweeter are on one side, while the second tweeter and the woofer port are on the other side; a switch selects either bipolar (in-phase) or dipolar (out-of-phase) operation. The enclosure measures 10 x 8½ x 6¾ inches and weighs 17 pounds, and there is a keyhole on the back panel for wall mounting. Rated frequency response is 50 Hz to 24 kHz, sensitivity is 89 dB, and impedance is 8 ohms.

The PSW150 subwoofer has a built-in 200-watt amp and a variable 50- to 150-Hz electronic crossover. The vented enclosure measures 12¼ x 17 x 20 inches, and it weighs 48 pounds. It includes a set of



speaker-level and line-level inputs and outputs. Frequency response is given as 30 to 150 Hz.

I installed the RT1000p towers well away from the side and front walls of my listening room and leveled them with their adjustable feet. I placed the RT f/x surround speakers on stands at either side of my main listening couch, 4 feet above the floor and 2 feet back from the rear of the couch. The CS275 center speaker, of course, went directly on top of my 51-inch rear-projection TV. I put the PSW150 subwoofer in the right rear corner of the room. Distances to the speakers were equalized using a tape measure and further adjusted with the time-alignment function of a Lexicon DC-1 surround processor.

Wiring this system was slightly more complicated than for a basic home-theater setup. I wired the RT1000p towers using the speaker-level inputs and adjusted the inter-

nal subs to create a cohesive three-way system. Then, using its line-level input, I connected the PSW150 subwoofer to my system and set its level to complement the RT1000p speakers.

In my listening room the RT1000p towers had a smooth and gently rising response characteristic with good low-frequency extension. Off-axis response remained smooth, and high-frequency response was strong even 60 degrees off-axis. The CS275 center speaker was less smooth (± 7 dB from 73 to 20 kHz on-axis), and the tweeter's level was about 6 dB louder than that of the woofers. Like many horizontally arrayed systems I've tested, the CS275 had a serious notch (12 to 15 dB) near the crossover region at any angle more than 20 degrees off dead center. However, the response of the RT f/x surround speaker at the listening position was excellent (± 5 dB from 46 Hz to 16.5 kHz), particularly

considering that the measurement was made at an angle to the side of the speaker. Switching between bipolar and dipolar operation changes the polarity of one of the tweeters, which didn't change the sound appreciably in my listening room.

The combination of three powered subwoofers, one in each main speaker plus the PSW150, gave the system excellent dynamics with program material. In the "Boom" scene from *Clear & Present Danger*, it delivered 110 dB SPL at my seat on the couch. Average peak output during my usual selection of low and loud music (Bass Erotica's *Bass Ecstasy* CD, the cannon shots from Telarc's *1812 Overture*, and "Jurassic Lunch" from Telarc's *The Great Fantasy and Adventure Album*) was 108 dB SPL. While the infrasonic fundamentals were missing and the system was not a world-class couch mover, it was remarkably dynamic from 40

the Polk RT1000p was made by separately measuring and then averaging the outputs of the left and right speakers from a distance of 12 feet on the axis of the left speaker; the subwoofer level was set to its middle position, which our listening indicated was approximately optimum for balanced response. The resulting curve showed an overall variation of ± 4 dB from 100

Hz upward. Overload control was also excellent. Driven beyond its capabilities, the system became hard-sounding, but there were no buzzing, scraping, or other obnoxious noises.

My favorite rock-and-roll recordings sang purely on these speakers, and the system sounded very good with other types of program material, too. The gently rising spectral balance delivered intelligible vocals with clear details, but at the cost of extra sibilance and saxophones that became squeaky at very loud levels. Off-axis the sound was much better than the frequency-response notch I measured would suggest. The primary effect was even more pronounced sibilance on speaking voices, some coloration of singing voices, and an overall increase in apparent treble. The basic sound was just as pleasing with classical music and video soundtracks as it was with rock-and-roll.

Spatially, the system also worked very well. At my primary listening seat the sound was big and spacious. The frontal image was wide, without holes or alleys, and had moderate depth. The sound field filled the room from front to back, and sounds tracked naturally into and out of the main stage. At seats far off-axis the spatial presentation remained good. There was a small dead zone between the front stage and the ambient sound field, and sometimes the surround speakers could be heard as independent sound sources, but overall the presentation was quite satisfactory at all listening spots in my room.

The Polk RT1000 Home Theater System offers excellent sound and good value. The system can do pretty much everything except reproduce the lowest bass with authority. It plays clean and clear, it plays very loud above its low-end limits, and it delivers excellent surround sound. Polk has brought a degree of technological sophistication to this system not generally found in this price class.

— Tom Nouraine

Hz to 12 kHz. Over most of that range the variation was about ± 2 dB. Of course, since this is not a standard measurement, it is not readily repeatable under other conditions or in other rooms, but it does say something about the overall smoothness of the speaker's response.

Our close-miked measurement of the subwoofer response was a symmetrical curve with its maximum at 60 Hz and an overall ± 6 -dB variation between 35 and 60 Hz. This "response" is obviously affected considerably by the setting of the subwoofer level, making a meaningful definition of the speaker's low-frequency response an uncertain process. This is, of course, equally true of any speaker system with an adjustable subwoofer. In fact, when a separate subwoofer is used, it is totally impractical to define the low-bass response of the system.

Returning to the higher frequencies for the moment, quasi-anechoic MLS response measurements confirmed the essential results of our room-response measurement and the effectiveness of the system's design. The 2-meter on-axis response variation from 300 Hz to 20 kHz was only ± 2.5 dB, about as good as it gets.

The system's impedance, rated at 8 ohms, was closer to 4 ohms at most frequencies, reaching the 8-ohm point only at 1.9 kHz (except for a maximum of 19.5 ohms at 80 Hz). Since the speaker is quite sensitive, rated at 90 dB and measuring 91 dB in our tests, the impedance figures have little practical importance.

Our measurements indicate that the Polk RT1000p is a first-rate speaker in every respect, and listening to it for more than a few moments fully justified that conclusion. It was quickly apparent that the treble/midrange portion of the RT1000p sets the standard of performance of the entire system. Its stereo imaging and frequency balance were excellent, with no sign of any systematic coloration or weakness.

The bass (subwoofer) portion of the spectrum should be more than adequate for 99 percent of the program material that the speaker will ever be called on to reproduce. In fact, while listening to it, it was hard to believe that its low-bass performance was the work of a single 6½-inch driver.

The Polk RT1000p is unquestionably a topnotch speaker at a bargain price, well worth hearing even if you are not in the market to buy a new speaker. □

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Sherwood Newcastle R-925 Dolby Digital Receiver

DANIEL KUMIN • START LABORATORIES

Sherwood's R-925 joins the growing brigade of Dolby Digital A/V receivers that sell for \$1,000 or less. Part of the company's upscale Newcastle line, it appears to have all the firepower necessary to play on what is rapidly becoming a very competitive field. The receiver's on-board Dolby Digital (DD) and digital-domain Pro Logic surround decoding are complemented by four DSP-powered music-surround modes, plenty of inputs and outputs, and several useful conveniences. The R-925 is rated to deliver 100 watts per channel in two-channel stereo mode and 125 watts in five-channel surround mode, which should be plenty of power in most cases.

Sherwood's first Dolby Digital receiver, the R-925 presents a relatively uncluttered face to the world, with large volume and input-selection knobs situated above three small bass, treble, and balance knobs. There's also a headphone jack and a set of A/V jacks for connecting a camcorder. The rest of the controls — pushbuttons — are grouped logically by function and distinguished by size and shape. The faceplate employs the currently fashionable gold-on-black panel lettering. It's not the most legible scheme, but Sherwood earns several points in my book for using labels that are larger

and brighter than those found on most comparable receivers.

Around back, the R-925 proffers an all-RCA-jack selection of inputs and outputs — there are no S-video connectors, which is a bit surprising at this price level. Audio facilities include two tape loops and inputs labeled CD and phono. The audio/video complement includes input trios for four components, but only one (VCR1) is equipped with outputs to accommodate recording. Digital inputs comprise two jacks — one labeled RF AC-3 for use with a Dolby Digital-equipped laserdisc player, the other PCM/AC-3 for digital sources like a CD or DVD player — and one optical port, also labeled PCM/AC-3. The speaker outputs are multi-way binding posts, sized and spaced for dual banana plugs — hallelujah.

Sherwood also supplies preamp-out RCA jacks for all six channels (including subwoofer) as well as main-in jacks for the left and right front chan-

nels, which are linked to their corresponding pre-outs by heavy jumper pins. All of this raises the R-925 substantially above the norm in terms of flexible expansion options. The receiver also has a pin-jack output to feed a Xantech-compatible multiroom controller, though no mention is made in the manual of how this might be used.

Remaining rear-panel features include two AC convenience jacks, a video-monitor output, AM and FM antenna terminals, and a pair of RCA jacks for Sherwood's Digi-Link remote-control system, which provides integrated "smart" control of additional Sherwood-brand components.

A peek under the R-925's hood revealed a main circuit board with vertically mounted cards (daughter boards) for the tuner, AC-3/DSP processing (this sports a Motorola 56000-family DSP engine), digital audio conversion, and analog audio and A/V input/output. Overall, the arrangement looks easily serviceable. The power-amp section employs ten identical output devices.

I set up the R-925 in my usual home-theater system, comprising B&W Model 803 Series 2 left/right front speakers, a B&W HTM center speaker, and Citation Model 7.3 dipole/bipole surrounds. A powered subwoofer is also part of this system, though as usual I initially omitted it to exercise the receiver's amplifiers with full-range front channels. Source material included Dolby Digital laserdiscs, CDs, and DSS broadcasts.

Setup was uneventful thanks to the R-925's manual, which is generally clear and straightforward. The receiver's solid-state volume control (a continually rotating knob) tracked very

DIMENSIONS: 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, 15 inches deep

WEIGHT: 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds

PRICE: \$1,000

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-High Performance Review

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"Ensemble delivered a smoother output than many larger and more expensive speakers. It's hard to imagine going wrong with Ensemble."

-Stereo Review

"Ensemble can provide big-speaker performance from a package that takes up little more room – or money – than mini speakers...another hi-fi milestone." **-CD Review**

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well, losing "sync" by only a couple of decibels at the extreme top of its range.

The receiver allows you to assign either the RF AC-3, the optical, or the coaxial digital input to the laserdisc (LD) position; the coaxial and optical inputs can also feed any or all of the aux/TV, DVD, LD, or CD inputs. Unlike most A/V receivers, which lock out a digital input once it is assigned, the R-925 lets you assign a digital source to multiple inputs simultaneously. This is a simple scheme, but it means that if you want to use, say, the coaxial digital input for non-Dolby Digital laserdisc playback, as would normally be the case with a DD-capable

laserdisc player, you must manually switch inputs each time, as the R-925 incorporates no "auto-fallback" mode. Sherwood also lets you dub to VCR1 independently of your listening/viewing selection and to mix and match audio and video sources for dubbing or recording. There's even a custom labeling option so that you can rename the A/V inputs shown in the front-panel display.

The Sherwood does not produce any on-screen (video) displays, however — a bit unusual for a receiver in this price range — so setup procedures rely on simple alphanumeric messages in the front display window. That causes no real problems since these

are clear and the Sherwood's options are relatively few. But the last point gives me some reservations. The R-925's only speaker-mode setup options are "large," "small," or "none" for the center channel and "yes" or "no" for the subwoofer, which toggles a 12-dB-per-octave high-pass characteristic for the left/right channels while activating the line-level subwoofer output, itself processed with a corresponding low-pass filter. When you select the "no" option, Dolby Digital's low-frequency-effects (LFE) channel is redirected to the front left/right channels.

So far, so good. However, the surround channels are equipped with a

MEASUREMENTS

DOLBY DIGITAL (AC-3) PERFORMANCE

All data except frequency response obtained with Dolby Digital signals from Dolby Labs' AC-3 test DVD using "small" speaker settings. Except for maximum output-power and channel-imbalance measurements, the speaker-balance controls and volume control were set together to produce 2.83 volts into 8 ohms from a -20-dBFS* signal from all channels. All input signals were dithered (which sets limits on measured noise and distortion).

OUTPUT AT CLIPPING (1 kHz, into 8 ohms)
one channel driven 95 watts
all channels driven (10 seconds) 130 watts

DISTORTION AT 1 WATT (THD+N, 1 kHz)
worst case (right surround) 0.11%

NOISE (A-wtd)
worst case (right surround) -65.6 dB

EXCESS NOISE (worst case, with signal)
16-bit +12.7 dB
18-bit +24.5 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (20 Hz to 20 kHz)
worst case (front right) +0.4, -2.6 dB

CHANNEL IMBALANCE (individual channels set at 0-dB gain) 0.54-dB spread

SUBWOOFER OUTPUT FREQUENCY RESPONSE
15 dB/octave rolloff above -6-dB point at 55 Hz

HIGH-PASS-FILTER FREQUENCY RESPONSES
12 dB/octave rolloff below -3-dB points at 100 Hz

MAXIMUM UNCLIPPED SUBWOOFER OUTPUT
(volume at 54, subwoofer level at 0) 3.6 volts

SUBWOOFER DISTORTION
worst-case signal 0.15%

* dBFS = decibels referred to digital full-scale

DOLBY PRO LOGIC PERFORMANCE

Except where noted, all data obtained with tones from a digital test-signal generator. Other test conditions same as for Dolby Digital.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE
front 20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.5, -2.6 dB
center 20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.3, -2.7 dB
surround 20 Hz to 6.25 kHz +0.3, -3 dB

NOISE (A-wtd)
worst case (surround) -66 dB

DISTORTION (THD+N, 1 kHz)
worst case (surround) 0.12%

SURROUND-CHANNEL NOISE-REDUCTION CALIBRATION ERROR
re Dolby level (-18 dBFS*) 0 dB

SURROUND-DECODER INPUT-OVERLOAD MARGINS (analog inputs, at 1 kHz)
front (re 2-volt input) +1.6 dB
center (re 1.4-volt input) +4.6 dB
surround (re 1.4-volt input) +4.6 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION
worst case (left out, right driven) >45 dB

* dBFS = decibels referred to digital full-scale

STEREO PERFORMANCE, DIGITAL INPUTS

Same test conditions as above.

OUTPUT AT CLIPPING (at 1 kHz)
8 ohms 118 watts
4 ohms 182 watts

CLIPPING HEADROOM
(re 125-watt, 8-ohm rating)
8 ohms -0.25 dB

DYNAMIC POWER
8 ohms 144 watts
4 ohms 230 watts

DYNAMIC HEADROOM
(re 125-watt, 8-ohm rating)
8 ohms +0.61 dB

DISTORTION AT RATED POWER (8 ohms, 1 kHz)
125 watts 1%

DISTORTION AT 1 WATT
(8 ohms, 1 kHz) 0.05%

LINEARITY ERROR
at -90 dBFS* -3.6 dB

NOISE
(A-wtd, de-emphasis off/on) -69.6/-69.9 dB

EXCESS NOISE (without/with signal)
16-bit +5.9/+6.6 dB
quasi-20-bit +24.4/+24.2 dB

ZONE-CONTROL RANGE
100 Hz +10.69, -10.0 dB
10 kHz +9.4, -10.7 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (20 Hz to 20 kHz)
de-emphasis off +0.8, -1.7 dB
de-emphasis on +0.7, -1.7 dB

* dBFS = decibels referred to digital full-scale

STEREO PERFORMANCE, ANALOG INPUTS

SENSITIVITY (for 1 watt at max volume)
CD 20.2 mV
phono 0.33 mV

INPUT-OVERLOAD LEVEL (re 2-volt input)
CD +0.1 dB

NOISE (re 1-watt output, A-wtd)
CD (500-mV input, see text) -77.7 dB
phono (5-mV input, see text) -70.4 dB

RIAA PHONO-EQUALIZATION ERROR
(20 Hz to 20 kHz) +0.3, -0.5 dB

ANALOG-INPUT FREQUENCY RESPONSE
20 Hz to 20 kHz +0.27, -2.69 dB

TUNER SECTION

All figures for FM except frequency response.

SENSITIVITY (50-dB quieting)
mono 22 dBf
stereo 44 dBf

NOISE (at 65 dBf)
mono -74 dB
stereo -68 dB

DISTORTION (THD+N at 65 dBf)
mono 0.40%
stereo 0.45%

CAPTURE RATIO (at 65 dBf) 0.8 dB

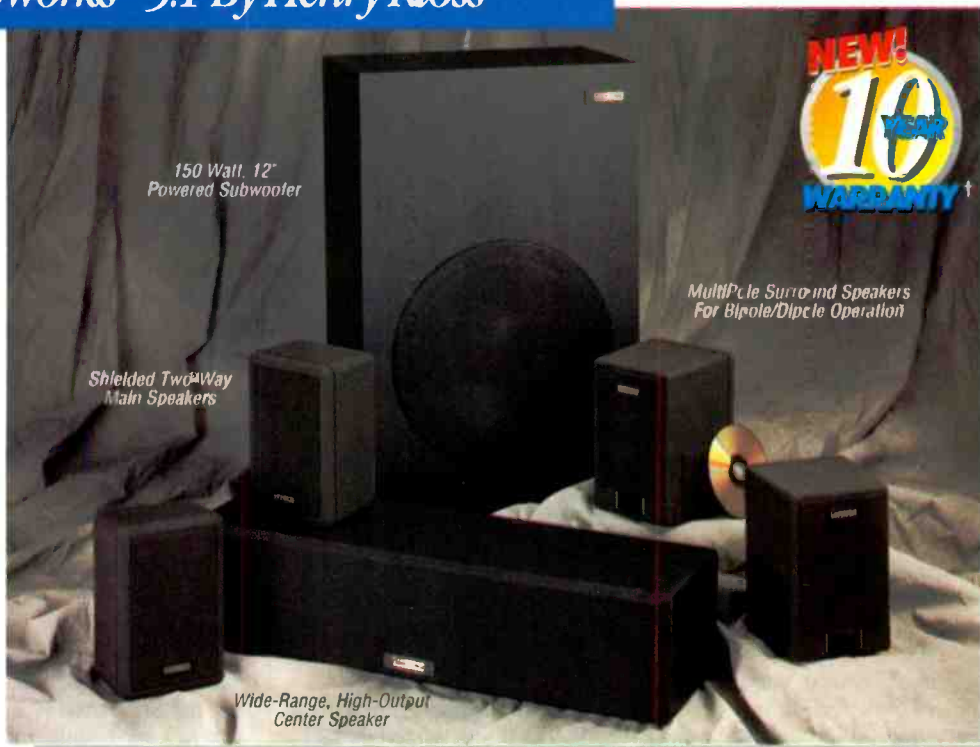
AM REJECTION 80 dB

SELECTIVITY
alternate-channel 68 dB
adjacent-channel 12 dB

PILOT-CARRIER LEAKAGE
19/38 kHz -75/-67 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (1 kHz) 46 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE
FM 20 Hz to 15 kHz +1, -1.5 dB
AM 65 Hz to 2.8 kHz +0.5, -6 dB



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* Unlike seemingly similar systems, our MultiPole speakers, when switched from dipole to bipole operation, affect a very broad range of sound – not just very high frequencies. This difference is crucial to proper performance. †New Industry-Best 10-Year Warranty applies to all speakers except The Powered Subwoofer’s amplifier which has a 2-Year Warranty.



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fixed high-pass filter, so if you want full-range surrounds, one of Dolby Digital's drawing cards — though not a very important one in my book — you will have to look elsewhere. Also, the low-pass filter on the subwoofer output may roll off at too low a frequency, possibly creating an octave-wide "hole" in the bass response given the 100-Hz high-pass filters on the main channels. Whether this is a problem will depend on your speakers and room acoustics. You can always ignore the receiver's subwoofer output and instead hook up your subwoofer's own loop-back high-pass filtering using the receiver's preamp-out/main-in connections.

Performance-wise, I was duly impressed by the Sherwood R-925. In two-channel mode, the receiver was about on par with competing 100-watt stereo receivers, which is to say that its amplifier section delivered very clean and solid power almost right up to its limits; at very high volume settings the R-925 started to sound noticeably hard before the onset of overt distortion (clipping). The sound quality of Dolby Digital surround playback



was first-class: dynamic, defined, and clear. The R-925 offers a fixed dynamic-range control. Surround-mode power should prove more than adequate for most systems, and the R-925's surround-channel amplifiers sounded

every bit as capable as the front-channel amps when I auditioned them "naked," with the other three channels driving dummy loads.

Dolby Pro Logic performance was excellent. Channel leakage was virtually nil, except for some negligible crosstalk at low frequencies. The clarity, stability, and cohesiveness of surround- and center-channel sound, even from demanding Dolby Surround-encoded music recordings, was outstanding. The Sherwood's digital-domain Pro Logic processing was generally quiet, yielding no audible noise at the listening position under any real-world conditions.

Stereo music also sounded excellent, and during critical listening the R-925's digital-to-analog (D/A) converter, fed via its optical input, nearly matched the overall musical resolution of the converter in my reference CD player. Typical of today's A/V receivers, the Sherwood R-925 provides four "extra" surround modes, endowed with the usual names: Theater, Hall, Church, and Stadium. All are four-channel modes that eschew the center speaker. As a group, they earn the

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dubious distinction of being among the least musically satisfying ambience modes I have recently encountered. The Stadium mode, for example, sounds uncannily like a guitar "flanger" stomp-box.

The only surround adjustments offered are rear- and center-channel delays, the latter in Dolby Digital only. (The manual offers no guidance for setting these.) The R-925 does, however, permit the relative front/rear speaker balance to be adjusted independently for each and every mode, including Dolby Digital and Pro Logic. Hurrah! More A/V receivers should incorporate this useful adjustment.

One thing that set the R-925 clearly apart from many competing A/V receivers was the performance of its FM section, which was noticeably above average. Reception on weaker or fringe-location FM signals was better than the run-of-the-mill receiver, yielding two or three more listenable stations than usual at my semi-rural location. The tuner's audio quality on stronger signals was also quite good — not the equal in clarity and dynamic range of a top-flight component tuner, but generally open, clean, and musical. AM reception was about average.

In terms of the human interface, the Sherwood R-925 scored well overall. Its front panel is generally readable, and most of the controls are easily accessible, though its "endless-circle" rotary input-selection knob is harder to use than direct-access source keys. The supplied remote control does have individual source keys but fails to provide direct access to surround modes, forcing you to step through all modes in sequence. The R-925 lets you select Dolby Digital mode whenever the aux/TV, LD, or DVD inputs are set to digital, whether or not any AC-3 data is present — which, of course, can yield silence: you must manually deselect DD by calling up another mode. This could confuse less experienced users.

The remote control is an unusually powerful and flexible preprogrammed device that can transmit several dozen commands to each of eight different components. The handset includes a plethora of keys, which for the most part are logically grouped by function or component and differentiated by size and shape. There's a standard, cruciform cursor control in the middle and a back-lighting button.

The Sherwood remote also offers some unusual options, including extensive macro capabilities and the

ability to "punch out" keys for such functions as volume, channel up/down, and transport so that they stay set to the relevant components regardless of what other component the remote as a whole is set to, letting you control, say, both receiver volume and TV channel selection without constantly switching component modes.

Though a few problems cropped up

in our test — most rectified in a second, final production sample from Sherwood — the R-925 delivered fundamentally fine performance in its movie-sound modes, solid amplification, and a notable FM section. Combine that with its simple design and unusually useful remote control, and you have an appealing, basic home-theater centerpiece. □

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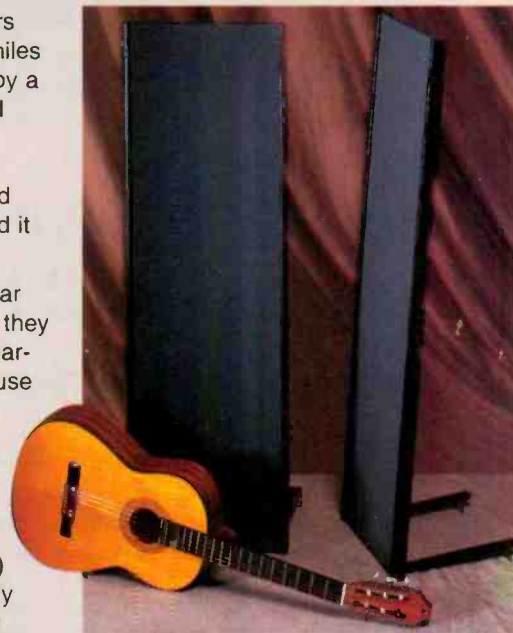
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USER'S REPORT



Acoustic Research The Edge/S 12 HO Home Theater Speaker System

KEN C. POHLMANN • HAMMER LABORATORIES

For a time, it seemed like the audio and video markets were diverging. Videophiles, when they weren't completely transfixed by their big screens, increasingly discovered the excitement of multichannel audio playback and abandoned mono and even stereo TV. The reason, of course, is that videophiles wanted to recreate at home the experience of watching movies in the best theaters, which now includes 5.1-channel surround sound. Meanwhile, for many years, audiophiles were sticking to stereo. Many, especially the purists, argued that more than two channels had been tried in the quadraphonic debacle of the 1970s and had failed because high-quality music reproduction does not require multichannel playback.

Now the gap between videophiles and audiophiles is closing, and if the truth be told, it is because the videophiles were right. Surround sound does indeed augment the playback of music as well as movie soundtracks. The problem is, which way should au-

diophiles turn? If we stick with stereo, we miss the excitement of surround sound, and if we go with home theater, many of us are afraid that it will be necessary to sacrifice audio integrity. Moreover, the extra cost of adding high-quality 5.1-channel playback can be formidable. It would be terrific if you could buy one affordable playback system that would sound great in both applications — that is, a true home-theater/music system.

Many companies have been working hard to address that market need, and one of them is Acoustic Research. AR was an American pioneer in the early days of stereo, when its designs were considered the alpha and omega of loudspeakers. Veteran audiophiles still speak fondly of the AR-3a and other models. Today, AR is a trademark of Christie Design Corporation (CDC), a subsidiary of Recoton. More important, CDC is headed by speaker designer Cary Christie, who co-founded Infinity Systems with Arnold Nudell back in the early 1970s. Now, un-

der the direction of Christie, AR has moved into the world of home theater, aiming to provide systems that serve the needs of both multichannel music and home theater. Although AR offers a number of mix-and-match speaker combinations, for this report we selected an affordable combo of five Edge satellite speakers (\$140 each) and an S 12 HO powered subwoofer (\$549).

The Edge speaker is housed in a robust ABS plastic case designed to be weather-resistant and thus also suitable for protected outdoor applications. The metal grille protects a full-range (nominally) 4¼-inch driver with an effective cone diameter of about 3½ inches. In addition, there is a ¾-inch polycarbonate tweeter as well as a port for the 4¼-inch driver. The satellite's power-handling capability is stated as 150 watts and its sensitivity as 91 dB sound-pressure level (SPL) with a 1-watt input measured at a distance of 1 meter. Frequency response is rated as 75 Hz to 20 kHz ±3 dB. The crossover frequency is said to be about 3.5 kHz.

The cabinet measures 9⅝ inches high, 6¾ inches wide, and 6¾ inches deep and is magnetically shielded for placement next to a TV. Around back there are two binding posts for connecting the speaker leads. AR provides mounting arms that attach to the rear of each cabinet with a ball-and-socket swivel. Both long and short arms are supplied, as is a mounting base. Using the ball and socket, and either the long or short arm, the speaker can be placed horizontally or vertically and aimed in any direction. The cabinet's near-trapezoidal shape gives you extra leeway in finding exactly the right angle. The AR logo plate, by the way, can be turned to accommodate horizontal or vertical orientation. The Edge speaker is available in white or black.

The S 12 HO subwoofer is housed in a cube that measures approximately 16 inches on each side. This roomy cabinet accommodates a 12-inch driver with an effective cone diameter of about 9½ inches and a rated impedance of 8 ohms. The subwoofer's bandwidth is given as 20 to 200 Hz. The cabinet also houses its power amplifier, rated at 140 watts. Each of the thick sides is wooden (no grille cloth for the cat to sharpen his claws on). The woofer is mounted on a false bottom and fires directly downward, along with its port. The cabinet's design raises the false bottom above the structural bottom, allowing sound to emerge

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USER'S REPORT

through front and rear slots. This is a nice design that helps protect the woofer from accidental damage. The cabinet is available only in a black ash woodgrain vinyl finish.

In contrast to the serene simplicity of the satellite speaker's rear panel, the powered subwoofer bristles with connectors and controls. In particular, there are four RCA jacks; two are for line-level inputs from the system power amplifier or receiver, and two are line-level outputs. One of the input jacks is designated mono, for use when the S 12 HO is connected only to a system's mono subwoofer output. There are also two terminal strips, each with four push terminals; these provide an alternate way to deliver speaker-level signals to the subwoofer. One terminal strip accepts left and right signals from the amp/receiver's front speaker outputs, while the other loops signals back to the front speakers.

There are two potentiometers. One adjusts the subwoofer output level, and the other selects the low-pass cutoff, at any point between 50 and 200 Hz. A rocker switch can be used to select 0-degree or 180-degree phase relative to the satellite channels. Another rocker selects power-off or auto-power; with the latter selected, the subwoofer's amplifier remains in standby mode if no audio signal is detected. A plastic spacer prevents inquisitive fingers from touching the potentially hot heat-sink area over the power-output transistors.

To audition this AR system, I connected a Sony DVP-S7000 CD/DVD player to a Denon AVR-3200 Dolby Digital receiver rated to deliver 85 watts (into 8-ohm loads) to each of its five channels. Audio connections were made with a Toslink optical cable and video connections with an S-video cable. My listening room has more wires than Ma Bell, so it was easy to connect the five satellite-speaker cables to the Denon receiver's main output terminals, each leading to an appropriate location around the room. Finally, I connected the receiver's line-level subwoofer output to the S 12 HO via an RCA cable.

I placed the AR speakers on stands that elevated them about 3 feet off the floor, placing them at ear level when I'm seated in my comfy chair. My listening room measures 15 x 23 feet, with a cathedral ceiling that rises to 20 feet. Experience has shown that the traditional home-theater speaker geometry works well, with the center

speaker atop the TV set, the front satellites placed on either side toward the front corners of the room, and the surround satellites placed along the side walls near the back of the room. Generally, I've found that it's best to place a subwoofer along the front wall.

Of course, the acoustical radiation patterns of all speakers are different, so I spent some time moving the speaker stands about, aiming the Edge satellites, and nudging the subwoofer until I found locations that seemed to satisfy the zen of my particular room. I also spent some time adjusting the subwoofer's level and cutoff frequency, using both pink noise with a real-time analyzer and my own ears to make the adjustments. Installation chores completed, I settled in for some critical listening to both movie sound-

The AR speaker system's surround-sound imaging was quite good with movie soundtracks on DVD, providing a realistic sense of envelopment.

tracks and music. I started with movies, auditioning such well-recorded DVDs as *Twister* and *Jumanji*. I was immediately pleased with the intelligibility of the dialogue. Somewhat surprisingly, the seemingly simple task of reproducing speech can be challenging to a speaker, but the Edge speakers did a good job of delivering clarity. I was also happy with the system's ability to convey good, dynamic theater music and sound effects. The frequency response was reasonably flat, with no overt problems. Moreover, I was happy with the low-frequency-effects channel. In *Twister's* tornado scenes, for example, I could shake my room with reasonably loud bass (though an a second S 12 HO would have been nice). Finally, the surround-sound imaging was quite good, providing a realistic sense of envelopment with good panning around the circle, free of obvious pinpoints of sound.

To judge the system's musical abilities, I auditioned a number of CD tracks, including the Jennifer Warnes tune "Bird on a Wire" from her *Famous Blue Overcoat* album. This su-

perb recording by engineer George Massenburg is an acid test for playback systems. As I expected, the Edge speakers fared less well in this demanding application. I felt that the high-frequency response was slightly brittle, the sound quality a little aggressive around 8 kHz. In addition, there seemed to be a slight deficiency in the lower-midrange and upper-bass regions, as if the crossover between the satellites and the subwoofer was not quite right. I worked with the sub's level and cutoff adjustments, and I moved it around, but I never entirely solved the problem. Perhaps if I had been able to vary the slope of the sub's 12-dB-per-octave crossover, I could've gotten it right.

Also, although it was quite musical, the subwoofer sounded somewhat boomy when stressed with complex low-frequency material, and it lacked the tight punch of truly excellent low-end response. On the other hand, I must confess that I was surprised at the peppy musical prowess of this moderately priced system. It was definitely competitive with similarly priced, music-only loudspeaker pairs or three-piece systems. With music, the AR the system played loud and without undue strain or resonances. A minor lapse: the sub's automatic turn-on feature did not always work when I turned on the receiver and played music at low listening levels.

It should not be surprising that I rate the AR Edge/S 12 HO system very good for movie playback and merely good for music playback. It is a simple fact that high-quality, music-only recordings are more demanding than movie soundtracks, and they often pose problems for even the best loudspeakers. On the other hand, although music is an important component of movie-viewing, slight sonic deficiencies do not particularly interfere with overall enjoyment of the movie experience. AR's Edge satellite speakers and S 12 HO subwoofer demonstrate that a single sound system can provide a good home-theater experience and reasonably satisfactory music playback. Depending on which application is more important to you, and whether you have the extra budget to pursue high-quality music playback, systems like this one may well serve both of your listening needs.

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small wwoor

Little Speakers with Big Possibilities

Small speakers are so familiar an element of modern stereo and home-theater sound, it's easy to forget that it was not always so. Back in hi-fi's Pleistocene period — that is, before the invention of the acoustic-suspension speaker in the 1950s and the high-wattage solid-state power amp in the 1960s — real hi-fi buffs sacrificed their domestic arrangements on the altar of enormous, horn-loaded cabinets. These were designed to squeeze some semblance of low-frequency response and dynamic realism from the limited amplifiers of the day. **by Daniel Kumin**

Things are different now — very different. Amps and receivers with 50 to 100 watts per channel are ubiquitous and almost universally affordable. An important consequence is that high speaker sensitivity — the ability to produce significant volume from relatively few watts of input — is not the important factor it once was. Speakers significantly less than 2 feet tall today routinely produce loud, deep bass, with a freedom from serious distortion that hi-fi fans a generation earlier

could only dream of getting from their refrigerator-size speaker enclosures.

All else being equal, smaller speakers are almost always preferred over larger ones, especially by household members whose criteria do not, shall we say, begin and end with sonic performance. It is not surprising, then, that speakers measuring a foot or less in their largest dimension are hugely popular — nor that manufacturers today produce a veritable blizzard of such diminutive designs, ranging from

blister-packed discount-store fodder to high-end models costing thousands of dollars a pair.

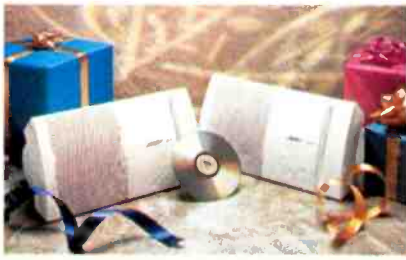
In between are scores of excellent-sounding, affordably priced, compact loudspeakers. Some are intended primarily as left/right speakers in a classic small-room stereo system, with or without a supporting subwoofer. But most are designed to function equally well in a variety of applications. The placement flexibility of compact speakers suits a home theater's front-stage

PHOTO BY JEFFREY KREIN

101



The Solid HCM1 from Rock Solid Sounds (\$200 each) is supplied with two different stands (only one is shown) to optimize it for horizontal or vertical mounting. Frequency response is rated as 70 Hz to 20 kHz ± 3 dB.



The Bose Model 100 (\$199 a pair) uses a single proprietary 4½-inch full-range driver that the company calls a Stardriver.



The Pinnacle Classic Gold Mini-Monitor (\$375 a pair) has a rated response of 45 Hz to 21 kHz ± 3 dB and a sensitivity of 92 dB.



The Advent Ruby (\$250 a pair) has a rated frequency response of 53 Hz to 21 kHz ± 3 dB, and a sensitivity rating of 89.5 dB.



The Polk Audio M5 (\$399 a pair), finished in paintable black or white, has a rated frequency response of 32 Hz to 25 kHz ± 3 dB.

array (left-center-right) to a T. But most small speakers are adaptable for surround-channel use as well, and some even have wall-mounting hardware built in or packaged with them.

It's difficult to make sweeping statements about small speakers as a genre, but there are a few attributes that the better models share. For example, small speakers tend to present narrow faces to the world, with their drivers closely spaced, an acoustical prescription for excellent stereo imaging and depth, in part because it reduces the unwanted reflections from the baffle (cabinet face) to which many large speakers are prone. That's one reason small speakers have a reputation for "detailed," "transparent," and "defined" sound from instruments and voices: much of the credit must go to their slim physiques. Another, somewhat subtler advantage of smaller speakers is that, being less intrusive in a room and (usually) physically more attractive and easier to handle, they stand a far better chance than large speakers of being set up in acoustically favorable locations — half the battle in any hi-fi installation.

Of course, smallness carries a few restrictions, too. With their 3- to 6-inch woofers and half-gallon enclosures, mini-speakers aren't destined to stir up a great deal of activity in the genuinely deep-bass region — below about 50 Hz, say. And, largely thanks to the same factors, most minis cannot play as loud as larger speakers, or produce quite the same dynamic impact. Nonetheless, most listeners are astonished at just how much solid, musical bass *can* emanate from good small speakers, and by just how full and dynamic they can sound, even at volumes approaching realistic levels. And since small speakers are most often used in small rooms, their ability to play loud is not an important factor.

There are so many good small speakers today that we have to divide them into subcategories just to get a handle on the profusion. We've made some rough and ready distinctions below, but most or all of the speakers mentioned — and at least as many

equally fine ones we lack the space to highlight — could arguably fall into two or more of our categories. Whether you need small speakers for a simple two-channel system, a surround-sound suite for your home theater, or even a pair or two to use outdoors, there are plenty of pint-sized models to choose from. And you're sure to encounter some surprisingly high sonic performance in the course of auditioning candidates.

The Bantam Audiophiles

Probably the most popular category of small speaker is the mini-monitor, designed primarily to deliver fine music reproduction in smaller rooms or in a "near-field" layout where the listener is seated within a yard or two of each speaker. In fact, almost every model in this category can trace its heritage to some degree to a near-field-monitor speaker design originally promulgated by the BBC some twenty-five years ago.



Infinity's Minuette L-MPS (\$229 a pair) has two 3½-inch woofers and a ½-inch polycarbonate tweeter. A Home Theater Pack (\$800) combines five of them with a powered sub.

Not too surprisingly, then, British and Canadian manufacturers tend to be good at this sort of speaker. Celestion's Impact 10 (\$199 a pair) is a classic example. Barely a foot tall, it updates the typical two-way configuration of a 5-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter with a neodymium magnet in the tweeter and an unusual contoured baffle

that is said to minimize reflections for increased imaging detail. The Diamond 7.2 (\$350 a pair) comes from Wharfedale, another of Britain's oldest loudspeaker brands. Again a two-way design with a 5-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter, the vented Wharfedale speaker has an extensively braced, nonresonant cabinet that is made from a composite of crushed rock and copolymer.

Also from Great Britain comes KEF's new Q15 (\$350 a pair), the smallest speaker featuring that firm's Uni-Q driver layout, which integrates tweeter and woofer into a single, concentric assembly. The Uni-Q arrangement is said to yield broad dispersion in all directions for smooth off-axis response — a textbook prescription for even tonal balance throughout the room. The design's symmetry also

permits the 12 x 8 x 10-inch Q15 to be placed either horizontally or vertically without affecting its sound, unlike conventionally arrayed multidriver speakers. KEF also makes a more conventional two-way minispeaker, the Coda 7 (\$125 a pair).

Canadian speaker makers are, if anything, even more dedicated to the mini-monitor. PSB's Alpha Mini is a slightly downsized version of its original Alpha, widely regarded for several years now as a speaker that offers a lot of musical sound for the money. The Alpha Mini (\$199 a pair) uses a 5¼-inch woofer instead of the Alpha's 6½-inch, but it has the same ½-inch, ferrofluid-cooled tweeter; the cabinet is barely 10 inches tall. Paradigm's Titan (\$219 a pair) is a similar, slightly larger speaker (6½-inch woofer, ¾-inch tweeter) from another north-of-the-border manufacturer with an equally well-established reputation for fine sonics. The Titan has recently been joined by a *really* pint-sized speaker, the roughly 8 x 8 x 6-inch Micro (\$149 a pair), which sounds similar but has a less extended response.



Definitive Technology's ProMonitor 100 (\$350 a pair), shown here with the ProSub 100 (\$449), is available finished in black or white and measures 10 x 6 x 6 inches.

American firms have not been slow to grasp the mini-monitor concept. The SuperOne from NHT (\$350 a pair) is a widely praised example. It has a very conventional, two-way acoustic-suspension design, with a 6½-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter, but its meticulously balanced response just happens to yield unconventionally good sound.

NHT recently introduced the SuperOne-Xu, for which it claims identical performance, in a modernistic thermoplastic enclosure with an integral mounting base and wall bracket (\$375 a pair).

The Pinnacle Classic Gold Mini-Monitor (\$375 a pair) has a 1-inch ferrofluid-cooled tweeter and a 5¼-inch woofer in a vented enclosure with an unusual angled duct and elliptical port, which Pinnacle dubs the Diaduct. Wall-mounting hardware is included. Advent's affordable Ruby (\$250 a pair) has a larger, 6½-inch woofer for enhanced bass extension. That, however, edges it over the 1-foot mark to a height of 15 inches.

Stylish Sound

While many of those drawn to smaller speakers are attracted by their performance-to-cost ratio, others find another facet of smallness equally important. Diminutive transducers lend themselves to innovative, visually unobtrusive, or simply interesting design. But there's no rule that says an adaptable, unusual-looking small speaker cannot also deliver excellent sound quality.

Definitive Technology's ProMonitor 100 (\$350 a pair) is a noteworthy example. This dramatically formed minispeaker has an enclosure constructed of PolyStone, a mineral-filled polymer that permits its unusual, compound-curve shape. (The geometry is said to have significant antiresonance benefits as well.) The integral stand converts to a wall-mounting bracket, and there's also a keyhole mount on the cabinet itself. The ProMonitor 100 has a 5¼-inch woofer and a 1-inch aluminum-dome tweeter. It's available in white or black. Definitive also offers two or four ProMonitor 100s in home-theater packages with a center speaker and a subwoofer.

The Polk Audio M5 (\$399 a pair) is characterized as "the go anywhere, do anything" loudspeaker. Designed for maximum placement flexibility, the unusual V-shaped enclosure is angled to permit corner, tabletop, shelf-top, or wall mounting with equal ease, all either vertically or horizontally. The M5's attractive form-follows-function cabinet design manages to accommodate a large 6½-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter. There's even an all-weather version, the AW/M5 (\$499 a pair).

Speaker giant Bose bills its Model 100 (\$199 a pair) as a "high-fidelity speaker you decorate with, instead of around." And despite a touch of the old hyperbole there, Bose's marketing guys may have a point. The understated, elegantly textured Model 100 is a real looker. Inside is a single 4½-inch Stardriver transducer, the product of several years of recent Bose research. This full-range driver doesn't need a crossover, yet it is said to yield smooth, wide-band sound suitable for stereo or



PSB's Alpha Mini (\$199 a pair) has a rated response of 38 Hz to 21 kHz ±3 dB. The low end of the Alpha Mite (\$169 a pair) is 72 Hz.



Paradigm's Titan (\$219 a pair) has a rated sensitivity of 90 dB and a frequency response of 75 Hz to 20 kHz ±2 dB.



The Boston Acoustics Micro90x (\$400 a pair) has a frequency-response rating of 120 Hz to 20 kHz ±3 dB and a sensitivity of 89 dB.



The Celestion MP-1 multipurpose speaker (\$299 a pair) can be mounted on a shelf, on a stand, or on a wall.



The Wharfedale Diamond 7.2 (\$350 a pair) is a two-way front-ported bookshelf speaker with a power-handling spec of 100 watts.



The Energy Take 2 (\$180 a pair) has a sensitivity rating of 88 dB and a power-handling capability of 15 to 100 watts.



The KEF Q-5 (\$350 a pair) can be mounted vertically or horizontally and is available finished in black, mahogany, or "video gray."



The NHT SuperOne-Xu (\$375 a pair) consists of a 6½-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter housed in a molded thermoplastic cabinet.

surround-sound reproduction. DCM's CX-007 (\$75 each), the smallest speaker in that firm's high-value CX series, displays a high-tech metal grille and incorporates self-resetting electronic circuits to protect against distortion or excessive input. Available in white or black, the littlest DCM barely exceeds 8 inches in height.

The Celestion MP-1 (\$299 a pair), with a 4½-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter, is designed as a multipurpose speaker, hence the model number. This understated mini has smoothly rounded edges and an elegant matte finish, and its ingeniously adaptable stand/bracket encourages flexible placement. Also qualifying for the high-style brigade is The Edge from Acoustic Research (\$280 a pair), with a 5¼-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter. The vented, molded cabinet incorporates a heavily sculpted, antidiffraction baffle surface. An even smaller version, The Edge Sequel (\$149 a pair), employs a 4½-inch woofer in a similar cabinet just under 8 inches on its longest side.

Like nearly all of the "stylish" small speakers mentioned, the Celestion and AR models that are described above are available in various sub/sat and home-theater groupings, packaged with a companion powered subwoofer or with matched center- or surround-channel speakers. And all of these speakers are magnetically shielded.

Home Theater Hideaways

Home theater and the small speaker are inextricably intertwined. Virtually all minispeaker makers offer one-carton systems incorporating multiples of one or more of their Lilliputian speakers for home-theater use. A great many of these packages are based on magnetically shielded minis that are also available separately, allowing you to assemble your home-cinema system as you go.

All of the following can be found packaged either way.

Canada's Energy Loudspeakers offers the Take 2 satellites (\$180 a pair). These minispeakers are truly miniature, about 4 x 7 x 5 inches, pairing a 3½-inch woofer and a ¾-inch aluminum-dome tweeter, but they have established a solid reputation for balanced, defined, dynamic sound. Energy boxes four Take 2 satellites with a center-channel speaker and a powered subwoofer as the Take 5 system for \$800. The Micro 90x from Boston Acoustics (\$400 a pair) is another well-regarded minispeaker that is available on its own or in a prepackaged home-theater system with a complementary center speaker and a powered sub. The two-way Micro 90x has an unusual die-cast aluminum enclosure that's said to eliminate cabinet resonance; its 1-inch aluminum-dome tweeter is equally high-tech, incorporating an acoustic filter/guard that's said to smooth high-end response while helping to reduce distortion.

Rock Solid Sounds, a division of the British maker B&W Loudspeakers, has produced a series of uniquely styled, high-performance minispeakers over the years. The Solid HCM1 (\$200 each) arrives in a swoopy black or white molded enclosure that was engineered to minimize coloration-inducing internal resonances from its 5-inch woofer and 1-inch tweeter. It comes with wall-mounting hardware and incorporates a nifty tabletop/shelf-top stand that can rotate 180 degrees so that the HCM1 can function equally well horizontally as a center-channel speaker on top of a TV.

Atlantic Technology is one manufacturer that owes its very existence to the audio/video revolution: all of its products are home-theater-oriented. The 251.1LR (\$399 a pair) is a verti-



The Edge from Acoustic Research (\$280 a pair) has a sensitivity rating of 91 dB and a frequency response rated as 70 Hz to 20 kHz ±3 dB. It's available in black or white.



The DCM CX-007 acoustic-suspension speaker (\$75 each) has a sensitivity rating of 88 dB. Available in either black or white, it features self-resetting protection circuitry.

cal two-way speaker with dual 4-inch woofers flanking a 3/4-inch tweeter; this narrow-baffle arrangement, called a D'Appolito array, is said to enhance imaging by reducing "smearing." Infinity's new L-MPS "multipurpose satellite" speaker (\$229 a pair) has a similar layout, with dual 3 1/2-inch drivers flanking a 1/2-inch dome tweeter. An acoustic lens is said to promote wide, smooth horizontal dispersion for home-theater coverage. The Infinity design also makes for a very narrow package: the L-MPS is under 5 inches wide and about 10 1/2 inches tall.

Audio Al Fresco

Around the world, Americans are famous (or notorious, depending on your viewpoint) for carrying outdoors activities that most cultures consider strictly indoor stuff. Music listening is one example, and speaker manufacturers have obliged with a new breed of "indoor/outdoor" models engineered to survive the rigors of life *al fresco*, whether that means on a suburban patio or in a penthouse roof garden. While such outdoorsy speakers include models that are camouflaged as rocks or potted plants, most all-weather designs are more conventional minispeakers intended for relatively sheltered locations, such as soffit-mounted under the eaves of a house or out on a covered balcony or a screened porch.

The Outdoor speaker from Cambridge SoundWorks (\$299 a pair) is a prime example of the breed, with components engineered for the elements: a sealed, mineral-filled polypropylene enclosure, an electroplated steel grille, and corrosion-resistant stainless-steel hardware and gold-plated connection terminals. The Outdoor includes both a threaded 1/4-inch socket mount and a keyhole slot, and it is engineered for higher than usual sensitivity to enable ade-



The Outdoor speaker from Cambridge SoundWorks (\$299 a pair) has a tightly sealed enclosure of inert, calcium-filled polypropylene and an electroplated steel grille.



Polk Audio's AW/M5 (\$499 a pair) features a rugged, sealed polymer cabinet that is UV-resistant and waterproof. Input terminals are gold-plated, and the grille is nonmetallic.

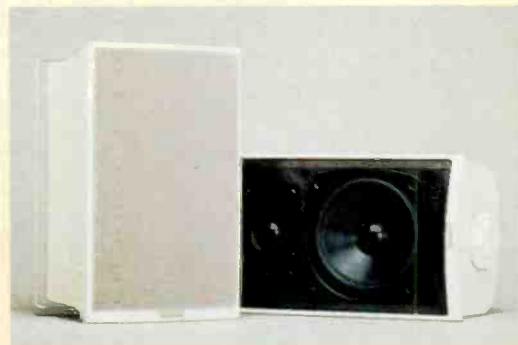
quate sound levels in unenclosed spaces. The Nomad Six outdoor speaker from Parasound (\$360 a pair) also employs stainless-steel hardware and gold-plated connectors; its enclosure is made of acoustically inert ABS and integrates a multidirectional mounting bracket. A ferrofluid-cooled 1-inch tweeter is paired with a weather-resistant, 5 1/4-inch polycarbonate woofer, and an integral bass-boost contour enhances perceived bass in open-air acoustics, which de-emphasize the bottom octaves.

AudioSource's indoor/outdoor design is the Project One (\$200 a pair), a stylish minispeaker with a 4-inch woofer and a 5/8-inch tweeter in a weather-resistant polycarbonate enclosure just 9 inches tall. A continuously adjustable gimbal-mount bracket is included. The Voyager outdoor speaker from Boston Acoustics (\$400 a pair) features an indestructible Lexan cabinet that helps make it fully immersible and even freezable. It combines ruggedized versions of the company's highly evolved 1-inch soft-dome tweeter and 5 1/4-inch co-polymer woofer, with stainless-steel hardware and a mounting bracket included. Bose offers an all-weather option in its Model 151 (\$279 a pair), an outdoor speaker that puts the firm's 4 1/2-inch Kevlar-cone full-range driver (derived from the famous Bose 901) into a 9 x 9 x 6-inch enclosure designed to resist moisture, heat, salt, and anything else life on land or sea might throw its way. Stainless-steel hardware and an aluminum grille are included.

It's clear that compact speakers are no longer exclusively for cramped quarters. Fine-sounding models are available in a wide variety of styles — guaranteeing that you'll be able to find one that will look right at home where you live. □



The Bose Model 151 outdoor speaker (\$279 a pair) has a weatherproof driver and stainless-steel grille and hardware.



Boston Acoustics' Voyager outdoor speaker (\$400 a pair) features a waterproof Lexan cabinet and watertight gaskets.



The Parasound Nomad Six outdoor speaker (\$360 a pair) has a rated frequency response of 48 Hz to 20 kHz ±3 dB, sensitivity of 89 dB.



The AudioSource Project 1 indoor/outdoor speaker (\$200 a pair) features a gimbal bracket that lets it be positioned at any angle.

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THE TOP TEN DVDS

BY RAD BENNETT

IF YOU ARE STILL THINKING about putting together a home-theater system, you're probably eyeing one of those new DVD players. And for good reason. Though laserdiscs still deliver fine picture and sound, even an average DVD can look as good as the best laserdisc, and the best DVDs are noticeably sharper. Movies on DVD are also offered at much lower prices than the laserdisc versions. And remember that, like combi-players, DVD players play audio CDs,

too. So if you're in the market for a new CD player, for a little more money you can have state-of-the-art video as well.

10 Hot Movies To Feed A New DVD Player

The full potential of DVD has yet to be realized, but some player features are already more or less standard. Most movie titles offer a clickable menu from which you can select different soundtrack languages and subtitles, various special features, and sometimes different versions of the film. Some DVDs include film-star biographies, production notes, trailers, documentaries, and more. Some even

offer alternate soundtracks with commentary tied to the image on screen, or a track that contains music only.

Though much of the focus has been on DVD's outstanding video characteristics, its movie-theater-quality sound is not to be underestimated. Only a small percentage of laserdiscs carry Dolby Digital soundtracks, but all DVDs offer it, often with 5.1 discrete channels (left and right front, center, and left and right surround, plus low-frequency-effects/subwoofer). The most important benefit, as I hear it, is greater clarity of the dialogue in the center channel, which no longer bleeds left, right, or rear the way it often does with analog Dolby Surround. Surround effects have better focus, too, and the overall sound field is cleaner and more natural. Far from noticing "more surround" in the DVDs auditioned for this article, I noticed more centered sounds in front.

PHOTOS BY DAN WAHNER



though when an effect was *intended* to be heard from the rear it was more precisely located. And Dolby Digital's discrete left and right surround channels yielded a sound field more in sync with what was happening on the screen. (Note that some DVDs sold in this country use Dolby Digital only for the primary — English — soundtrack, with any alternate soundtracks in other languages encoded in Dolby Surround, from which Dolby Pro Logic decoders can extract front left, center, and right channels and a single surround channel.)

If you've already made an investment in a DVD player, you know that there aren't yet as many titles as on laserdisc. But there are already more excellent DVDs than there were laserdiscs early in that format's history. There also aren't many music titles yet, but I hope studios will consider releasing more. DVD is tailor-made for opera and ballet. In the meantime, here are ten motion-picture-related DVDs that should hold your interest and enable you to get the very best performance out of your system.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

1993; color; one-sided; English, Dolby Digital 5.1 channels; French, Dolby Surround; Spanish or Korean subtitles: closed-captioned; letterbox (2.35:1 aspect ratio). 127 min. Rated R. COLUMBIA TRISTAR 52319 \$29.95 (in keep case; jewel box also available).



A suspenseful cat-and-mouse thriller starring Clint Eastwood as a Secret Service agent and John Malkovich as a psychotic assassin determined to kill the President. It was shot in 2.35:1 Panavision, the aspect ratio in which it is presented here. This ratio has caused a lot of problems for home video in the past. When a Panavision film is not presented as seen in the theater, so much of the picture is edited out that the result is not artistically valid. But when it's letterboxed to preserve the full width, there aren't enough scan lines for adequate detail, not even on laserdisc. DVD's increased horizontal resolution ameliorates the situation, for this movie is incredibly sharp and focused. There are a lot of long shots, and they struck me as the sharpest I've seen on *any* optically read disc.

Seeing this DVD is like observing a

road sign on the way to digital TV. The Dolby Digital soundtrack is impressive, but it's curious that this DVD's default setting is Dolby Surround rather than Dolby Digital, which you have to select in the menu as an option. (The releases from Columbia TriStar are the only ones I've seen that do this. All others have had Dolby Digital only for the English soundtrack, and it's automatically remixed to Dolby Surround if the regular stereo output jacks are used.) In sum, *In the Line of Fire* is a DVD of demonstration caliber.

THE LOST WORLD

1925; b&w with color tints; one-sided; Dolby Digital 2.1 stereo soundtrack with music and effects, alternate soundtrack with music only; extensive supplemental material including original trailer, excerpts from earlier Willis O'Brien films, and a large still-frame archive. Approximately 65 min (feature only). Not rated. LUMIVISION DVD0897 \$24.95.

The granddaddy of all dinosaur flicks, this silent masterpiece looks better than ever on DVD. The story, from Arthur Conan Doyle, is about an expedition that discovers a remote region of the Amazon where dinosaurs still roam; one of these is brought back to London, where it predictably runs amuck and destroys buildings. Even though the Lumivision laserdisc version was excellent, the color tints on the DVD are so pure that they seem to allow much more video detail to emerge. The synthesizer score composed for this classic sounds terrific, with more solid bass than on laserdisc. If you think of movies made before 1950 as antiquated, this absorbing and highly entertaining title could very well change your mind.

In "A Laserdisc Starter Set" back in April 1994, I said the laserdisc version gave players a real special-effects workout. The DVD does the same, though I did notice a few quirky encoding-related artifacts that need explanation. There are two soundtracks,



one with just the modern score, one with the score plus sound effects, which I found distracting. But only Track 1 is active for the supplements, and if you watch the movie using Track 2 you'll have to switch manually to Track 1 for these extras. Also, the still-frame archive is not accessed with a

still-frame button, as you might expect, but via an on-screen menu, which lets you search backward as well as forward. These are small annoyances compared with the beauty and thrill of seeing a film made seventy-two years ago living today in something so close to its original splendor.

MICHAEL COLLINS

1996; color; two-sided; English, Dolby Digital 5.1 channels; French, Dolby Surround; English, French, or Spanish subtitles: closed-captioned; letterbox (1.85:1 aspect ratio); includes production notes, trailer, and *South Bank Show* documentary with director Neil Jordan and footage of the real Michael Collins. Feature, 133 min; documentary, 52 min. Rated R. WARNER HOME VIDEO 14205 \$24.95.

This DVD has been done as a two-sided rather than dual-layer disc, so it must be turned over to view the whole movie. But it boasts a picture that is so filmlike in overall tone and detail that it must stand as one of the best film transfers in the optical video catalog, one that makes even the excellent laserdisc look



as if it had been shot through a scrim. Walls, streets, wooden benches, even smoke all have apparent texture. Also note that the credits' white on black letters are all rock solid, with

no distracting bloom or blur.

This DVD is also laden with special features. Chief among these, besides production notes and a trailer, is a documentary on the real Irish patriot, Michael Collins. Produced for British TV's *South Bank Show*, it features Neil Jordan, the director of the movie. These 51 minutes are quite a bonus, as the show is one of the best "making of" featurettes I've seen. Jordan explains why it was necessary to alter some of history's facts in order to make a successful movie, and he sheds light on the process of translating a real life into a film biography. The documentary is available only on the DVD, not the laserdisc, which costs \$15 more. That makes the DVD version quite a bargain.

THE PLAYER

1992; color; two-sided; English, Dolby Digital 5.1 channels; French, Dolby Surround; alternate soundtrack with commentary by director Robert Altman and screenwriter Michael Tolkin;

English, French, or Spanish subtitles: closed-captioned; letterbox (1.85:1 aspect ratio); trailer and extensive supplements, including a menu of cameo performances. Approximately 124 min. Rated R. NEW LINE VIDEO N4032 \$24.95.

Robert Altman's clever allegorical satire of Hollywood is presented full length on Side 1 of this feature-laden DVD, which shows off many of the possibilities of the format in presenting "more than just the movie!" Besides the remixed Dolby Digital soundtrack, Side 1 also contains an alternate audio track in which Altman and screenwriter Michael Tolkin discuss the film and the novel on which it was based. And there's a special menu that features the more than fifty name actors who grace this Tinseltown movie. Click on an image in the menu, and almost instantly you'll be transported to the scene in the film where the actor appears; click on a different line of the menu, and you'll get a list of the other films in which he or she has starred. When you're finally ready to move on to Side 2, you'll find that it contains a 17-minute documentary discussion with Altman plus five deleted scenes and a theatrical trailer. That's a whopping amount of information for a disc priced at just \$24.50. *The Player* is one of the most outrageous bargains in the infant DVD catalog.



POLTERGEIST

1982; color; two-sided; English, Dolby Digital 5.1 channels; French and Spanish, Dolby Surround; English, French, or Spanish subtitles; closed-captioned; trailer;

letterbox (2.35:1 aspect ratio) or pan-and-scan. 114 min. Rated PG. MGM/UA 906039 \$24.95.

Both a cult and a mainstream favorite, this story of a housing-development family that's terrorized by demons has been made available three times on laserdisc, but none of those versions can hold a candle to this clear, sharp DVD. Some of the film takes place in darkness or shadow, and now you can easily see details that were quite obscure in earlier transfers. Overall, this film and *In the Line of Fire* make it clear that DVD and the 2.35:1 aspect ratio are a match made in heaven. Laserdisc fans have always

rightly demanded the anamorphic letterbox for artistic reasons, but that reduces the number of scan lines so much that the crispness of the image suffers. But thanks to DVD's greater horizontal resolution, movie fans can now have their cake and eat it, too. Take the opening scene here, where four kids sitting on a curb pursue a man on his bike with remote-controlled toy cars. The anamorphic frame is necessary to capture all four youngsters (the pan-and-scan version cuts it down to three), but in past letterbox transfers they seemed to be merely a group of kids. The DVD is so sharp that each kid emerges as a separate personality *within* the group. Of course, all of the neat monster visual effects are sharp as a tack, too, but it is the human elements that keep this movie from being just another genre flick. We get to know and care about the characters, and when they are threatened, we feel it deeply.

The remixed sound is cleaner than ever. All of the special surround effects seem to be coming from the correct places, while dialogue emerges up front with crystalline clarity. This is one of those double-sided DVDs that has the letterbox version on one side, the pan-and-scan on the other, but the 2.35:1 image is so good that it's unlikely you'll ever watch the version "formatted to fit your TV" at all.

THE ROAD WARRIOR

1981; color; two-sided; English, Dolby Digital 5.1 channels; French, Dolby Surround; English, French, or Spanish subtitles; closed-captioned; trailer; letterbox (2.35:1 aspect ratio) and pan-and-scan. 95 min. Rated R. WARNER HOME VIDEO 11181 \$24.95.

Arguably the best of the *Mad Max* series, this action-adventure yarn set in an apocalyptic retrograde S&M world, where possession of gasoline gives power, is loaded with high-energy sights and sounds. The camera shots of all the high-speed chase stunts are exemplary, and Brian May's score is melded to the motorized sound effects as if the Foley and music tracks were one. The DVD format takes to the 2.35:1 aspect ratio like a duck to water, crisply delineating every scene, and the Dolby Digital soundtrack provides clear-cut front-to-back separation.



The disc is demo caliber. The movie opens with a 1.33:1 image taking the center of the Panavision space for scenes from the first *Mad Max* movie, with a mono soundtrack of narration and music that sounds as if it were recorded in the 1950s. But the black-and-white images are razor-sharp, even sharper than in the average full-frame picture. As the section ends, the surround and low-frequency-effects channels kick in with the sound of Max's car going full throttle, and the screen opens to 2.35:1. It's a pretty heady experience, and from there on the movie never lets up till the closing credits. Take the R rating seriously if you have kids, but have a good time.



SEVEN

1995; color; two-sided; English, Dolby Digital 5.1 channels; French, Dolby Surround; English, French, or Spanish subtitles; closed-captioned; letterbox (2.35:1

aspect ratio). 127 min. Rated R. NEW LINE VIDEO N4381 \$24.95.

Picky fans are liable to fault this choice, for it splits a 127-minute movie between two sides. And it is true that DVD promised something laserdisc could not deliver: no side breaks except on movies long enough to have intermissions that would provide natural stopping points. But the single-side, dual-layer approach, allowing more than 133 minutes per side, seems hard to come by, and the producers obviously felt that the complex images of *Seven* needed more room for the MPEG video-compression scheme to work correctly. I'm willing to accept that decision because this is one of the best-looking DVDs of all. Watching it, I was constantly aware of just how much it looks like a film. There's a total absence of video noise, and details are constantly leaping out. The crinkled glass on office doors seems to have touchable texture, as does Brad Pitt's beard stubble; headlines on newspapers at a newsstand are legible without strain. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is used intelligently, and it's transferred without a hitch, with a good low-frequency-effects channel used sparingly to add welcome low-frequency punch at key points in the story. Extras are unusually skimpy for New Line, just some background biographical information. The movie's the thing here, but it's

delivered in such high quality that it holds its own without supplemental material.



SHORT CINEMA JOURNAL

Invention; Mr. Resistor; The Big Story; Some Folks Call It a Sling Blade; Black Rider; Trouble; Michael Apted Interview; Baraka (excerpt);

The Unfamiliar Place; Goreville; Henry Rollins — Easter Sunday in NYC; John Lee Hooker — Performance & Interview; Quisling & Tsai; Shape Without Form.

1997; color & b&w; one-sided; Dolby Digital 5.1 channels with many auxiliary soundtracks and one alternate video track; some letterbox. 137 min. Not rated. POLYGRAM 440 046 565 \$29.95.

Probably the most imaginative DVD I've seen, *Short Cinema Journal* presents a number of short subjects of different types, ranging from *Some Folks Call It a Sling Blade* (later reshot and expanded as the opening scene of *Sling Blade*) to a dynamite commercial for GM's electric car. There are quite a few alternate audio tracks, varying aspect ratios, and the only example so far of an alternate video track: in *The Big Story*, a 3-D animation in which all the characters are Kirk Douglas, you can switch to Video 2 and obtain, right in sequence, the animated pencil-sketch study for the finished film.

Far from being a gimmick, however, this compilation presents some really neat little films in excellent video and Dolby Digital audio, which ranges from two to six discrete channels. The Short Cinema Journal Corporation hopes to make its DVD a monthly video "magazine," with the second issue due out by the time you read this. PolyGram will distribute it in stores, but you can also subscribe by mail. Short Cinema Journal plans to package the discs differently from PolyGram, which has opted to use the poorly designed Laserfile slide case, which can scratch discs if handled carelessly.



SINGIN' IN THE RAIN

1951; color; one-sided; English. Dolby Digital 5.1 mono/stereo; French and Spanish, 2.1-channel mono; English, French, or Spanish

subtitles; closed-captioned. 103 min. Rated G. MGM/UA 906262 \$24.95.

ALTERNATE TAKES

In case you can't find some of the ten recommended DVDs, or simply aren't interested in some of them, here are ten alternate choices that rank alongside those on my main list. Besides, since DVD prices are so low, you could buy all twenty, and you won't have to rob a credit union or take out a second mortgage to do it. — R.B.

THE ARRIVAL

LIVE VIDEO 60446 \$24.98

THE EXORCIST

WARNER HOME VIDEO 1007 \$24.95

FARGO

POLYGRAM 800 638 693 \$29.95

FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL

POLYGRAM 800 631 769 \$29.95

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD: THX SPECIAL EDITION

ELITE EE1116 \$29.95

ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL: WIDESCREEN SPECIAL EDITION

LUMIVISION DVD 0797 \$29.95

RUMBLE IN THE BRONX

NEW LINE VIDEO N4410 \$24.95

SPACE JAM

WARNER HOME VIDEO 16400 \$24.95

TOTAL RECALL

LIVE VIDEO 60439 \$24.95

THE WIZARD OF OZ

MGM/UA 906044 \$24.95

There have been at least three laser-disc versions of this classic movie, but none of them is as classy as this DVD. The main thing you'll notice is the outrageous colors, ranging all the way from the hot pinks of the chorus line in "All I Do Is Dream of You" to the screaming bright green of Cyd Charisse's dress against a garish red background in the big "Broadway Melody" production number to the "Beautiful Girls" fashion show, in which elegant models show off clothing using just about every color under the sun. Analog video just can't handle all that with the ease of DVD, which makes it look like it does in the movie

theater. As for detail, it seems like you can count every raindrop in the famous title-song sequence.

The English soundtrack is good cleaned-up mono, with some discrete stereo fed to the left/right front and surround speakers in musical numbers. Since MGM recorded its major musicals using many different sound "stems" for different sections of the orchestra, it's possible to do this kind of reconstruction without having it sound artificial. All in all, this DVD is, by itself, reason enough to investigate the medium. I hope MGM is planning on eventually presenting its whole catalog of fabulous musicals in the DVD format. At press time *Brigadoon* was already out, and *Showboat* was promised for Christmas.

STRANGERS ON A TRAIN

1951; b&w; two-sided; U.S. and British prints; English and French Dolby Digital 1.1-channel mono; English.

French, or Spanish subtitles;

closed-captioned. U.S. print, 101 min. not rated;

British, 103 min, rated PG. WARNER HOME

VIDEO 15324 \$24.95.



It is perhaps sufficient to say that Alfred Hitchcock's movie of Patricia Highsmith's novel *Strangers on a Train* is one of the best suspense thrillers ever made. Two men meet on a train, and one suggests to the other that they perpetrate murders for each other of people they don't care for. One thinks it a joke, but the other goes through with it, having planned things way ahead. There were two versions of this movie, and for DVD it has received not one but two crackerjack transfers. The version released in the U.K. has extra footage that makes the malevolent character even more so while more clearly revealing his homosexuality. What a dandy idea to present each version complete on a DVD side in beautiful, high-contrast black-and-white. The jacket notes indicate which scenes were expanded so that you can follow the changes, and some brief but informative program notes give more detail. Two movies for \$12.50 each is really an extraordinary value for your dollar.

Rad Bennett is editor and publisher of The Laser Disc Gazette, a bimonthly newsletter that features reviews of DVDs, laserdiscs, and CDs.

KEF SOUNDRAVES

KEF RDM *one* SPEAKER

As reviewed in

AUDIO

September 1997

Some notable quotes from Edward M. Long in *Audio's* September issue:

"...KEF has gained an enviable reputation for producing excellent loudspeakers."

"...clear, precise imaging."

"The RDM *one* reminds me of the classic BBC LS3/5a, but with deeper bass and higher output."

"...the KEF RDM *ones* are an excellent value—and very good looking, too."



Designed by the same engineers as our legendary Reference Series, the RDM *one*

features KEF's patented Uni-Q®

technology. Uni-Q places the tweeter at the exact acoustic center of the woofer cone to create a single point source for the entire frequency range—the ideal to which all speakers aspire—producing a flawless soundstage over a much wider listening area. Whether on a bookshelf or stand, the RDM *one* no longer confines you to sitting in a central sweet spot to enjoy exceptional performance. Audition

them for yourself by contacting us for the name of the authorized KEF dealer nearest you. Ask for a full reprint of the RDM *one* review when you call.

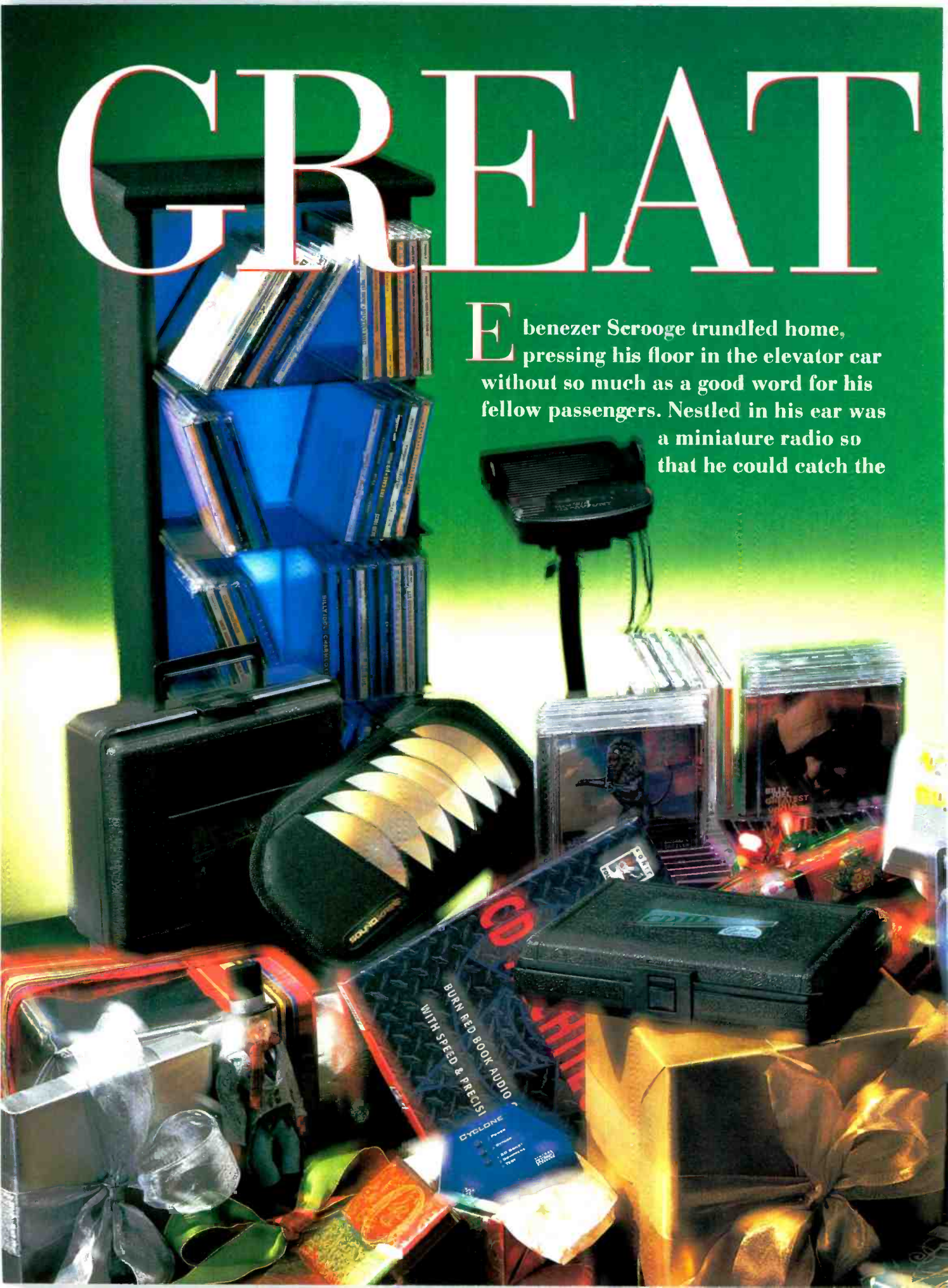


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CIRCLE NO. 27 ON READER SERVICE CARD

GREAT

Ebenezer Scrooge trundled home, pressing his floor in the elevator car without so much as a good word for his fellow passengers. Nestled in his ear was a miniature radio so that he could catch the



GIFTS

closing markets. At a mere fraction of an ounce, ATC's FMSounds radio (\$30) did not weigh heavily upon his soul and protected at least one ear from the rabble of humanity. His stocks were as strong as the tiny radio's reception

— and its 14-hour lithium battery. Reaching for the volume switch, he accidentally pressed the scan-tuning button, and the sound of Marley filled his ear. He hastily pressed the button again to tune in another station.

By Rich Warren



As Scrooge approached his condo, the IBM Home Director (\$79) brought up the lights in a magical sort of way. Scrooge cackled every time this happened, he was so pleased with how easily he had installed the system. Why, he didn't even need to call IBM's 24-hour support line. And he admired Big Blue for offering free help for only 60 days — a company after his own heart. Scrooge didn't own an IBM PC (he was too cheap even to buy an Aptiva, which comes bundled with a Home Director), so he bought the stand-alone starter kit. After plugging the PC Connection Module into a wall outlet, he ran the supplied cable to his clone PC's serial port and popped in the CD-ROM to load the software. Then he plugged his TV, stereo, coffee pot, and several other small appliances and lamps into special modules — one per device — that were in turn plugged into electrical outlets. (Since the starter kit came with only one lamp and one appliance module, Scrooge begrudgingly paid \$15 apiece for extra lamp modules and \$17 apiece for extra appliance modules.)

Scrooge relished the thought that he could program his PC to control his lights and appliances automatically *or* use the supplied wireless remote control to turn them on and off — all without having to run any extra wires. The remote even operated his TV and VCR. And his voice-activation software gave him infinite pleasure. He programmed it to turn on the lights when he said "Bah!" and off when he said "Humbug!"

Preparing to retire for the evening, Scrooge pressed the play button on his CD player, and the voice of Marley wailing reggae again filled his ears. The sound took him aback — he knew Marley was dead. Suddenly the TV clicked on, and Marley appeared on the screen, this time speaking directly to Scrooge. His voice hovered in the room like a sonic hologram. Scrooge had forgotten all about the VLS Cyclone 3D virtual surround processor (\$100) that his nephew Fred had installed.

Marley predicted that three ghosts would visit. Scrooge retorted: "I don't get ghosts, I have DSS!" Marley warned him to pick up the beat and get



- a** ATC's FMSounds ear radio (\$30); 800-417-2346
- b** Panasonic RQ-SW70 Shock Wave personal stereo (\$120); 800-222-4213
- c** Tribute C25 video adaptor cable (\$100); 800-521-1596
- d** IBM Home Director home-automation kit (\$79); 800-426-7917
- e** Scosche SoundKase VVS-12 CD holder (\$17); 800-621-3695

with the season, prompting Scrooge to press the off button on his Sole Control SC-555 remote (\$30). Marley's image collapsed into a dot at the center of the screen, although his voice still seemed to hover there with concert-hall ambience.

"Bah, humbug," grumbled Scrooge, accidentally turning lights on and off as he went in search of his Caig ProGold (K-PAV50) Audio/Video Pro Maintenance Kit (\$76). He muttered that the whole affair must be the result of a dirty connector or a static charge on the TV screen. Opening the latch on the black plastic storage box, Scrooge selected the OpticALL antistatic cleaner and sprayed the screen, cleaning it with one of the enclosed nonscratch cloths. Then he sprayed some ProGold G5 conditioning treatment and cleaner on the system's connectors and switches, using the special nylon brushes to reach the tight spots.

While he was at it, he also cleaned the tape heads in his boombox with the kit's ultrapure isopropyl alcohol and plastic-handled foam swabs. Finally, he used CaiLube MCL to relubricate the contact surfaces. Scrooge didn't use the entire arsenal in the Caig kit, but he was sure he had solved the problem. If it worked for Boeing, Dolby, Hewlett-Packard, and Xerox, it should do the trick for him, too.

Scrooge decided to take a closer look at the Cyclone 3D processor, barely larger than a deck of cards, that was sitting on top of his TV. He had been too cheap to buy a real surround-sound speaker system, but his nephew assured him that the Cyclone would deliver a delightful surround illusion, creating five virtual speakers from a single pair of real speakers. (It uses a modified version of the Toltec circuitry that VLS developed for its Auri surround-sound headphone processor.) Scrooge particularly liked the automatic volume control that limits dynamic range for late-night home theater. He liked limiting things. So Marley hadn't really been there wailing in the room after all — it was just the Cyclone 3D.

Scrooge dozed off with the Sole Control in his hand, only to wake with a start when all of his digital clocks chirped and beeped once. A ghostly blue light filled the room. "Bah, humbug," Scrooge bellowed. It was just the light coming from his new Sm'art

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Designs CD Lites CD-100 M rack (\$60), which concealed a blue-cloaked fluorescent light behind the white diffuser that forms its back panel. The blue light cast an otherworldly glow as it traveled through the edges of the sixty-five CD jewel boxes Scrooge had carefully placed on the rack's five shelves. The waist-high rack added a bit of class to Scrooge's otherwise spartan digs. He enjoyed having it now, although he remembered that the "assembly required" part would have tried even Bob Cratchit's good will, since the directions in the box failed to match the product. Scrooge made a note to ask the company for a different color filter — blue just seemed too eerie.

Out of the corner of his eye, Scrooge noticed that his other CD holder — the DiscDisk (\$70) from Epic Design Studios — was turning. Forty-four of his favorite CDs stood upright on the elegant lazy-susan-style holder made of solid aluminum. Someone had given it to him; he would never buy anything that exquisite on his own. He also knew it would not spin by itself (he always felt a secret thrill spinning it and admiring his CD collection).

The TV popped back on, and the Ghost of Christmas Past beckoned him. Scrooge did not remember subscribing to this particular channel. . . . The ghost carried the record of Scrooge's life on DVDs and CDs stored smartly in a Scosche SoundKase SKN-12 Executive CD Notebook (\$30). The black nylon fold-over case held twelve discs and had compartments for a portable CD player, headphones, a notepad, and even a few pens. All the better for notes on his life.

Scrooge noticed that his name and social-security number were printed in the area around the spindle hole of each disc. He wondered how the ghost had managed that. The spirit smiled and held up the CD ID kit (\$50) from Epic Design Studios, which contains a special disc holder, a stamp pad, indelible ink, and a stamper. The ghost had returned the enclosed postcard to Epic with what he wanted the stanip to say, and he received a customized stamper back in the mail. With a flick



f Sm'art Designs CD-100 M CD rack (\$60); 310-515-5444

g Woods TV Game Surge Protector (\$20); 800-428-6168

h Scosche SoundKase SKN-12 CD notebook (\$30); 800-621-3695

i Epic Design's DiscDisk CD holder (\$70); 800-343-3742

j Caig ProGold K-PAV50 A/V maintenance kit (\$76); 619-451-1799

of the wrist, he could permanently label the discs so that no spirit could mistake them for some other poor soul's.

The ghost pulled a disc from the SoundKase notebook and slipped it into Scrooge's CD player. Scrooge heard how as a child he had played video games but never bothered with a surge protector, and how he had cried when his game player and TV died during that horrendous thunderstorm. The ghost showed him the Woods TV Game Surge Protector (\$20). The UL-approved device had six outlets and was designed to accommodate two of those large "power brick" AC adaptors of the kind used on video-game systems. Scrooge's childhood meltdown didn't have to happen the way it did.

At the wink of an LED, Scrooge's VCR commenced playback at 2 o'clock. The jovial Spirit of Christmas Present invited him to party. They jumped into the spirit's Maserati, where they enjoyed music provided by a portable CD player supported by Arkon's Sound Feeder SF345 CD Mount (\$50). Secured to the car's floor was a sturdy yet flexible metal gooseneck that supported the thick Gripmatic mounting platform; a pair of spring-loaded, ratchet-adjusted ears held the player firmly in place. The platform also had a built-in DC power adaptor, which plugged into the car's cigarette lighter, and an FM modulator that "broadcast" the CD signal over the car's FM radio. The spirit used the SoundKase VVS-12 CD Visor Organizer (\$17) to keep a dozen discs in easy reach.

Scrooge was so impressed with the CD-player mount and visor holder that he failed to notice they were cruising 500 feet above the pavement. When he finally looked down, he wished he still had the Sole Control remote in his hand. Since it came preprogrammed with 621 codes and was designed to control five components, he figured it just might work on this spirit.

At the stroke of 3 o'clock the breadmaker, microwave, and coffeemaker all started chiming at once. Scrooge stumbled out of bed, clutching the Sole Control. He had always liked its differently shaped and colored keys, which never left a doubt about the function of each button. Before him beckoned the ominous Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come. Scrooge wondered if it might show him HDTV or digital ra-



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Al Griffin, *Home Theater*, December '96

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Edward J. Foster, *Audio*, March '97

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Thomas J. Norton,
Stereophile Guide to Home Theater, Fall '97

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dio, but some things are beyond even the power of spirits.

First, the spirit reminded Scrooge that he really should do something about that clumsy video switcher the satellite TV installer left him. Because his DSS receiver used an S-video cable and his cheap VCR used a composite-video cable, he was forever fumbling with his Sole Control to find the right TV inputs. Scrooge swore that he'd try Tributaries' new Tribute C2S cable (\$100), which passively converts composite-video signals to S-video so that he could use S-video connections throughout his system. The barrel of the cable's RCA-jack end even contains luminance (Y) and chroma (C) adjustments, so he could tweak the video performance for a ghost-free picture.

The spirit sat before a PC creating jewel-box liners and disc labels. As Scrooge strained to read what was shown on the screen, labels began spilling from the color ink-jet printer, even if they were mostly black: "Ebenezer Scrooge R.I.P." The spirit's bony fingers created the labels effortlessly using Neato's CD Labeler Kit (\$80). First it loaded the supplied software templates onto the PC (spirits of doom always use PCs, though Neato's software can also run on Macs), and then it used the design software to create spiffy labels that were guaranteed to unnerve Scrooge. In all, there were sixty-six background images to choose from.

The spirit loaded the printer with label sheets and issued the print command. It then used the supplied label applicator to position the custom adhesive-backed labels onto the discs — at last, a way to give home-recorded CDs a professional look. Scrooge begged the spirit to let him at the PC so that he could design a different label for the CD of his life. But the spirit vanished, and Scrooge awoke the next morning in a cold sweat, still clutching the Sole Control.

Scrooge noticed that the spirits had left him a gift. Loaded on his PC was Sonic Foundry's CD Architect audio-recording program, including the Sound Forge XP digital audio editor (\$395). With this he could edit the audio rec-

ord of his existence with the power and versatility formerly enjoyed only by big-budget recording studios. He could be a CD-making pro and still have money left over for charity. He could view every bellow, every whimper, and every humbug on screen and edit out the cheap remarks. He could clean up some of his harsher comments, maybe even add a little reverb to his personality. Then, with only a few mouse clicks, he could burn in new audio CDs on his computer's CD-R drive. Scrooge, who had never edited an audio track in his life, let alone recorded his own CDs, was humming away by the time the first morning church bells sounded. He could and would reform his life and the way it sounded.

Donning his sweatsuit, Scrooge grabbed his Panasonic RQ-SW70 Shock Wave personal radio/cassette player (\$120) and headed out the door for a morning jog. The player's tough rubberized case repelled the light snow.

Headphones in place, he pressed play, and now he was really jammin' with Marley. The Virtual Motion Sound System headphones delivered more than sound; they actually vibrated with the music, a real head-banger. He tried all of the twenty radio-station presets, and every one was playing

reggae Christmas carols, except the one that was playing reggae Hanukkah songs.

Scrooge accosted the first youth he saw on the street and asked if the DVD player was still in the window of the stereo salon down the street. He must buy it and have it delivered to his nephew Fred as a surprise. He also purchased duplicates of all his favorite toys for Bob Cratchit and his large family, including another Sole Control remote, a Home Director, a Cyclone 3D processor, and all of those nifty things the spirits had shown him. They would make great Christmas presents. Scrooge just couldn't wait to see Tiny Tim hopping around with an FM-Sounds radio in his ear. At work Scrooge would finally let Bob have his own Sole Control, and access to the Home Director to boot. And Scrooge was a man of his word. He learned to keep Christmas in his heart, a home theater in his living room, and plenty of spare batteries in a cool, dry place. □



- k** Arkon Sound Feeder SF345 car CD mount (\$50); 818-358-1133
- l** VLS's Cyclone 3D virtual surround processor (\$100); 888-486-5832
- m** Recoton Sole Control SC-555 remote (\$30); 800-223-6009
- n** Neato CD Labeler Kit (\$80); 800-984-9800
- o** SonicFoundry CD Architect program (\$395); 608-256-3133
- p** Epic Design's CD ID system (\$50); 800-343-3742

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—D.B. Keele, Jr. on the new Celestion A3, *Audio* August 1997

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New Beginnings

For almost half of his 40-year life, Steve Wright of Loveland, Ohio, dreamed of building a home theater. He finally got his chance when he moved into a new house with a basement that was just waiting to be turned into one. He “finished” his 550-square-foot home theater earlier this year, but he admits that it will probably never *truly* be finished — and he’s already planning to add new components. However, Wright does believe that his home theater is a success. “I was happy with its performance and the way it looked,” he says, “but I wasn’t really going to consider

it a success unless it was featured in ‘Systems.’”

Wright gives some of the credit for his successful home theater to STEREO REVIEW. “The magazine was not only an inspiration for building the room but also helped keep the dream alive. I looked at other ‘Systems’ features many times to get ideas from other readers,” he says.

The most striking feature of his home theater is its cabinetry, built by Don Justice Custom Cabinetry of Cincinnati. The center unit backs into one corner of his basement and holds his 50-inch Pioneer rear-projection TV at a 45-degree angle. Two adjoining

“wings” extend onto the side walls. The TV sits on the floor, but the wood frame that surrounds it makes it look as if the TV and cabinet were manufactured together.

Flanking the screen on three sides are speakers from Atlantic Technology’s System 250.1. At left and right are Model 251.1 LR’s; above the screen is the Model 253.1 C center-channel speaker. The speakers aren’t particularly large — the LR’s measure only about 6 x 13 x 8½ inches — but you’d never know it by looking. They are installed behind custom grilles that match the screen size perfectly. (The grille panels can be opened and the extra



PHOTOS BY D. R. GOFF/QUICKSILVER PHOTOGRAPHY



space behind can be used for storage.) The three speakers share the same drivers, with two 4-inch polypropylene-cone woofers and a 3/4-inch dome tweeter in each one. Both models are sealed-box (acoustic-suspension) designs, though the center speaker has a tilting base, so that it can be aimed at the listening position, and a rear-panel timbre-matching control.

The surround speakers are a pair of Atlantic Technology Model 254.1 speakers, which Wright had mounted in the ceiling by using the optional ceiling-mounting kit. These full-range speakers (rated for 80 Hz to 20 kHz ± 3 dB) are also part of the System 250.1 and were purchased in anticipation of an upgrade to Dolby Digital, with its discrete full-range surround channels. The 254.1 is a two-way design with two 4-inch polypropylene woofers and a 3/4-inch dome tweeter.

Augmenting the sound from the five front and surround speakers is a Model 262 PBM powered subwoofer, which features an internal 150-watt amplifier and a 12-inch polypropylene driver with a low-pass filter variable from 60 to 125 Hz. Its frequency response is rated as 35 to 180 Hz ± 3 dB. The subwoofer is placed along one wall of the basement, just off the right wing of the cabinet.

Wright is quite pleased with the System 250.1 speakers. "They're fantastic for home theater," he brags. "I might not have picked them for a music-only system, but in my setup they can't be beat."

The electronic components are located in a glass-fronted cabinet to the right of the TV. There is a Sony STR-GA8ES A/V receiver with five channels of amplification. It delivers a rated 120 watts each to the three front speakers and 50 watts each to the two

surrounds. Also in that cabinet are a Yamaha CDX-730 CD player, a Yamaha K-640 cassette deck, and a Technics SL-D20 turntable. Wright splits his music between CDs, cassettes, and LPs, with about 500 of each. His video source is a JVC S-VHS VCR.

Knowing that the system would be installed in a basement that it shares with a play area for his kids, Wright took a couple of extra precautions. First, he made sure that the equipment



was mounted high enough to be out of reach of the children. Also, the subwoofer wiring was installed before the drywall went up to avoid any cable runs across the floor. He didn't want to keep the kids away from good music, though, so he installed Niles CM-76 speakers in the ceiling on their side of the basement.

Wright has left plenty of room for storage and expansion — he's got an entire empty equipment cabinet just waiting for new gear. A DVD player is next on his list. He's still watching the rollout and hoping that Paramount jumps on the bandwagon and releases

DVDs of the *Star Trek* movies, which you can tell are his favorites just by looking around the room. A digital satellite receiver is also on his wish list.

Wright's surround-sound enjoyment isn't limited to his home theater. In the master bedroom is the smallest of his three A/V systems, comprising a Yamaha AX-500U integrated two-channel amplifier and TX-500U tuner, a Fisher CAV-875A surround-sound amplifier, and two flush-mounted Russound SP-610 in-wall speakers for the front, two wall-mounted Bose 101 speakers for the rear (there is no center speaker), and a 25-inch JVC video monitor. The Yamaha amplifier also drives two Bose 201 bookshelf speakers in the office and two Niles CM-76 ceiling speakers in the master bath.

His third system, in the great room, is built around a Sony GX69ES receiver driving two flush-mounted Russound SP-610 in-wall speakers and a Bose Video Monitor in front, two Russound SP-502 in-walls in the rear, and an a/d/s MS1 powered subwoofer. The receiver also drives in-wall and ceiling speakers in his kitchen, dining room, and living room and out on his deck.



Throughout the house, each listening area has its own volume control, a Russound ALT-2 RLC.

As you might have already guessed, there's plenty of music listening going on at the Wright house. Steve is a rock-and-roll fan. His wife, Laura, prefers country. Contemporary jazz — from Bob James, Lee Ritenour, and David Sanborn — is something they both agree on. But the favorite listening time seems to be Sunday morning, when Wright loads his Sony CDP-525 CD changer with classical music and relaxes with the Sunday paper.

— Brian C. Fenton



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POPULAR

AC/DC Bonfire

Elektra (four CDs, \$70). A memorial to original lead singer Bon Scott, focusing on the band's early years and including rare material — as well as the entire *Back in Black*, the 1980 "tribute" to Scott with successor Brian Johnson.

THE BEACH BOYS

The Pet Sounds Sessions

EMI/Capitol Entertainment Properties (four CDs). Announced last year, finally released this year: multiple versions of the classic 1966 album's thirteen tracks, featuring the first true stereo mixes.

RAY CHARLES Genius & Soul:

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Rhino (five CDs, \$70). The first compilation that spans his entire recording career, from 1949 to 1993. The eighty-page book offers several essays and an exhaustive discography.

CREAM Those Were the Days

Polydor/Chronicles (four CDs, \$60). All studio recordings from *Fresh Cream*, *Disraeli Gears*, *Wheels of Fire*, and *Goodbye*. Add to that the singles, nearly every official live track, unreleased studio/concert tapes, and unpublished photos.

THE DOORS Box Set

Elektra (four CDs, \$70). Three discs are filled with demos and live recordings, most of them previously unreleased. The fourth disc has fifteen "Band Favorites" from the studio, five each chosen by John Densmore, Robby Krieger, and Ray Manzarek. The book includes their track-by-track commentary.

SIMON AND GARFUNKEL

Old Friends

Columbia/Legacy (three CDs, \$50). All the singles, the major album cuts, and fifteen newly issued tracks: two demos, three unearthed studio recordings, and ten live performances. Remastered, for

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PETER TOSH Honorary Citizen

Columbia/Legacy (three CDs, \$45). On the tenth anniversary of his murder, the reggae star is memorialized on one disc each of Jamaican singles (including titles by the Wailers), unreleased live recordings, and "Hits & Classic Album Cuts."

BEG, SCREAM & SHOUT!

The Big Ol' Box of '60s Soul

Rhino (six CDs, \$100). Resting in their special sleeves and nestled in their carrying case, the CDs resemble the 7-inch singles of yore. You also get trading cards for all of the 144 artists, who include James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, Etta James, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, Carla Thomas, Irma Thomas, Mary Wells, and Jackie Wilson.

CUBA I Am Time

Blue Jacket (four CDs, \$56; 322 Hicksville Rd., Bethpage, NY 11714). It looks



Bring Home the Boxes

GIFTS THAT KEEP ON PLAYING

BY **KEN RICHARDSON AND ROBERT RIPPS**



like a box of cigars but actually contains Cuban music grouped under four themes: folk ("Invocations"), song, dance, and jazz. The 112-page book is a virtual encyclopedia of artists and musical styles.

VANGUARD COLLECTOR'S EDITION Vanguard (four CDs, \$60). The label that brought us Joan Baez also recorded Paul Robeson, Count Basie, the Weavers, the Kingston Trio, Odetta, Ian and Sylvia, the Clancy Brothers, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Judy Collins, Country Joe and the Fish, Buddy Guy, and, more recently, Peter Case and Paul Kelly — all here.

Also Recommended

BILLY JOEL *The Complete Hits Collection 1973-1997* Columbia (four CDs, \$50, limited edition).

PHIL OCHS *Farewells and Fantasies* Elektra Traditions/Rhino (three CDs, \$50).

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD *The Dusty Springfield Anthology* Mercury/Chronicles (three CDs, \$50).

THE PHILLY SOUND Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff, and the Story of Brotherly Love (1966-1976) Epic Associated/Legacy (three CDs, \$45).

UNBLOCKED *Music of Eastern Europe* Ellipsis Arts (three CDs, \$37; telephone, 800-788-6670; 20 Lumber Rd., Roslyn, NY 11576).

JAZZ **JOHN COLTRANE** *The Complete 1961 Village Vanguard Recordings* Impulse!/GRP (four CDs, \$55). The historic performances, taped over four nights, appear together for the first time. Here are twenty-two versions of "Spiritual," "India," "Impressions," "Chasin' the Trane," and five other compositions, with the saxophonist joined by the likes of Eric Dolphy and McCoy Tyner.

BILL EVANS *The Complete Bill Evans on Verve* Verve (eighteen CDs, \$300). In a hinged steel cube with shelving comes every session the pianist did for the label — 269 tracks, all 22-bit remastered — as leader, co-leader, and sideman. The 160-page hardcover book includes a biography, a tribute by Chick Corea, an interview with Creed Taylor, and session-by-session analysis.

CHARLES MINGUS *Passions of a Man: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961* Rhino/Atlantic Jazz Gallery (six CDs, \$75). Five discs of music, offering the entire *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, *The Clown*, *Blues & Roots*, *Oh Yeah*, *Tonight at Noon*, and *Mingus at Antibes*. The sixth CD is a 75-minute interview with the bassist by Nesuhi Ertegun.

SONNY ROLLINS *The Complete RCA Victor Recordings* RCA Victor (six CDs, \$84). The saxophonist in the early 1960s — *The Bridge*, *What's New*, *Our Man in Jazz*, *Sonny Meets Hawk*, *Now's the Time*, and *The Standard Sonny Rollins* — including cuts previously available only on French LPs.

LENNIE TRISTANO, LEE KONITZ, AND WARNE MARSH *The Complete Atlantic Recordings* Mosaic (six CDs, \$96, limited edition; available by mail-order only; telephone, 203-327-7111). Pianist Tristano and his most important students, altoist Konitz and tenorman Marsh, in everything they did together and separately for the label from 1955 to 1961.

RCA VICTOR 80th ANNIVERSARY *The Collector's Edition* RCA Victor (nine CDs, \$98). Collects eight volumes released in 1997 — with music ranging from the Original Dixieland Jazz Band to Marcus Roberts — and adds a bonus CD, a photo album, and a newly discovered version of Charles Mingus's "Scenes in the City."

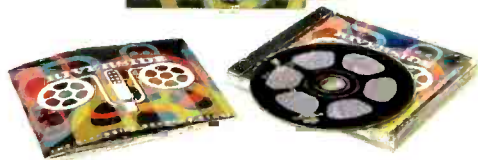
THE RIVERSIDE RECORDS STORY Riverside/Fantasy (four CDs, \$65). Highlights of the label's lifespan from 1952 to 1964, assembled and annotated by cofounder Orrin Keepnews. Among the forty-three performers are Cannonball and Nat Adderley, Art Blakey, Bill Evans, Milt Jackson, Thelonious Monk, and Wes Montgomery.

Also Recommended

PAUL DESMOND *The Complete RCA Victor Recordings* RCA Victor (five CDs, \$70).

KEITH JARRETT *The Impulse! Years, 1973-1974* Impulse!/GRP (five CDs, \$60).

THAD JONES *The Complete Blue Note/UA/Roulette Recordings* Mosaic (three CDs, \$48, limited edition);



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Wes Phillips, *Stereophile Guide to Home Theater*, Spring 1997



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BEST OF THE MONTH

STEREO REVIEW'S
CRITICS CHOOSE THE OUTSTANDING
CURRENT RELEASES



NOEMI KATZMAN/VIRGIN

It's Still Rock-and-Roll

This late in the century, it's difficult to expect miracles from Mick Jagger, age 54, Keith Richards, who turns 54 this month, Charlie Watts, 56, and Ronnie Wood, the baby at 50. *Bridges to Babylon*, however, is their best studio album since their last great record, *Tattoo You*, itself a ripe 16. Sure, *Steel Wheels* (1989) and *Voodoo Lounge* (1994) got some kind reviews, but can anyone remember more than a track from either of them? I'd bet that, even 16 years from now, many songs on the new record will remain as vital as *Tattoo's* touchstones, "Start Me Up" and "Waiting on a Friend."

Just as Paul McCartney was revived by working on the Beatles' *Anthology* series, so the Rolling Stones rediscovered songcraft by revisiting old material for the taping of 1995's live *Stripped*. But *Bridges to Babylon* is also an extension of Jagger's overlooked 1993 solo album, *Wandering Spirit*, where he first returned to serious writing. The full band doesn't waste any time on *Bridges*, starting with the fleet rocker "Flip the Switch" and then grooving through "Anybody Seen My Baby?," which could have been the Single of the Summer à la "Miss You" had it been released a couple of months

earlier. Yes, the descending chorus resembles that of k.d. lang's "Constant Craving" (which is why she and Ben Mink get a co-writing credit), but the Stones track is really a different song. And the co-production by the Dust Brothers is just a light Dusting. In the end, "Anybody" sounds like nobody but the Stones.

It gets better. The midtempo rocker "Low Down" gives me chills every time it skids from its big chorus into the next guitar verse. "Already Over Me" and its sister song, "Always Suffering," are vintage Stones ballads that wouldn't seem out of place on *Sticky Fingers*. Another outright classic, "Saint of Me," rounds up bassist Me'Shell Ndegéocello, organist Billy Preston, and others for some rousing, defiant gospel choruses. Above them all is the sturdy Watts; in this frequently over-electronic age, he relishes the crack of his snare drum. And throughout the record, Jagger sings better than he has in years. For "Always Suffering" he stays in a low register until rejoicing in the third verse's "Let your soul come alive," proving he can still put a lump in your throat.

The album closes with a showcase for Richards. "Thief in the Night" may seem like one of his standard end-of-evening, end-of-record shuffles, but it sure will get you in its sway, and it nicely sets up the 7-minute "How Can I Stop." Here, the band recalls the grandeur of tracks like "Moonlight Mile" and "Memory Motel," giving over the final minute to an elegant sendoff by Watts and jazz saxophonist Wayne Shorter.

You can think of the Rolling Stones as a bunch of bad boys still excited at being able to rock. Or you can think of them as a bunch of old bluesmen just getting started. Either way, *Bridges to Babylon* certainly bodes well for getting them and their fans into the *next* century.

Ken Richardson

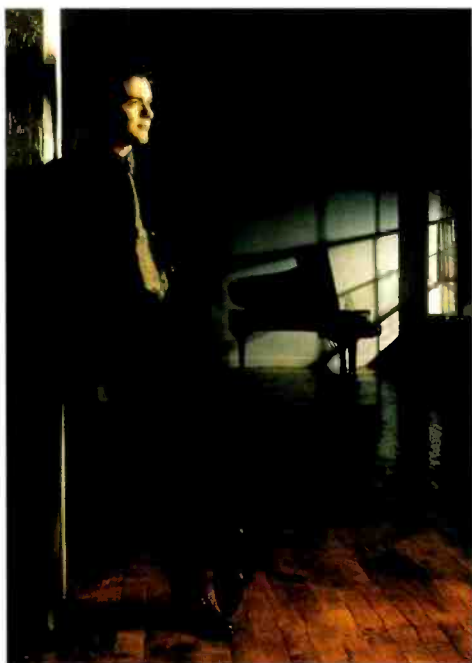
THE ROLLING STONES: *Bridges to Babylon*.

Flip the Switch; Anybody Seen My Baby?; Low Down; Already Over Me; Gunface; You Don't Have to Mean It; Out of Control; Saint of Me; Might as Well Get Juiced; Always Suffering; Too Tight; Thief in the Night; How Can I Stop.
VIRGIN 44712 (63 min).

Beethoven Piano Concertos with Evgeny Kissin

Evgeny Kissin's new Sony CD of the Beethoven Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 5, with the Philharmonia Orchestra led by James Levine, is his first recording of any Beethoven concerto, though he did perform the

BEST OF THE MONTH



MARK HANAUER/SONY CLASSICAL

Evgeny Kissin

solo role in a 1991 concert recording of the Choral Fantasy with Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic. I find Kissin's performance highly satisfactory on all counts in both the youthful Concerto No. 2, in B-flat Major (despite the numbering, Beethoven's first essay in this form), and the proto-Lisztian "Emperor"

(No. 5, in E-flat Major). His playing is wonderfully fleet-fingered and airy in the early concerto, with elegant voicing throughout the slow movement and plenty of nimbleness and wit in the rondo-finale.

Considering that there are more than fifty recordings of the "Emperor" Concerto on CD, there's not a lot of point in making comparisons. The Kissin-Levine reading can be enjoyed for its own merits, which are ample, beginning with the boldly rhetorical approach to the famous opening. The hymnal slow movement is notable for the way Kissin sets forth decorative details without breaking the sustained line, and in the brisk and brilliant finale he gives an impetus to the basic rhythmic figure that allows it to carry the music without becoming overbearing.

A major part of the credit for the success of these performances belongs to Levine, who is one of the finest musical collaborators in the business. Soloist and conductor seem to be working hand-in-glove all the way. The recorded sound is fine — perhaps a mite bass-shy in the piano solos, but that may be the nature of the particular instrument Kissin used. All told, this is more than an hour of nicely contrasted and very fine musicmaking.

David Hall

BEETHOVEN:

Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 5.

Evgeny Kissin (piano); Philharmonia Orchestra. James Levine cond. SONY 62926 (69 min).

Positively Bob Dylan

Relatively few people have paid much attention to Bob Dylan's Nineties output — least of all Dylan himself, whose concert playlists usually stop at 1975's *Blood on the Tracks*. But he has settled into a perversely fascinating groove over the past decade: he's been brilliant, inscrutable, and flat-out sloppy. With *Time Out of Mind* he's finally become all three — but mostly brilliant. It's the first Dylan record in years that keeps you coming back to figure it all out.

It's also his first studio record since the 1993 collection of folk and blues standards, *World Gone Wrong*, not to mention his first album of all original material since 1990's *Under the Red Sky*. And already *Time Out of Mind* has drawn its share of comeback hype, but don't go into it expecting another *Blonde on Blonde*. Think instead of the wasted ambience of Neil Young's *Tonight's the Night* or of any Junior Kimbrough album. The booklet photos of Dylan are weird and blurry,

and the music isn't much different. The studio aces play like they're at an after-hours blues jam, and Dylan's voice has never sounded quite this raspy before. Producer Daniel Lanois, who last worked



MARK SEIGER/COLUMBIA

with him on the 1989 record *Oh Mercy*, aims for maximum echo and spookiness, making the rough spots an essential part of the picture.

Something about the skeletal swamp sound, the lowdown vocals, and the half-finished songs is so wrong that it's absolutely right. Recorded before Dylan's recent hospitalization, *Time Out of Mind* is heavy with foreboding, and the lyrics jump from trivial to profound and back. There are eye-openers like the black-humored "Not Dark Yet" and the intense blues "Cold Irons Bound." There's even a ballad, "Make You Feel My Love" (which has already been covered, to lesser effect, by Billy Joel), to prove that Dylan can still write an obvious standard when the mood strikes.

The payoff is the closing "Highlands," at 17 minutes the longest Dylan song ever, with enough random rhymes and non sequiturs to suggest that he made it all up as he went along (Neil Young and Erica Jong are name-dropped, and there's even an audible lyric flub midway through). Yet the song has haunting images and builds steadily to its bittersweet conclusion; it leaves you feeling that you've been somewhere. Call "Highlands" a short story or a sprawling country blues, but there's nothing else like it in Dylan's catalog — or, for that matter, anywhere else.

Brett Milano

BOB DYLAN:

Time Out of Mind.

Love Sick; Dirt Road Blues; Standing in the Doorway; Million Miles; Tryin' to Get to Heaven; 'Til I Fell in Love with You; Not Dark Yet; Cold Irons Bound; Make You Feel My Love; Can't Wait; Highlands. COLUMBIA 68556 (73 min).

Kathleen Battle Sings Mozart Operas Arias

The cover of soprano Kathleen Battle's collection of Mozart opera arias, recently released on Deutsche Grammophon, *should* have shown her giving a big hug to the conductor, James Levine, the artistic director of the Metropolitan Opera. Instead, the disc is encased in a somewhat forbidding red plastic box — for shortly after the recording was completed nearly five years ago, Battle was unceremoniously fired by the Met management for her imperious behavior at rehearsals. It was the most shocking public dismissal since Rudolf

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BEST OF THE MONTH

Bing sent Maria Callas packing forty years ago, and it marked the beginning of the end of the temperamental Battle's career on the opera stage, though she continues to perform to great acclaim in concerts and recitals.

We may rejoice that they got this recording in the can before the storm broke, for it is a radiantly beautiful souvenir of an era when Battle and Levine were close artistic collaborators, a team as celebrated and accomplished in their way as Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Herbert von Karajan or Birgit Nilsson and Georg Solti. Levine accompanied Battle in legendary lieder recitals at Salzburg and elsewhere, but it was, above all, her performances at the Met of the lyric-soprano roles in the great Mozart operas, conducted by Levine, that established her as one of the world's leading interpreters of that repertory. This recording captures these artists at the top of their form, and even if subsequent events have given it a certain bittersweet quality, that's almost a virtue for some of the arias about love lost and love longed for that are included here. The aria "Ruhe sanft, mein holdes Leben," from the opera *Zaide*, is a case in point. As exquisite a musical expression of a yearning heart as was ever written, it



Kathleen Battle

is ideally suited to Battle's golden voice, which soars with the ease of a bird in flight across a cloudless sky.

The disc offers Battle a chance to try her hand at the three major female roles in *The Marriage of Figaro*. At this point in her career, she was perfectly capable of

pulling off the wistful longing of the Countess Almaviva ("Porgi, amor"), the sunny innocence of her maid Susanna ("Deh vieni"), and the dazed, adolescent high spirits of the page Cherubino ("Non so più"). Nobody swoons more fetchingly than Battle, and her renditions of Pamina's aria ("Ach, ich fühl's") and the Act Two finale with the Three Boys from *The Magic Flute*, which close the disc, are ravishing. The Met Orchestra purrs like a Rolls-Royce in the hands of Levine, who has made it the best opera orchestra in the world. If the collection has one flaw, it is a certain overall lugubrious tone. There are just two uptempo selections, Cherubino's aria and Blonde's aria "Welche Wonne, welche Lust" from *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, and even these are none too brisk as performed here. The program might have benefited from the inclusion of a few more frisky numbers.

Jamie James

MOZART: Arias from *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, *Zaide*, *Così fan tutte*, *La Clemenza di Tito*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Magic Flute*.

Kathleen Battle (soprano); Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. James Levine, cond.
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 439 949 (59 min).

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LISZT: Sonata in B Minor; Mephisto Waltz; Concerto No. 1; Hungarian Fantasia.

Jorge Bolet (piano); Symphony of the Air, Robert Irving cond. EVEREST 9015. The Cuban virtuoso was best known for his Liszt performances, and these were recorded in the early 1960s.

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POPULAR MUSIC

NEW RECORDINGS REVIEWED BY CHRIS ALBERTSON, FRANCIS DAVIS,
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ALANNA NASH, PARKE PUTERBAUGH, KEN RICHARDSON, & STEVE SIMELS

MARIAH CAREY: *Butterfly*.
COLUMBIA 67835 (57 min).

★★★★★
Mariah Carey's ability to deliver a song has often exceeded the quality of her material, but that's no longer the case. *Butterfly* offers a set of meticulously crafted selections that are immediately engaging.

As usual, Carey is lyricist, composer, arranger, and producer, often collaborating with Walter Afanasieff and bringing aboard others to lend an occasional hand with the production. Not as usual, the lyrics reflect a maturity: a poignance laces "Close My Eyes" as a woman regrets growing up too soon, and "Outside" is a lament of alienation. The music, meanwhile, invites rather than shouts: even the obligatory opening dance song, "Honey," has an edge of politeness to its subdued rap. "My All" is introduced by a delicate guitar and has a Spanish tinge. "Whenever You Call" features an exquisite piano solo with a classical feel, and the treatment of "The Beautiful Ones" from Prince's *Purple Rain* is riveting.

With an album as satisfying as *Butterfly*, Mariah Carey deserves our respect. P.G.

PATSY CLINE:
***Live at the Cimarron Ballroom*.**
MCA NASHVILLE 11579 (41 min).

★★
A month after her car crash in 1961, Patsy Cline arrived at Tulsa's Cimarron Ballroom to do a show with Leon McAuliffe's famed swing band. But because the accident had dislocated her hip, she couldn't stand up to sing, so she sat on a stool. You'd never know that from her performance, as

she belts out "I Fall to Pieces," the No. 1 country song at the time, as well as past hits "Walkin' After Midnight" and "A Poor Man's Roses." Her brassy (and sometimes salty) between-song banter is also a delight to hear, as is McAuliffe's supple band.

Only two years later, Cline died in an airplane crash. Very few concert tapes would

surface, and for that reason *Live at the Cimarron Ballroom* is a welcome collector's item. However, most fans will find the poor sound quality a big disappointment, since the recording is extremely muffled, with almost no brightness, and the vocals sometimes drop out. In fact, the album is only marginally fit for release to anyone other than the most rabid aficionado. A.N.

THE KELLEY DEAL 6000:
Boom! Boom! Boom!
NICE/NEW WEST 6002 (44 min).

★★★
The Kelley Deal 6000's debut album of last year, *Go to the Sugar Altar*, didn't promise much, sounding like a more haphazard version of the Breeders, with whom Kelley played lead guitar next to sister Kim on *Last Splash*. But Kelley finds her own voice on *Boom! Boom! Boom!* The songs are punchier and poppier, and the Breeders trademarks of cool/ironic vocals and dirty guitar chords are used more sparingly.

The sex-rocking "Shag," the punk-snarling "Get the Writing Off My Back," and the boom-boom-booming "Brillo Hunt" are as catchy as anything on *Last Splash* but more fully arranged. Less characteristic are a pair of ballads, "When He Calls Me Kitten" and "Where Did the Home Team Go," done as Fifties-style slow dances with Deal singing in convincing teen-angel style. She's also developing a wicked sense of humor:

Electronica

1997 THE YEAR IN-

Not too long ago, electronic dance music was known by its subtle subdivisions: techno, rave, jungle, house, trip-hop, drum-and-bass, and so on. Today it's stuck with the generic name of electronica, and it was supposed to take the music world by storm in 1997. It didn't. Sure, Prodigy's *The Fat of the Land* hit No. 1 and was a Flavor of the Month on a couple of magazine covers. But other high-profile records — including the Chemical Brothers' *Dig Your Own Hole*, the Crystal Method's *Vegas*, and *Spawn: The Album* — all under-

achieved, and collections like *Urbal Beats* and MTV's *Amp* are nowhere to be charted. Is it possible that most of the record-buying public thinks this Next Big Thing just isn't all that Big?

STAR SYSTEM	
Excellent	★★★★★
Very good	★★★★
Good	★★★
Fair	★★
Poor	★

POPULAR MUSIC

in "Stripper" she applies for that job, making it sound as innocent as cheerleading. And if I didn't know better, I'd swear that "My Boyfriend Died" is the nastiest Hole parody ever recorded. *B.M.*

TANYA DONELLY: Lovesongs for Underdogs.

REPRISE 46495 (45 min).

★★★★

On her solo debut record, Tanya Donelly shows she has more up her sleeve than Belly's ethereal pop. Nothing on *Lovesongs for Underdogs* is particularly ethereal, and some of it isn't even pop. With a wide range of loops, vocal layers, and guitar textures, the album is as sonically inventive as it is melodically appealing.

It hedges its bets somewhat by opening with four mainstream numbers that sound like Belly with louder guitars. But then the lovely midtempo "Lantern," which builds from a technofied opening to an *cappella* finish, ushers in her new preference for harder and more abstract pop; even the acoustic numbers have some compelling weirdness. Donelly's vocals likewise take surprising jumps from tender to nasty and back. And her lyrics are as enigmatic as ever, although she drops enough hints to suggest that the album title is no joke. *B.M.*

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN: Evergreen.

LONDON 828 905 (50 min).

★★★★

How can you make a reunion album when you haven't really broken up? The two prime movers of Echo & the Bunnymen, singer Ian McCulloch and guitarist Will Sergeant, already got back together in 1994 as Electrafixion, swearing it was the dawn of a new band. The only problem was that nobody wanted to buy an Electrafixion album that sounded like second-rate INXS. By re-creating the Bunnymen name and bringing bassist Les Pattinson back in, they're clearly hoping to conjure the old magic.

They succeed, but not entirely. Although *Evergreen* doesn't reach the peaks of their first three albums, it's good enough to make you forget about Electrafixion and the one Bunnymen album, 1990's *Reverberation*, that was made in McCulloch's absence. In fact, they recapture the familiar psychedelic swirl so well that it keeps them from breaking any new ground. Still, Sergeant's raunchy yet lyrical guitar work is always a pleasure. McCulloch's voice has gotten surprisingly jagged over the years, but he sings with a swagger that was missing from his solo efforts. And the Bunnymen still sound mysterious even when rocking out. *B.M.*

AMY GRANT: Behind the Eyes.

A&M 540 760 (50 min).

★★★★

In her journey from contemporary Christian singer to breezy-pop purveyor, Amy Grant revealed herself to be a quixotic performer, one who imbued quasi-religious material with a kind of *joie de vivre* but who carried almost none of Christian music's emotional searching to the secular arena. On *Behind the Eyes* she finally be-

1997 THE YEAR IN

Zany Tributes

No, we're not talking the often sedate, all-star homages to legends living or dead. We're talking stuff that's a lot more fun. Some of the titles here are indeed tributes to a single artist (one CD is devoted to an artist feting himself). The other discs are wacky batches of assorted songs, not just covered but gleefully smothered.

APOCALYPTICA:

Plays Metallica by Four Cellos.

MERCURY 532 707. That's right, *cellos*. "Enter Sandman," "Master of Puppets," "The Unforgiven," and five more.

THE MOOG COOKBOOK:

Plays the Classic Rock Hits — Ye Olde Space Band.

RESTLESS 111. Synth versions of warhorses like "Born to Be Wild," "More Than a Feeling," and "Hotel California."

TODD RUNDGREN: With a Twist.

GUARDIAN 59866. The wizard creates lounge covers of his own songs, such as "I Saw the Light" and "Hello, It's Me."

TEXAS CHAINSAW ORCHESTRA.

RHINO 72845. That's right, *chainsaws* (plus other hardware), roaring away to tunes like "You Oughta Know," "I Will Always Love You," and "Chain Gang."

GOLDEN THROATS 4 — Celebrities Butcher Songs of the Beatles.

RHINO 72593. William Shatner's legendary "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" is here, along with Bing Crosby's "Hey Jude," Joe Pesci's "Got to Get You into My Life," and thirteen more.

LOUNGE-A-PALOOZA.

HOLLYWOOD 62072. Lounge versions of alternative hits? Alternative versions of lounge hits? You get both! Fastball does "This Guy's in Love with You," P.J. Harvey does Was (Not Was), and Steve & Eydie do "Black Hole Sun."

SHOW & TELL — A Stormy

Remembrance of TV Themes.

WHICH? 0666 (P.O. Box 659, Village Station, New York, NY 10014). Mostly punk, mostly sitcoms: *Green Acres*, *Laverne & Shirley*, *Cheers*, even *It's Garry Shandling's Show*.

ULTRA-LOUNGE, ON THE ROCKS, PARTS ONE AND TWO — Rock 'n' Roll Hits Distilled for Easy Listening.

CAPITOL 55161 and 55433. How they tried to be hip: Mel Torme's "Sunshine Superman," Peggy Lee's "Everyday People," the Hollyridge Strings' "Theme from Shaft," Kurt Russell's "Sugar, Sugar," and more on two separate CDs.

gins to take that step. "Missing You" and "The Feeling I Had" seem to be the clandestine thoughts of a married woman seeking, but refusing, an affair, and they present Grant as a complicated woman wrestling with deeper romantic issues than usual. Elsewhere, she travels into bright, stylized arrangements that owe much to Sheryl Crow ("Curious Thing") and Queen ("Leave It All Behind"). These more optimistic rhythm tunes seem to be for the radio and for those fans who want to hear the bounce of old. But the real Amy Grant, now 37, can be found peering out from her more contemplative and intimate songs, and this makes *Behind the Eyes* her most interesting and satisfying album to date. *A.N.*

JACK KEROUAC: kicks joy darkness.

RYKODISC 10329 (80 min).

★★★★

MATERIAL: Seven Souls.

WORLDLY TRILOKA 534 905 (64 min).

★★★★

ALLEN GINSBERG: The Lion for Real.

MOUTH OF ALMIGHTY 534 908 (54 min).

★★

The three figureheads of the Beat Generation — Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg — are represented on three current releases, as another

beaten-down generation of disaffected coffeehouse habitués reaches across the decades to forge a link with the poetic progenitors of hip, literary angst. The best of the CDs, *kicks joy darkness*, gathers readings of Kerouac by rockers, actors, and poets, produced by Jim Samps (his brother-in-law) with Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth. Some bits are clearly better than others, but what's most commendable about this collection is its range. A few standouts: Robert Hunter reading a classic passage from *Visions of Cody* with Kerouac scatting in the background, John Cale casting the poem "The Moon" in mystery and enchantment, and Juliana Hatfield waxing childlike in "Silly Gooftball Pomes." It's a high compliment to speculate that Kerouac, who didn't have much use for rock-and-roll, would have appreciated this treasure chest of a tribute.

Two dark lights come together on the reissue of the 1989 album *Seven Souls*, which has Burroughs reciting excerpts from his novel *The Western Lands* against a brooding soundtrack by Bill Laswell's Material. Burroughs was as clinical with his words as a surgeon with a scalpel, and he reads his work as an anthropologist-mystic who is undertaking some sort of "journey beyond Death, beyond the basic God standard of Fear and Danger." Material's under-

ground aesthetic serves this world view well, icing the words with spacy, dubby backdrops that carry an aura of menace as they lurk through subterranean realms.

Also reissued from 1989 is *The Lion for Real*, a Ginsberg album with music by producer Hal Willner. This, however, sometimes comes off more like a collision than a collaboration. One problem is Ginsberg himself, whose speaking voice rarely modulates beyond a kind of chipper recitation. Given that liability, Willner's varied settings still frequently manage to link up with the drolly comic meditations. On the other hand, the album closes with a truly misconceived bummer, "C'mon Jack," a bout of homosexual overkill recited awkwardly by Ginsberg to seamy dance beats as lewd voices chant "ooh" and "aah." Although he was a great poet and culture hero, Ginsberg wasn't exactly on par with Jim Morrison in terms of erotic charisma when he stepped before a mike. *P.P.*

TALK SHOW.

ATLANTIC 83040 (42 min).

★★★★

BRAD: Interiors.

EPIC 68137 (45 min).

★★★

These two bands amount to a busman's holiday for members of Stone Temple Pilots and Pearl Jam. Talk Show is basically STP with a new singer, Dave Coutts, while Brad is a Seattle-scene conglomerate featuring Pearl Jam guitarist Stone Gossard. Talk Show seems to be more an actual band than a side project, and Coutts fits in with the DeLeo brothers (guitarist Dean, bassist Robert) and drummer Eric Kretz in a more simpatico way than does STP's problematic Scott Weiland. Coutts's amiable-brat vocals recall Robin Zander, and indeed Talk Show bashes, crashes, and riffs with the infectious energy of vintage Cheap Trick. Listen to the retooled, "Day Tripper"-style riffing of "Hello Hello." Except for the fact that "So Long" seems a rather obvious rewrite of the opening track, "Ring Twice," Talk Show is consistently entertaining.

Brad, too, has its moments on *Interiors*, its second album (a follow-up to a 1993 release that's better left forgotten). An entire album of songs as solid and fleshed out as "The Day Brings" (a kind of New Age pick-me-up) and "Sweet Al George" (the best craven rocker that Aerosmith never wrote) would be a first-rank treat. However, *Interiors* is larded with so-so material that snacks less of inspiration than process: book some time, bring some stray riffs, and hash out an album amid the studio's bloodless environs. In their worst moments, the guys of Brad sound like progressive-rock wannabes, and their ambition just doesn't get realized. *Led Zeppelin IV* wasn't built in a day. *P.P.*

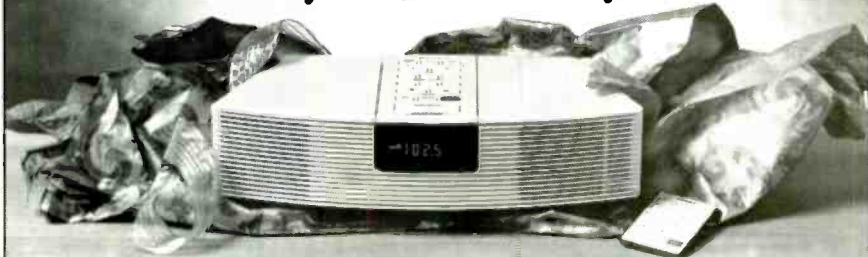
TONIO K.: Olé.

GADFLY 233 (53 min).

★★★★★

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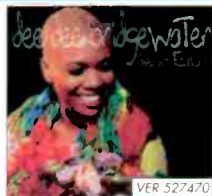
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- 3-D space sound system
- Remote

\$249.99 [PAN SCAK20]

JVC UXC30-BK
3-CD triple tray changer, auto-reverse cassette, AM/FM, remote **249**

JVC FS-1000
Ultra-micro, CD player, AM/FM, clock/timer, woodgrain speakers, remote **299**

Sony MHC-F100
100 watts/ch., 50 + 1 CD changer, dual A/R cassette, AM/FM, karaoke, remote **399**

Sony MHC-RX100AV
100w x 2 + 20w + 10w x 2, 3-CD changer, A/R dual cassette, 5 speakers & remote **CALL**

JVC EXTDS
3-amp (20w x 2 + 60w for subwoofer), AM/FM, 3-CD, A/R cassette, speakers & subwoofer **CALL**

Mini Audio Systems

Yamaha GX-50
Mini Audio System

- 45 watts/channel
- 6-disc CD changer
- 40 AM/FM presets
- 5-band EQ
- Dual auto-reverse cassette
- 3-way active servo speakers
- Remote

\$399.99 [YAM GX50]

Denon D-C30
45 watts/channel, 6-CD changer, dual auto-reverse cassette, remote **CALL**

Bose® Lifestyle™ 3-II
AM/FM, CD player, 2 tiny cube speakers, Acoustimass™ bass module, remote **799**

Yomoho AV1-BK
Home Theater, 5 satellites (30w x 5) & subwoofer (50W), CD player, AM/FM, remote **CALL**

JBL ESC550 The SOURCE™
Preamp, CD player, AM/FM, Dolby Pro Logic/Dolby 3 stereo, subwoofer + 5 satellites **CALL**

Bose® Lifestyle™ 8
AM/FM tuner, CD player, 5 cube speakers & Acoustimass™ bass module, remote **1399**

Turntables

Thorens TD180
3-Speed Belt Drive Turntable

- 33, 45, 78 r.p.m.
- Automatic shut-off & auto-retract
- Synchronous motor
- External power supply
- Includes Stanton cartridge

\$299.99 [THN 180]

Aiwo PX-E850
Fully-automatic, includes built-in phono preamp & cartridge **119**

Technics SL-BD22K
Semi-automatic, belt drive, pitch control with stabi, accepts P-mount cartridges **149**

Sony PS-LX300H
Semi-automatic, belt-drive, includes cartridge **CALL**

Thorens TD280 Mk IV
Belt-drive, 33/45, auto shut-off, includes Stanton cartridge **369**

Technics SL-1200II
Professional Manual, direct-drive, quartz lock, pitch control **479**

Home Theater Speakers

Yamaha Encore-2
Home Theater Speaker Package

- Includes 50 watt powered subwoofer, center channel speaker, main speakers & rear speakers
- Front & center speakers are shielded

\$249.99 [YAM ENCORE2]

Yamaha NSA-P100
Center/Surround Speaker System, center channel + 2 full-range speakers **99**

Technics SB-CSS70
Center Channel/Surround Speaker System, all speakers shielded & wall mountable **129**

Cerwin-Vego HT56
Satellite Speakers designed for surround sound, 80 watt capacity, black, shielded **149**

Yomoho NSA-P150
Center Channel/Surround Speaker System, center channel + 2 two-way speakers **149**

Sony SS-CR600
Center Channel/Surround speakers, shielded center channel with dual 5" woofer **CALL**

Home Theater Components

Technics SH-AC300
Digital Surround Processor

- Decodes the Dolby Digital (AC-3) input signal from DVD player to send to select receivers
- CINEMA Re-Equalizer circuit
- Dual digital inputs
- Remote

\$299.99 [TEC SHAC300]

Sony SDP-E800
Dolby Digital Decoder, 24-bit processing, decodes Dolby Digital & Dolby Pro Logic Surround **CALL**

Yomoho DDP-2
Dolby Digital (AC-3) Processor, decodes Dolby Digital sources **CALL**

JBL SCS115
6-Piece Home Cinema System with 100w subwoofer + front/center/rear speakers **CALL**

JBL esc300
All-in-One Home Cinema System, 5 speakers & subwoofer w/ components & amplification **CALL**

JBL SCS120
5-Piece Home Cinema Speaker/Subwoofer, 150w subwoofer + five 2-way speakers **CALL**

DJ Equipment

Technics SH-DJ1200
Disco Mixer

- Durable construction with highly reliable faders
- 2-phono/line inputs
- Mic. input
- Tone controls with -24dB/+12dB
- 3-column level meter

\$399.99 [TEC SHDJ1200]

Gemini PMX-16
DJ Mixer, 2 phono/2 line/1 mic. inputs, cue fader, rotary master balance control **98**

Gemini FG-2001
Professional Compact Fagger, low-profile design, generates dance jog, 800 watt heater **118**

Audio Technica AM200
DJ Mixer, 2 phono, 2 mic & 4 stereo line level inputs, sound effects generator **149**

Gemini XG-9500 Pro II
Dual CD Player, digital output (BNC connector), cue to music, jog wheel, pitch (±8%) **648**

Pioneer CDJ-500 II
Pro CD Player, jog dial, quick start, tempo control, manual cue **CALL**

DJ Equipment

Pioneer DJM-500
DJ CD Mixer

- B.P.M. counter
- Fader
- Start play with 2-CDJ500's
- Beat synchro effectors
- Single repeat beat overly
- Pitch shifter
- 2-mic/2-CD/3-phono inputs

CALL [PIO DJM500]

Ness UL36
Pin Spot, ideal for permanent as well as mobile applications, ready to use with limp **24**

Gemini GSM-1532
5-Way Pro Disco Speakers, 15" woofer, 4" x 12" horn, Three 3" super tweeters **188**

NESS Orco
DJ Light, double row of 20 lenses that twist with the limit of the music, multi-colored display **189**

Gemini XG-2000
250 watts/ch. @ 4Ω, 160 watts/ch. @ 8Ω, 500 watts @ 8Ω bridged mono **398**

Pioneer M-V3000
Pro Power Amp, 480w/ch. @ 4Ω, 300w/ch. @ 8Ω, 1000w mono @ 8Ω **1199**

Separates

AudioSource AMP Two
Power Amplifier

- 80 watts per channel, switchable to 200 watts mono
- Auto-on signal sensing
- A/B speaker switching

\$299.99 [ASO AMPTWO]

AudioSource AMP Three
Power Amp, 150 watts/channel, switchable to 400 watts mono **399**

Dynaco Stereo 200
Power Amp, 100 watts/channel, A/B speaker selector **399**

Dynaco Stereo 80
Power Amp, vacuum tubes, 40 watts per channel, 50% Off Mfr. Sug. Retail (\$1699) **849.99**

AudioSource PRE One
Preamp, electronic switching, MM/MMC phono, 2-way tape dubbing **229**

Dynaco PAS-4
Vacuum Tube Preamp, MM phono preamp, 50% Off Mfr. Sug. Retail (\$999) **499**

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CIRCLE NO. 36 ON READER SERVICE CARD

VCRs

SHARP



Sharp VC-H972U
Hi-Fi Stereo VHS VCR
• 4 heads • Sharp Super Picture circuit • 19-micron exact-track heads • 1-year/8-event programmable timer • Universal remote
\$159⁹⁹ (SHA VCH972U)

Samsung VR3607
• Quickstart/High-speed mechanism, remote with 2-key shuttle operation **\$129⁹⁹**

JVC HR-A33
• 4 heads, digital live circuit, Ultra Spec drive, Precision 19 micron heads, remote **\$149⁹⁹**

Panasonic PV-7400
• 4 heads, digital auto picture, universal TV/cable box remote **\$159⁹⁹**

Panasonic PV-7450
• VHS Hi-Fi Stereo, 4 heads, High-speed Omnisearch, universal TV/cable box remote **\$189⁹⁹**

Sony SLV-675HF
• VHS Hi-Fi Stereo, 4 heads, crystal-clear freeze frame, multi-brand remote **\$229⁹⁹**

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..... LTX VHS **\$39.99**

Men In Black VHS **\$15.99**

Liar, Liar VHS **\$14.99**

Star Trek- First Contact VHS **\$9.99**

Beavis & Butthead Do America VHS **\$11.99**

The Lost World (1997) **\$14⁹⁹**
P/S & LTX

Sleeping Beauty (Disney) VHS **\$16.99**

Jungle Book (Disney) VHS **\$16.99**

Batman & Robin VHS **\$14.99**

Michael VHS **\$14.99**

Mars Attacks VHS **\$14.99**

Preacher's Wife VHS **\$12.99**

Ransom P/S or LTX VHS **\$12.99**



S-VHS Hi-Fi Stereo VCRs

Panasonic



Panasonic PV-S7670
S-VHS Stereo Hi-Fi VCR
• 4 heads • Spatializer™ Audio Processing • Digital auto tracking • VCR Plus+ with cable/DSS box control • Multi-brand TV/cable box remote with shuttle
\$399⁹⁹ (PAN PVS7670)

JVC HR-S5400
• 4 heads, VCR Plus+ with cable box control, Pro-Style editing, shuttle plus, remote **CALL**

JVC HR-S7300
• VCR Plus+ with cable box control, pro-style edit, multi-brand remote **\$599⁹⁹**

Panasonic PV-S4690
• Digital video signal processor, 5-pin editing pick, VCR Plus+, Jog/shuttle, assemble editing **\$799⁹⁹**

Sony SLV-R1000
• Cable Mouse™ System, adaptive picture control, 4 heads, dual mode shuttle control, remote **CALL**

JVC HR-S9400
• TimeScan with Dynamic Drum System, VCR Plus+ with cable box controller, Pro-Style editing **CALL**

Professional Video

Panasonic



Panasonic AG-1980
Pro S-VHS Hi-Fi Video Recorder
• Digital TBC & Digital noise reduction to eliminate jitter
• Insert/assemble editing • 3-D digital Y/C separation
\$1199⁹⁹ (PAN AG1980)

Panasonic AG-1310
• VHS VCR, High-response mechanism, Quasi S-VHS playback **\$249⁹⁹**

Panasonic AG-2550
• S-VHS, Hi-Fi Stereo, digital TBC & digital noise reduction, insert/assemble editing **\$329⁹⁹**

Sony SV-02000
• S-VHS Hi-Fi Stereo Editing VCR, adaptive picture control, VCR Plus+ **\$1099⁹⁹**

Panasonic CT-1384Y
• 13" Pro Color Video Monitor, 90° deflection screen, selectable line 1, 2, 3, S-Video **\$299⁹⁹**

Panasonic AG-456U
• S-VHS Camcorder, 1.2x zoom with manual control, digital functions, VTC generator **\$1499⁹⁹**

Televisions

Panasonic



Panasonic CT-27SF12
27" Superflat™ Stereo Color TV/Monitor
• Data-Grade picture tube with black screen • Up to 700 lines of horizontal resolution • Closed Caption • Universal remote
\$499⁹⁹ (PAN CT27SF12)

Sharp 13J1M100
• 13" Color TV, bilingual on-screen display, front-panel A/V inputs **\$159⁹⁹**

Samsung TXG2548
• 25" Stereo Color TV, dark tint picture tube, comb filter, contrast enhancement circuitry **\$299⁹⁹**

Sony KV-20V60
• 20" Trinitron™ Stereo Color TV, surround sound enhancement, universal remote **CALL**

Panasonic CT-315F13
• 31" Superflat™ Stereo Color TV/Monitor, home theater remote **\$799⁹⁹**

Panasonic CT-35SF23
• 35" Superflat™ Stereo Color TV, picture-in-picture, home theater remote **\$1199⁹⁹**

DVD Players

SONY



Sony DVP-S7000
DVD/CD Player
• Over 500 lines of horizontal resolution • Plays DVD, audio CD & video CD formats • Includes remote control
CALL (SON DVPS7000)

Panasonic DVD-A100
• DVD/CD Player, LED display, 3 screen display formats including letterbox, remote **\$449⁹⁹**

RCA RC5500P
• DVD/CD Player, Built-in Dolby Digital (AC3) decoder, shuttle control, remote **\$499⁹⁹**

Toshiba SD-3006
• DVD/CD Player, fluorescent display, Dolby Digital (AC-3) capable (with select receivers) **\$579⁹⁹**

Panasonic DVD-A300
• DVD/CD Player, built-in Dolby Digital Decoder (AC-3) & karaoke functions **CALL**

Yamaha DVD-1000
• DVD/CD Player, Built-in Dolby Digital (AC-3) decoder, optical digital output, remote **CALL**

Remotes/Antennas

ONE FOR ALL



One-For-All homeDirector™ 8
Universal IR/RF Remote System
• Operates any combination of 8 devices • Works through walls, from anywhere up to 100' away
\$79⁹⁹ (OFA URC8090)

Sony RM-V12
• Universal Remote, preprogrammed, replaces 4 remotes **\$14⁹⁹**

One-For-All URC-8080
• 1/2 Director™ 8, Universal Home Theater Remote Control, replaces 8 devices, backlit keypad **\$59⁹⁹**

Terk AF-9925
• Hi AM/FM Amplified Antenna, 42 db gain, omni/uni pickup patterns **\$49⁹⁹**

Terk AM-FMQ
• Powered Indoor Stereo AM/FM Antenna, with selectable wideband/narrow modes **\$79⁹⁹**

Terk TV25
• Amplified TV Antenna, local/distant mode switch, complimentary symmetry design **\$79⁹⁹**

Wireless Technology

RECCOTON



Reccoton WP445
900MHz Wireless Speaker System
• Powered by twin 10 watt amplifiers • Up to 150' operating range • Operates on either 8 batteries (not included) or 2 AC adapters, included as a BONUS
\$249⁹⁹ (REC WP445) + 2x (REC WP44S)

Reccoton V-900SX
• Wireless Video Sender, VCR transmits to TVs without wires **\$79⁹⁹**

Elcom Technologies ezTV™
• Remote Control System, view & control cable TV, satellite TV, TV or VCR in any room **\$99⁹⁹**

Reccoton W-440
• 900MHz Wireless Speakers, dual 20 watt amplified system, 150' range **\$169⁹⁹**

JBL WrkW1000
• Wireless Speakers, 900MHz technology, transmits up to 150', 4" woofer, 10 watts **CALL**

Reccoton W-450
• Wireless Speaker System, 25 watt built-in amp, 2-way with 6.5" woofers **\$299⁹⁹**

Video Games

PlayStation™



32-Bit Video Game
• A new dimension in exciting games • 360,000 polygons per second • 3-D graphics • Includes adapter & controller
\$149⁹⁹ (PSX PLAYSYSTEM2)

Sega Genesis Sonic & Knuckles
• System with one controller (SEG G-GENESIS3) **\$79⁹⁹**

Sega Pica
• The Computer that thinks it's a toy (SEG PIC0) **\$129⁹⁹**

Sega Saturn Core System
• Includes Sega Rally CD (SEG SATURNCORE) **\$129⁹⁹**

Nintendo Gameboy Pocket
• Black (NIN GB-PCKET/B) **\$49⁹⁹**

Nintendo Ultra 64 System
• Includes controller & AC adapter (NIN 64-SYSTEM) **\$149⁹⁹**

Portable Stereo

aiwa



Aiwa CSD-ED20
CD/AM/FM/Cassette Portable Stereo
• Digital tuner with 30 station presets • CD player with 20 track programming • Includes AC adapter & remote control
\$99⁹⁹ (AIW CSD20)

Sony CFD-S33
• CD/AM/FM/Cassette, 20-track programmable CD, 10-AM/10-FM presets, remote **\$119⁹⁹**

Panasonic RX-DS27
• CD/AM/FM/Cassette, 24-track programmable CD, 10-AM/10-FM presets, remote **\$129⁹⁹**

Sony CFD-ZW160
• CD/AM/FM/Dual Cassette, 20-track programmable CD, 3-piece, remote **\$139⁹⁹**

Aiwa CA-DW680M
• Dual CD Changer/AM/FM/Dual Cassette, 3-piece Dual CD changer (2 single CD players) **\$179⁹⁹**

JVC PC-XC11
• 3-CD/AM/FM/Dual Cassette, 20-track prog. CD, 30-AM/FM presets, detachable speakers **\$199⁹⁹**

Grundig Radios

GRUNDIG



Grundig Classic
50th Anniversary FM Stereo/AM/Shortwave Table Radio
• A classic reproduction utilizing today's technology • Deep, full sound • Hand-made wooden cabinet • AUX input
\$249⁹⁹ (GRU CLASSIC)

Grundig Mini World
• AM/FM/Shortwave Portable Radio, FM stereo from headphone jack **\$49⁹⁹**

Grundig Traveller II Digital
• AM/FM (Stereo through headphones, jack)/Shortwave Portable, 20 presets **\$99⁹⁹**

Grundig Art Deco
• AM/FM Classic Series Table Radio, 1930s design, today's technology **\$149⁹⁹**

Grundig G2000A
• AM/FM/Shortwave Portable, designed by F.A. Porsche Design Group, 20 presets **\$149⁹⁹**

Grundig Yacht Boy 400
• AM/FM/LW/SW Portable, digital tuner with 40 presets, superb sensitivity **\$199⁹⁹**

Portable CD Players

Panasonic



Panasonic SL-S125
Portable Rechargeable CD Player
• XBS™ Extra Bass System • 24-track programming • Heat-resistant body • Includes headphones, rechargeable batteries & AC adapter
\$69⁹⁹ (PAN SLS125)

Sony D-162CKT
• Car/Portable Discman™, 22-track programming, heat resistant, includes car mounting plate **\$79⁹⁹**

Sony D-E301
• 10-millimeter Electronic Shock Protection, Digital Mega Bass, 22-track programming **\$99⁹⁹**

JVC XL-P63CR
• Car/Portable, 10-sec. Triple Shock Protection, 24 track programming, includes car kit **\$119⁹⁹**

Panasonic SL-S650
• Up to 10-sec. anti-shock memory, 24-track programming, detachable remote **\$139⁹⁹**

Sony D-T405
• Discman™ with AM/FM Stereo, 30 presets, 22-track programming, rechargeable battery **\$169⁹⁹**

Personal Stereo

SONY



Sony WM-GX552
AM/FM/Cassette Walkman® Recorder
• Digital tuner with 24 presets • Record from radio or stereo mic. (included) • Dolby B • Auto-reverse playback • Wired remote
\$169⁹⁹ (SON WMGX552)

Sony WM-EX552
• Cassette Walkman, auto-reverse, feather-touch controls, Dolby B, wired remote **\$99⁹⁹**

Aiwa HS-JS445
• Personal Stereo Recorder with digital AM/FM, tuner, auto-rev. playback, Dolby B **\$119⁹⁹**

Panasonic RQ-XV30
• AM/FM/Cassette Recorder with 24 presets, auto-rev., Dolby B, rechargeable, remote **\$149⁹⁹**

Panasonic RQ-SX40
• Auto-Reverse Cassette, Dolby B, heavy-duty rubberized body, remote, rechargeable **\$149⁹⁹**

Aiwa HS-JX779
• Personal Stereo Recorder with digital AM/FM, auto-rev. record/play, Dolby B **\$199⁹⁹**

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- Moves on heavy-duty casters
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\$69⁹⁹ (ELI EL143)

Standesign SSB
• Dimensional Speaker Brackets, for wall or ceiling mounting speakers up to 13 lbs. each... **\$29⁹⁹**

Plateau L4000
• Speaker Stands, black oak, spike feet, 11.25" high... **\$34⁹⁹**

Plateau MXA5
• Modular Audio Rack, 5 shelves with 8" between shelves, black... **\$179⁹⁹**

BELL'OGGETTI AR-703
• Audio Rack, all-metal construction, 5 adjustable shelves, adjustable spikes... **CALL**

Standesign Design 5 Series
• Audio Rack, 34" h w/ 6.5" usable distance between shelves, 20" w & 16" d for each shelf... **\$299⁹⁹**

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Bram Stoker's Dracula DVD \$24.99		
La Femme Nikita DVD \$21.99		
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Selena DVD \$21.99		

Apple® Macintosh® Computers

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PowerPC™ 603e processor • 16MB RAM • 1.3GB HD • 8x CD-ROM • 11.3" DSTN color screen • 1.4MB Apple SuperDrive™
\$1999⁹⁹ (APP M560SL/A)

Apple® Macintosh® PowerBook® 1400c/133
16MB/1.3GB/8xCD • 133MHz
PowerPC™ 603e processor • 16MB RAM • 1.3GB HD • 8x CD-ROM • 11.3" active matrix color display
\$2699⁹⁹ (APP M5891L/A)

Apple® Power Macintosh® 6500/250
32/4GB/24x-CD/Zip™ Computer
• PowerPC™ 603e
250MHz processor
• 32MB RAM
• 4.0GB HD • 24x-CD-ROM • iomega® Zip™ drive • Up to 56Kbps modem • Monitor sold separately
\$1999⁹⁹ (APP M6189L/A)

Apple® Power Macintosh® 8600/250
32MB/4GB/24xCD/Zip™
250MHz
PowerPC™ 604e processor • 32MB RAM • 4GB HD • 24x CD-ROM • iomega® Zip™ drive • 1MB L2 inline cache • Monitor sold separately
\$3199⁹⁹ (APP M5905L/A)

Video/Tele-Phones

8x8 ViaTV Video Phone Solution
• Connect to TV & phone & you're ready • H.324 compatible • Up to 23 frames/sec • Built-in color camera • Includes caller ID • Privacy option
\$449⁹⁹ After Rebate (8X8 VC105)

8x8 VC55
• Make video phone calls using your camcorder... **\$399⁹⁹**

Phonemate 8200
• Answering Machine with Speakerphone, digital outgoing message... **\$34⁹⁹**

Panasonic KX-TCM422
• Cordless Phone/Digital Ans. Machine, 15 min. digital record, 25-ch. auto scan, blk. or wh. **\$149⁹⁹**

Sony SPID910-BK
• 900MHz Cordless Phone, digitally scrambled voice communication, enhanced range, black **\$179⁹⁹**

Panasonic KXTCM940-BK
• 900MHz Cordless Phone Answering System, 16 min. all-digital ans. machine, black... **\$229⁹⁹**

Facsimile Machines

Brother MFC-4550
5-In-1 Laser Multi-Function Center
• Fax, printer, copier scanner & PC fax • 600 x 600 dpi printer resolution • 6 ppm laser printing and straight paper path technology
\$699⁹⁹ (BRT MFC4550)

Brother FAX190
• Personal Fax/Telephone, auto paper cutter, 10-pg. auto document feeder, 32 shades of gray **\$179⁹⁹**

Panasonic KX-F880
• Fax/Digital Answering System, up to 28 pg. document memory, anti-curl, auto after **\$299⁹⁹**

Panasonic KX-FM220
• 7-in-One Center, plain-paper fax, copier, scanner, PC-fax, digital answering machine, caller ID **\$419⁹⁹**

Hewlett-Packard OfficeJet 570
• Color Printer/Fax/Copier/Scanner, fax features, 20-pg. document feeder (HP C46-3A) **\$549⁹⁹**

Brother MFC-7000
• 6-in-1 Multi-Function Center, color-printer, copier, scanner, facsimile, PC fax, message-center **\$999⁹⁹**

Compaq Computer



Compaq Presario 2200
180MHz Multimedia Mini Desktop Computer
• 16MB EDO RAM • 1.6GB hard drive • 8x CD-ROM drive • 1.44MB diskette drive • 33.6K/14.4K bps data/fax modem • 64-bit 3D graphics with MPEG full-motion video • Integrated stereo speakers & Phantom subwoofer • Windows 95 keyboard • Black chassis • Software bundle including Windows 95 • Monitor sold separately
\$799⁹⁹ (CPQ 2200)

Sennheiser Headphones

Sennheiser HDC 451
NoiseGuard™ Headphones
• Open-air headphones with active noise compensation
• Lightweight • Allows listening to speech, yet it reduces ambient noise
\$199⁹⁹ (SEN HDC451)

Sennheiser HD445
• Supracard lightweight design, includes dual plugs for use with portables or home stereo... **\$49⁹⁹**

Sennheiser IS380
• Infrared Wireless, 30' operating range, rechargeable transmitter... **\$79⁹⁹**

Sennheiser IS450
• Infrared Wireless, transmitter with rechargeable battery, volume control on headphone... **\$149⁹⁹**

Sennheiser RS6
• 900MHz Wireless, 325' operating range, 3-switchable frequencies, rechargeable... **\$199⁹⁹**

Sennheiser HD580
• Audiophile precision, circumaural design, velvet-covered ear cushions... **\$279⁹⁹**

Kensington Computer Accessories

Kensington Saddlebag
Notebook Case
• Black with tan trim • Shoulder strap, handle, or backpack straps • Zip-down organizer • Quick access pocket • Padded notebook compartment
\$79⁹⁹ (KEG 64089)

Kensington 22501
• Sports™ Contour Wrist Pad, keeps wrist in a natural position, non-skid base, black... **\$12⁹⁹**

Kensington 57501
• Sports™ Contour Mouse Wrist Pad, elevated platform maintains a neutral position, black... **\$12⁹⁹**

Kensington 62516
• SmartSocket™ Premium Power Strip, 6 wide outlets, price after \$10 Mail-In Rebate (exp 12/31) **\$29⁹⁹**

Kensington 62105
• Masterpiece Home Office Control Center, 420 joules phone protection, 6 outlets, 5 switches... **\$59⁹⁹**

Kensington 62071
• Sky Runner Computer Case, lightweight, padded, 3 compartments... **\$64⁹⁹**

Scanners

UMAX® Astra 600P
Personal Flatbed Color Scanner
• 1-pass, 30-bit color • 300dpi x 600dpi, 4800 dpi with interpolation • Scans up to legal size documents • SCSI-2 interface • For PCs
\$159⁹⁹ (UMX ASTRA600P)

Logitech Dextra 4800
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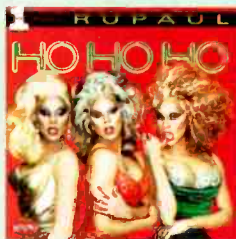
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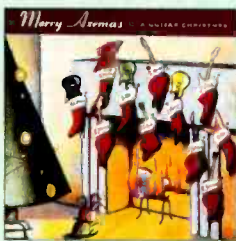
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RYKODISC 10386. Big Star, Kristin Hersh.

YULE BE BOPPIN'.
BLUE NOTE 56991. Jacky Terrasson.

because of a regime change at A&M, *Ole* probably deserves its billing as "The Great Lost Tonio K. Album." In fact, for overall smarts, musical inventiveness, and creative bile, this is probably the best work he has done since his brilliant debut record, 1978's *Life in the Foodchain*.

It's a more mature and reflective Tonio, of course; as the man himself writes in the album's amusing liner notes, a song like "What a Way to Live" comes off "so good-naturedly mean-spirited" that it could be a sequel to the classic "H-A-T-R-E-D" as written by "somebody sober." Highlights include "Time Steps Aside," a sort-of-poppy paean to a hippie throwback, and the unexpectedly poignant "We Walk On." *Ole* is another installment in the musical autobiography of a guy who's still the most corrosively sane singer/songwriter in America. It totally rocks, and you should get it *may pronto*. S.S.

Collections

HERITAGE.
SIX DEGREES/ISLAND 524 434 (73 min).

★★★
Heritage, a concept album with the subtitle "New Interpretations of American Roots Music," revisits public-domain songs that speak of the love, joy, despair, and deaths of generations of peoples who settled this country. The record includes sparkling acoustic instrumentals by Bela Fleck, John Jennings, Vassar Clements, John Hartford, David Grisman, Jerry Douglas, and the project's producer/arranger, violinist Darol Anger. And there are equally outstanding vocals by Jane Siberry, John Gorka, Dar Williams, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Willie Nelson, Mavis Staples, and Tim O'Brien.

With this much talent, the album would seem a can't-miss proposition, and it is exceptionally moving at times (the instrumental "Talk About Suffering Here Below," featuring bassist Edgar Meyer, and Carpenter's menacing rendition of "Pretty Polly"). But for the most part, it is strangely lifeless. The record never gathers momentum, partly because the instrumentals head off in the direction of elongated jazz-folk while the vocal selections usually stick to a straighter stanza/chorus format. Still, this is an ambitious, if not fully realized, project, satisfying and fascinating in small doses. A.N.

PAINT IT, BLUE — SONGS OF THE ROLLING STONES.
HOUSE OF BLUES 161 315 (62 min).

★★★
STONE COUNTRY — COUNTRY ARTISTS PERFORM THE SONGS OF THE ROLLING STONES.
BEYOND/TOMMY BOY 3055 (44 min).

★★★
The Rolling Stones freely admit how much they stole from their blues heroes; *Paint It, Blue* gives those heroes an overdue chance to steal it back. What's surprising is how respectful most of them sound: the late Johnny Copeland's "Tumblin' Dice," Lucky Peterson's "Under My Thumb," and



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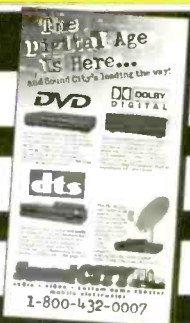
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POPULAR MUSIC

Alvin Youngblood Hart's "Sway" are note-for-note remakes, and since Bobby Womack recorded "It's All Over Now" before the Stones did, his new version is a cover of a cover. Sparks fly only when the bluesmen take some liberties: Taj Mahal's acoustic "Honky Tonk Women," Larry McRae's funkified "Midnight Rambler," the Holmes Brothers' swamp-rocking "Beast of Burden," and Junior Wells's Chicago-shuffle "Satisfaction" all throw fresh spins on the old chestnuts. But whose bright idea was it

to throw the riff from Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side" into Luther Allison's "You Can't Always Get What You Want"?

Nobody tries anything similar on *Stone Country*, whose eleven tracks (save for Blackhawk's inappropriately jaunty "Wild Horses") are all patterned closely on the Stones' arrangements. But not every singer seems at home: Nanci Griffith affects a howler of a Mick Jagger impression in "No Expectations," and Collin Raye sounds far too nice for "Brown Sugar." Still, Deana

Carter gives "Ruby Tuesday" an affecting innocence, and Travis Tritt is like a kid on a rampage in "Honky Tonk Women." And George Jones personalizes "Time Is on My Side" because he's George Jones, and he personalizes everything. *B.M.*

THE SONGS OF JIMMIE RODGERS — A TRIBUTE.

EGYPTIAN/COLUMBIA 67676 (53 min).

★★★

Bob Dylan gathers friends both green and graying to show what the Singing Brakeman means to them. Unfortunately, Bono turns "Dreaming with Tears in My Eyes" into unrecognizable mish-mash, and Mary Chapin Carpenter debases "Somewhere Down Below the Mason Dixon Line" into the kind of beer-barrel piano tripe you hear in peanut-shells-on-the-floor steakhouses.

This isn't to say that everyone need be as faithfully traditional as Willie Nelson with "Peach Pickin' Time Down in Georgia" or Iris DeMent in an unvarnished treatment of "Hobo Bill's Last Ride." Steve Earle and the V-Roys rock "In the Jailhouse Now" with a fun and witty insouciance, and Van Morrison charms "Mule-Skinner Blues" into something akin to an irresistible boogie. Other strong interpretations come from John Mellencamp in "Gambling Bar Room Blues" and Dwight Yoakam in "T for Texas." But alas, too many of these performers seem to be having an off day. Dylan himself is so raspy as to sound consumptive, while the dying Jerry Garcia isn't anywhere near the top of his game. Others (Aaron Neville, Dickey Betts) just sound like they're wondering what they're doing here.

That leaves the long-dead Jimmie Rodgers as the most impressive of the lot. His ghost will probably still rule when Bono and most of his pals are forgotten. *A.N.*

STAR SPANGLED RHYTHM — VOICES OF BROADWAY AND HOLLYWOOD.

SMITHSONIAN 111 (four CDs, 280 min).

★★★★★

The Smithsonian's third gala anthology of musical comedy and the Great American Songbook puts the emphasis on the stars, from George M. Cohan to Ethel Merman to Nathan Lane. Still, the great shows and composers can't help but be spotlighted just as much as they were in the two earlier boxed sets, *American Musical Theater* and *American Popular Song*. Making *Star Spangled Rhythm* unique among similar retrospectives is the admittance of Hollywood to the pantheon, via numerous soundtrack items from the Thirties and Forties (some of which have never been on LP or CD), showing how even performers who never appeared on Broadway (Judy Garland, Bing Crosby) contributed to the development of the art form. Equally praiseworthy are the inclusion of superior revivals — allowing the package to conclude with the Nineties productions of *Gyps and Dolls* and *Showboat* — and the omission of Andrew Lloyd Webber. Crammed to capacity with one showstopper after another, this box is essential for anyone who has ever caught



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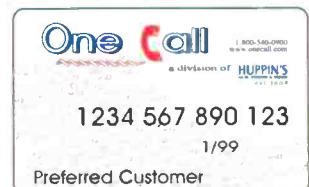
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THE FAIRFIELD FOUR:

I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray.

WARNER BROS. 46698 (42 min). ★★★
A national gospel treasure since the 1920s, the Fairfield Four are both somber and joyful on this CD, a stark reminder of the power and beauty of the unvarnished human voice, seldom more moving than when joined with others in a spiritual calling. A.N.

DARYL HALL/JOHN OATES:

Marigold Sky.

PUSH/BMG 102 (57 min). ★★
Is the old magic back? Yes and no. It's refreshing to hear the Hall & Oates sound again, with the same mix of Philly soul and rock backbeat, but the writing isn't near the level of the duo's *Private Eyes* and *Big Bam Boom*. B.M.

JOE JACKSON & FRIENDS:

Heaven & Hell.

SONY CLASSICAL 60273 (52 min). ★★
Writing in a sort of modernist symphonic style mixed with pop touches, Jackson is clearly trying to be a latter-day Gershwin or Bernstein, not a bad thing to aspire to. But despite some imaginative moments and generally impeccable performance, there's little here that lingers in the memory. S.S.

WALLACE RONEY: Village.

WARNER BROS. 46649 (60 min). ★★★
Roney, a 37-year-old Philadelphian, sounds a lot like Miles Davis, his mentor, but he shouldn't be written off as a mere imitator. He's a fiery player with a wonderful combination of technique, invention, and taste. Give him time to find his own style. C.A.

6 STRING DRAG: High Hat.

E-SQUARED 1055 (39 min). ★★★
From Raleigh, 6 String Drag fits into the alt-rock category but moves away from boring melodies, cryptic lyrics, and half-dead vocals to fuse a roots-rock/country fest of infectious hooks and literate writing that is not just winning but inspiring. These Carolinians like their barbecue hot, hot, hot. A.N.

JIM CROCE —

A NASHVILLE TRIBUTE.

RIVER NORTH 1295 (38 min). ★★
The knot of singers who honor Croce have a difficult time inhabiting his material, and the bulk of them simply go through the motions. A couple of folks — Rodney Crowell ("Operator") and, surprisingly, Crystal Bernard ("Photographs and Memories") — get close, but nobody approximates the ease of Croce's delivery. A.N.

himself humming "The Night They Invented Champagne" from *Gigi*. W.F.



JAZZ

JOE HENDERSON: Porgy and Bess.
VERVE 539 046 (54 min).

★★
A new version of *Porgy and Bess* from saxophonist Joe Henderson is a modest venture but a mixed blessing. With sporadic appearances by trombonist Conrad Herwig and vibist Stefon Harris and with solid rhythmic support from Tommy Flanagan, John Scofield, Dave Holland, and Jack DeJohnette, Henderson comes up with decent performances. But the album gets off to a poor start with pop singer Chaka Khan's grating, screaming, unseasonably inclement version of "Summertime." Not even the fine instrumental lineup can make up for her rendering of the lyrics, which seem to be beyond her comprehension. Sting fares better singing "It Ain't Necessarily So," and the sensibly sensitive Henderson-Flanagan duet in "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" is pleasant enough. However, don't expect goosebumps from any of this. C.A.

THE BILL HOLMAN BAND:

Brilliant Corners.

JVC 0028 (69 min).

★★★★

THE CLIFFORD JORDAN BIG BAND:

Play What You Feel.

MAPLESHADE 03232 (70 min).

★★★★

Bill Holman's L.A.-based orchestra is one of the most precise and far-reaching big bands around today. This is very much an "arranger's band," a vehicle for the writing of Holman, the least pretentious of the composers and arrangers who contributed scores to the Stan Kenton Orchestra in the 1950s. *Brilliant Corners* is an unusual project for Holman in that it features no originals, only his adaptations of pieces by Thelonious Monk, and it is essentially a program of recompositions. Holman is most successful when he takes the greatest liberties, as in the opening "Straight, No Chaser," where Monk's theme is only obliquely stated after some whirling fanfares and chorales. But Holman shows great originality even when serving Monk straight up, and he locates new wrinkles in "Round Midnight" by rescoring it for Bob Efford's noble-sounding bass clarinet.

The big band that tenor saxophonist Clifford Jordan led for three years until his death in 1993 was a "player's band": not a vehicle for one particular writer but a rough-and-ready outfit whose charts were effective frameworks for improvisation. Record-

ed at Condon's in New York in 1990, *Play What You Feel* is a valuable document for capturing the band in full flight. Along with exceptionally strong solos by Jordan, fellow tenorist Junior Cook, and trombonist Benny Powell, what makes this a treat is the band's obvious camaraderie. F.D.

THE DAVE McMURDO

JAZZ ORCHESTRA: Fire & Song.

SACKVILLE 5004 (two CDs, 143 min).

★★★★

The Dave McMurdo Jazz Orchestra is a Canadian outfit that somehow has managed to stay alive for nearly ten years. The arrangements aren't intricate tapestries but neither are they pedestrian. There's a bit of Count Basie and a gram or two of Gil Evans, and the solos — by such highly talented players as trombonist McMurdo himself, pianist Don Thompson, baritone saxophonist Perry White, and guitarist Reg Schwager — are as skillful and substantive as they are plentiful. Add to that the fact that these performances were digitally recorded with utmost care on 24-track machines and you have an album that will treat your ears royally. From Pat LaBarbera's absorbing tenor solo in "Fast Eddie," which opens Disc 1, to Chase Sanborn's crisp, lyrical reading of "Easy Living," which closes Disc 2, *Fire & Song* is a fulfilling big-band album that might give McMurdo the recognition that seems to have eluded him south of the Canadian border. C.A.

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

NEW RECORDINGS REVIEWED BY ROBERT ACKART,
RICHARD FREED, DAVID HALL,
JAMIE JAMES, GEORGE JELLINEK, AND ERIC SALZMAN

BEETHOVEN: String Quartets Nos. 13 and 16; Grosse Fuge.

Juilliard String Quartet. SONY 62792 (76 min).

★★★★

The Juilliard String Quartet's latest Sony CD offers a generous 76 minutes of prime Beethoven communicated with the utmost conviction and intensity. There have been more volatile readings, but if you want your Beethoven sinewy and weighty, these will be to your taste. The sonics are on the close-up side, but the textures are clearly and cleanly delineated from start to finish. The Juilliard opus for the exposition repeat in the first movement of the Quartet No. 13,

Heard here at the end of the Quartet No. 13, for which it was originally intended to be the finale, Beethoven's "Great Fugue" is almost terrifying in its intensity and relentless drive. I would rank this as one of those rare readings that provide unique insights into a work, and the CD is worth getting for it alone. *D.H.*

ELGAR: Cello Concerto. WALTON: Cello Concerto. DELIUS: Caprice and Elegy.

Janos Starker (cello); Philharmonia Orchestra. Leonard Slatkin cond. RCA VICTOR 61695 (63 min).

★★★★

The redoubtable Janos Starker, in his first go at the major British cello-and-orchestra repertoire, delivers a highly intense rendition of the Elgar concerto. Deep melancholy permeates much of this music despite the virtuoso elements in the *moto perpetuo* second movement and in the finale with its abrupt and impatient conclusion.

The Walton Cello Concerto has finally been getting its due over the past decade, at least in terms of recorded performances. I rate it along with the Viola Concerto as his finest work of this type — suffused with bittersweet lyricism and free Fenby in mere glitz. The dramatic contrasts between the solo-cello episodes and the orchestral outbursts in the finale make for particularly memorable listening, especially at the close and its recall of the "motto" theme with which the work opens. The CD is filled out with the brief and fragile Caprice and Elegy that Delius dictated to Eric Fenby in the closing years of his life. A major asset of the present CD is the handsome support from Leonard Slatkin and the Philharmonia Orchestra. The recording is imbued with ample warmth and heft. *D.H.*

FALLA: El Amor Brujo; El Retablo de Maese Pedro.

Nancy Fabiola Herrera (mezzo-soprano); others: I Cameristi. Diego Dini-Ciacci and

Maurizio Dini-Ciacci cond. NAXOS 8.553499 (62 min).

★★★

The original version of Falla's "Gypsy ballet" *El Amor Brujo* — chamber orchestration for fifteen musicians and spoken dialogue alternating with songs and dance numbers — is paired here with his strange *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* (*Master Peter's Puppet Show*), a musical dramatization of a scene from *Don Quixote* as a puppet play within a puppet play.

El Amor Brujo works very well in its original form, and the famous "Ritual Fire Dance" (here a "Dance for the End of Day") and the very torchy songs get a context that gives them dramatic as well as purely musical power. *El Retablo*, on the other hand, more Neoclassical than Spanish in tone, is a dramatic enigma that's not entirely successful in musical terms.

In spite of her mezzo-soprano billing, Nancy Fabiola Herrera manages a very respectable and sexy contralto. I Cameristi is a fine North Italian chamber orchestra under the capable direction of the Dini-Ciacci brothers. Diego scores a big success with *El Amor Brujo*, but the equally capable Maurizio cannot solve the problems of *El Retablo*, which must remain, I'm afraid, in the category of a curiosity. *E.S.*

HANDEL: Messiah.

Dorothea Röschmann. Susan Gritton (soprano), Bernarda Fink (contralto), Charles Daniels (tenor), Neal Davies (bass); Gabrieli Consort and Players. Paul McCreesh cond. DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON ARCHIV 453 464 (two CDs, 132 min).

★★★★

There's nothing wrong with this recording, and a great deal that's right about it. The Gabrieli Players perform the Foundling Hospital Version of *Messiah* with admirable precision, vigor, and sweetness. The cast of vocal soloists is a fine one, particularly the men; when bass Neal Davies sings "The trumpet shall sound," you can almost see the heavenly host massing for the Final Judgment. Soprano Susan Gritton's coloratura in "But who may abide the day of his coming?" is a bit on the tremulous side, but overall it's a competent, even fine performance. The choir is excellent, and the resonant recorded sound is very good. *Messiah* specialists and fans of the Gabrieli Players will certainly want to have this recording.

The problem, however, is that this is the most heavily recorded piece of choral music ever composed. When there are so many really superb, inspired recordings of every possible version of the score, it's difficult to recommend a set that has nothing really distinctive about it. If you're looking for period instruments, Christopher Hogwood's



ERIC HARTMANN/SONY CLASSICAL

Juilliard String Quartet

but what is more unusual is the decision to observe repeats of both exposition and development in the "*Muss es sein? / Es muss sein*" ("Must it be? / It must be") finale of No. 16. The effect of the repeats is to alter the whole specific gravity of the piece, transforming it into a decidedly more serious affair than usual. The Juilliard players clearly don't buy the common "leave 'em laughing" interpretation of Beethoven's intent in this last of his quartet masterpieces.

STAR SYSTEM

Excellent ★★★★★
Very good ★★★★
Good ★★★
Fair ★★
Poor ★

groundbreaking version on L'Oiseau-Lyre is stunning; the Argo recording with the Choir of Christ Cathedral, Oxford, was the masterpiece of producer Peter Wadland and remains unsurpassed, particularly the singing of the boys. William Christie's lovely, intimately scaled recording on Harmonia Mundi is also one to be cherished. If you prefer a high-cholesterol reading with modern instruments, there's Robert Shaw's magisterial one on Telarc. And don't forget Thomas Beecham's fabulous 1959 recording, with over-the-top re-orchestrations by Eugene Goossens, on RCA. You're not making a mistake if you choose this new set, but be aware of what you're missing. *J.J.*

LECUONA: Complete Piano Music, Volume 4.

Thomas Tirino (piano); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. BIS CD-874 (64 min).

★★★★★

With no slackening of quantity or quality, Thomas Tirino has plunged ahead into Volume 4 of his amazing CD series on the Swedish BIS label of the complete piano music of the great, neglected Cuban pianist and composer Ernest Lecuona (1895-1963). As in the previous volumes, Tirino leads off with a big rediscovered and reconstructed piece, here the astonishing *Rumba-Rhapsody* for three female soloists, chorus, piano, and orchestra. It's amusing if a bit overblown. As before, it is the simple piano dances — six Cuban dances, ten more Hispanic-flavored nineteenth-century Cuban dances, and eight waltzes — that engage our delighted attention. These elegant dances, almost all between 1 and 3 minutes in length, are so brief as to seem almost aphoristic. The writing is, by turns, elegant, wistful, witty, popular, brilliant, and melancholic.

Music like this depends not entirely on the written notes. Tirino has resuscitated Lecuona by a sort of reincarnation. He has not only studied the various (and often contradictory) manuscripts and printed editions, but he has listened carefully to Lecuona's own recorded performances and has caught the grand manner in his own way. The composer often failed to write things down, or, like any creative performer, played different versions at different times. Tirino has restored lost pieces and found the most interesting variants. Above all, he has caught the composer's accent, his expressive pianism and way of speaking musically. *E.S.*

MENDELSSOHN: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2; Capriccio Brillant; Rondo Brillant; Serenade and Allegro Giocoso. Stephen Hough (piano); City of Birmingham Symphony, Lawrence Foster cond. HYPERION 66969 (75 min).

★★★★★

Mendelssohn's published output for piano and orchestra can fit neatly onto a single CD, as demonstrated by Stephen Hough in this release from Britain's Hyperion label. All five works, composed between 1832 and 1836, show stylistic fingerprints of Hummel and Weber in the solo writing. Also from Weber (the *Konzerstück*

for piano and orchestra) comes the idea of eliminating pauses between movements.

The Piano Concerto No. 1, in G Minor, is far and away the most popular of the lot. Its taut and dramatic opening movement (no cadenza) steals the show straight off. The slow movement is in the composer's best "song without words" manner; and the presto finale has sparkle aplenty. The D Minor Concerto, No. 2, has a lower profile but considerable lyrical substance in its opening pages and the whole of the slow move-

ment. Except for the somberly reflective first half of the *Serenade and Allegro Giocoso*, the shorter works are of lesser consequence, though there is brilliance to burn in the *Capriccio Brillant* and *Rondo Brillant*.

Stephen Hough, who is something of a specialist in Romantic keyboard repertoire, searches out the lyrical essence of the music rather than going for glitz. He is supported with warmth and enthusiasm by the City of Birmingham players under Lawrence Foster's direction. Good, substantial

The Many Moods of Christmas

Whether you like your holiday music to resound like a mighty chorus and organ or to tinkle gently like a celestial harp, there's a new CD this year to accompany your seasonal celebrations.

ACADEMY OF ANCIENT MUSIC: A Christmas Collection.

HARMONIA MUNDI 907202. A program of seventeenth-century motets by Heinrich Schütz and canzonas by Giovanni Gabrieli.

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RCA VICTOR 68880. Popular songs and carols played by the brass quintet joined by a couple of children's choirs.

PLACIDO DOMINGO, YING HUANG, MICHAEL BOLTON: Merry Christmas from Vienna.

SONY 62970. Domingo has made an annual tradition of these concerts mixing classical and pop singers.

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EMI 56259. The American lyric soprano performs sacred songs from Schubert's "Ave Maria" to Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Piè Jésus," accompanied by orchestra.

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TELARC 80446. Heavenly harp joined by earthly percussion in a varied program that combines familiar pieces with novelties from the Ukraine and the Huron Indian nation.

REJOICE: A String Quartet Christmas, Vol. 2.

JOHN MARKS RECORDS JMR 18. Arrangements of traditional and sacred music of the season, performed by violinist Arturo Delmoni, cellist Nathaniel Rosen, and friends.

ROBERT SHAW CHORALE: The Many Moods of Christmas.

Organ; RCA Victor Symphony. RCA VICTOR 88052. A fully remastered midprice reissue of the popular 1963 recording.



Songs to My Lady

While there were few major female composers during the Renaissance, much of the era's best music, perhaps most of it, was addressed to the fair sex. Guillaume Dufay created many of his greatest choral settings for the liturgy devoted to the Virgin Mary, who attained an importance in the spiritual life of the Renaissance tantamount to that of her Son. *The Virgin and the Temple*, a recent DG Archiv CD by the New York-based choir Pomerium, gathers together some of Dufay's exquisite Marian motets and chants.

The album's title refers to the controversy swirling around its opening motet, "*Nuper rosarium flores*" ("Lately, the blossoms of roses"), composed for the dedication of the cathedral of Florence. Brunelleschi's great domed church consecrated to the Virgin. This 6½-minute masterpiece decisively marks the musical watershed between the austerity of medieval church music and the polished, supple style of the Renaissance. Alexander Blachly, Pomerium's director, points out that the piece is arranged mathematically, with the curiously irregular ratios among its four parts of 6:4:2:3. One school of thought is that the motet's design reflects the sublime dimensions of the cathedral; other musicologists believe that it is based on the Biblical description of the Temple of Solomon in the sixth book of *I Kings*.

Perhaps both sides are right, and Brunelleschi had Solomon's Temple in mind when he conceived his cathedral. We'll never know the answer, and it really doesn't matter when we have such a satisfying performance of this exquisite work, and of the other chants and motets on the CD. The fifteen voices of Pomerium meld and bloom with clarity and warmth in a fine recording taped at a number of churches in New York City.

Another choir from New York, Lionheart, explores profane as well as sacred musical homages to womankind in a disc of madrigals and chant from Tudor England catchily titled *My Fayre Ladye*. There is scarcely any difference between the idealized portrait of the beloved in the erotic madrigals and the way worshippers celebrated the perfection of the Virgin Mary.



Some of the chants included here, from a collection published in Paris in 1502, take their texts from the sensuous *Song of Songs* and address the Virgin quite explicitly as a lover. Not many of us were taught hymns with words like these: "How beautiful and how fair you are, dearest, in

delights. You stand like the palm tree, and your breasts are its clusters."

Some of the madrigals cross the line of bawdiness. William Cornysh's rollicking ballad "Blow Thy Horn, Hunter" compares the beloved to a hunted deer; after the huntsman has tracked her down and killed her, the song tells us, his "horn is well unbent, his bolt may fly no more." The six men of Lionheart, accomplished veterans of the early-music scene in New York, sing with a persuasive mixture of refinement and spirituality, making subtle distinctions in their interpretations of the various genres represented. The recorded sound is clear enough, but too dry for my taste. —*Jamie James*

DUFAY: The Virgin & the Temple (Chant and Motets).

Pomerium, Alexander Blachly dir. DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON ARCHIV 447 773 (60 min). ★★★★★

LIONHEART: My Fayre Ladye (Tudor Songs and Chant).

Lionheart. NIMBUS 5512 (60 min). ★★★★★

ments (two basset horns, a second pair of horns, and a double-bass added to the basic wind octet), is the masterwork of the entire cycle of serenades, not just those for winds. Its seven expansive movements stand on the cusp between true chamber music and the symphony, as it would come to be known in the Romantic Era that this music so dramatically anticipated.

Philippe Herreweghe fully grasps all the weighty significance of both these works, and fortunately he makes no attempt at gratuitous underscoring of it by ignoring the wit and charm or the virtuoso exploitation of color that make them so immediately appealing. The players from the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées seem to relish their assignment; they are recorded vividly and in impeccable balance, and the illuminating annotation is on the same level. *R.F.*

PUCCINI: La Rondine; Morire?; Le Villi (excerpts).

Angela Gheorghiu (Magda), Roberto Alagna (Ruggero), others: London Voices; London Symphony, Antonio Pappano cond. EMI 56338 (two CDs, 121 min).

★★★★★

Although formally a through-composed opera, *La Rondine* was originally conceived as an operetta in the Viennese style — and it shows. A loose series of subplots provides vehicles for a series of exuberant love duets, bittersweet ballads, and rousing choral scenes. The opera's first big number, the aria "*Chi il bel sogno di Doretta*," is one of Puccini's most inspired flights of melody and has become a recital staple; Angela Gheorghiu here turns in a classic performance, overflowing with emotion, of this wistful paean to romantic love.

Her rich, creamy soprano is ideally suited to the part of the courtesan Magda, and she is well partnered by tenor Roberto Alagna, as the naïve Ruggero, the country bumpkin on his first visit to Paris. The third act is basically one long, rapturous duet between the two of them, interrupted by a pretty but irrelevant scene between the poet Prunier and the maid Lisette, delightfully sung by William Matteuzi and Inva Mula.

The opera is short, lasting scarcely an hour and a half, and the disc is filled up with some fascinating oddities: "*Morire?*," a morbid song about death, passionately sung by Alagna, and some excerpts from Puccini's first opera, *Le Villi*, that give the orchestra and chorus a chance to shine. The music is brilliantly scored, and conductor Antonio Pappano elicits an intensely colorful performance from the London Symphony Orchestra. *J.J.*

SCHUMANN: Cello Concerto; Symphony No. 4.

Christophe Coin (cello); Orchestre des Champs Élysées, Philippe Herreweghe cond. HARMONIA MUNDI 901598 (56 min).

★★★★★

Recordings of the Schumann Cello Concerto seem to come a dime a dozen these days, and the same for the Symphony No. 4. The chief interest of this new recording is the use of a modest-size period-in-

strument, with the soloist front and center but not obtrusively so. *D.H.*

MOZART: Serenade No. 10, in B-flat Major ("Gran Partita," K. 361); Serenade No. 12, in C Minor (K. 388).

Winds of l'Orchestre des Champs Élysées, Philippe Herreweghe cond. HARMONIA MUNDI 901570 (70 min).

★★★★★

Mozart used the term "serenade" for various kind of works, and the three for wind ensemble to which he affixed that title in the early 1780s are out-and-out mas-

ternetworks exploring, among other things, an emotional range not ordinarily associated with such offerings. Indeed, the last of them, the Serenade No. 12, in C Minor, for wind octet (pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns, and bassoons), is music of such profundity and intimacy, of such adventurous experimentation in form, that it is not at all surprising that Mozart should have recast it as one of his string quintets (K. 406), part of the series in which he reached his greatest heights in chamber music. But the grand-scaled Serenade No. 10, in B-flat Major, the so-called "*Gran Partita*" for thirteen instru-

strument orchestra, comparable to those in Schumann's day, with the first and second violins set up left and right, respectively. Intense lyricism, with an emphasis on the ruminative aspects of the music, characterizes the interpretation of soloist Christophe Coin



in the concerto. Combined with the lighter orchestral texture provided by the period instruments, that's all to the good from an aural standpoint; I heard none of the occasionally clotted sonorities that can crop up in the final movement. Score points here for conductor Philippe Herreweghe and his excellent body of players.

I have mixed feelings about the symphony, which is offered here in the 1851 revised version. For me, that score works better with the heft afforded by modern instruments. The strings here sound a bit too bland and the brass and timpani somewhat too blaring. I'd also like more adrenalin in the opening movement. The middle movements go well, and the last is just fine. Good sound all the way. *D.H.*

TCHAIKOVSKY: Swan Lake (1895 version).

Maryinsky Theater Orchestra, Victor Fedotov cond. JVC/WEA 6500 (two CDs, 135 min).

★★★★

While other recordings of *Swan Lake* have been touted as "authentic" versions, comprising all the music Tchaikovsky composed for the first of his great ballets, the point of Victor Fedotov's new one with the Maryinsky Theater Orchestra is to give us the music that was performed in the celebrated Petipa/Ivanov production of January 1895 (more than a year after the composer's death). This means that the numbers are performed in a sequence somewhat different from the original, that some of them are split for fragmented repositioning while others are shortened or dropped, and that we also get several of Tchaikovsky's little-known piano pieces as orchestrated for the 1895 production by Riccardo Drigo. The annotation with the new set makes the point that it was this version of *Swan Lake*, after all, that took the work off the shelf and made it one of the most beloved in the dance repertory.

So, while many listeners may have become familiar and comfortable now with the original layout of the musical design as related to the original scenario, more than a few balletomanes may want something they can relate more directly to their experience in the theater — and they are not likely to find a more attractive souvenir than the one offered here. Fedotov has been conducting the orchestra of St. Petersburg's venerable

theater in staged performances of *Swan Lake* for some time, and familiarity in this case has not bred anything remotely related to contempt. The performance, eminently danceable from start to finish, never sags; it has a well-sustained dramatic momentum, and the level of both ensemble and solo playing is consistently high. The sound is not only rich and full but very focused, and the documentation is for the most part exceptionally thoughtful and comprehensive. For music lovers, this is not a replacement or substitute for the original version, but it's still a lovely production. *R.F.*

WAGNER: Die Walküre.

Poul Elming (Siegmund), Alessandra Marc (Sieglinde), Gabriele Schnaut (Brünnhilde), Robert Hale (Wotan), Alfred Muff (Hunding), Anja Silja (Fricka), others: Cleveland Orchestra, Christoph von Dohnanyi cond. LONDON 440 371 (four CDs, 225 min).

★★★

Although London's new account of this most favored opera in Wagner's *Ring* cycle falls short of its most recent predecessors, by James Levine (DG) and Bernard Haitink (EMI), it has many virtues, and conductor Christoph von Dohnanyi's contribution ranks very high among them. His approach is closer to Haitink's than to Levine's in emphasizing forward momentum rather than massive solemnity. Nonetheless, the grand moments — the Love Duet in Act I, the death-prophecy scene in Act II, and the entire Scene 3 of Act III — come off with power and majesty, at well-chosen tempos, and are executed with orchestral brilliance.

Act I starts off very promisingly with a winning pair of Valsungs. Alessandra Marc's Sieglinde is opulent in sound, and she brings considerable interpretive skill to her crucial narrative ("*Der Männer Sippe*"). She rises triumphantly to Wagner's demands in her great moment in Act III ("*O hehrstest Wunder!*"). As Siegmund, Sieglinde's twin brother, Poul Elming is a worthy partner in every way: a sturdy heroic tenor who sings with a lyrical legato and combines youthful vigor with manly dignity.

Robert Hale's Wotan is convincing in his confrontations with Fricka and, later, Brünnhilde. His voice lacks the imposing sonority required for the ideal Wotan, but he manages the range skillfully and leaves us with an intelligently conceived image of the troubled god. Gabriele Schnaut's Brünnhilde is also thoughtfully conceived and, in some details, well executed. Unfortunately, her voice wavers on sustained notes, a persistent flaw that compromises her good intentions. Anja Silja brings meaningful declamatory force to Fricka's pronouncements; there is strength, even grandeur in what she attempts to do, but those attempts are frequently undone by her limited vocal range and power. Alfred Muff was not the happiest choice for Hunding: a deep bass is needed here, not a bass-baritone, let alone a sometimes unsteady one. The Waltraute (Karin Goltz) and her seven Valkyrie companions are good but not outstanding — which also applies to the entire production. *G.J.*

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

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BACH: Harpsichord Concertos in D Minor (BWV 1052), F Major (BWV 1057), and D Major (BWV 1054); Concerto for Flute, Violin, and Harpsichord in A Minor (BWV 1044).

Rinaldo Alessandrini (harpsichord); Claudio Rufa (flute); Francesca Vicari (violin); Concerto Italiano, Rinaldo Alessandrini cond. OPUS 111/HARMONIA MUNDI 30-153 (72 min). ★★★★★

Very dynamic performances of four of Bach's "coffee house" concertos, including a version with solo harpsichord of the fourth *Brandenburg*, two transcriptions of



violin concertos, and the curiously hybrid triple concerto transcribed from earlier keyboard pieces. Rinaldo Alessandrini has great flair as a player, and he is a superb leader of this crack early-instrument group; the performances ooze energy and style in the Italian manner. *E.S.*

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonatas No. 29 ("Hammerklavier") and No. 31.

Charles Rosen (piano). MUSICMASTERS 67183 (58 min). ★★★★★

Charles Rosen's recording of Beethoven's last six sonatas (Sony) has been valued for more than twenty-five years for the pianist's clear-eyed understanding, ability to focus on the grand design without neglecting detail, and largely successful quest for the essence of the music on its own terms. These virtues are deepened on this vividly recorded new disc — particularly in the eloquently communicative realization of No. 31, though a little more visceral impact might not have been amiss in the "Hammerklavier." *R.F.*

BOSTON POPS: American Visions.

Boston Pops, Keith Lockhart cond. RCA VICTOR 68786 (66 min). ★★★★★

Ferde Grofé's comball *Mississippi Suite* and Jerome Kern's *Mark Twain* share company with John Williams's *Hymn to New England*, Howard Hanson's "Maypole Dances" from *Merry Mount*, and Harl McDonald's "Fiesta" from *San Juan Capistrano*, after which we move up several pegs to "Buckaroo Holiday" from Copland's *Rodeo*, Ron Nelson's *Savannah River Holiday*, "Times Square" from Bern-

stein's *On the Town*, and "Housatonic at Stockbridge" from Ives's *Three Places in New England*. The Bernstein and Nelson get splendidly alert performances, and justice is done to the Ives masterpiece. The sound is bright and clean. *D.H.*

YING HUANG: Opera Arias.

Ying Huang (soprano); London Symphony, James Conlon cond. SONY 62687 (68 min). ★★★★★

Star of a recent film version of *Madama Butterfly*, pretty young Ying Huang is in the forefront of promising operatic newcomers. Although she is from China, she seems quite at home in this collection of familiar Italian arias, and her pure clear voice is especially persuasive in the Puccini excerpts. *William Livingstone*

IKON

(A Cappella Liturgical Music).

James Bowman (countertenor); Holst Singers, Stephen Layton cond. HYPERION 66928 (79 min). ★★★★★

Bringing together disparate strands of the austere liturgical music originating in northern Europe, this generous, well-recorded disc concentrates on the Russians, particularly the contemporary Georgy Sviridov (b. 1915), whose writing is exquisitely radiant and never dull. "The Ikon," one of four choruses from his *Songs of Troubled Times*, elicits a tour de force performance from countertenor James Bowman. Tchaikovsky is represented by a few short works, and the disc concludes with a fine performance of Arvo Pärt's *Magnificat*, a long and rather droopy piece by Henryk Górecki, and a glorious little arrangement of a Bach chorale by the Norwegian composer Knut Nystedt. *J.J.*

MURRAY PERAHIA:

Plays Handel and Scarlatti.

Murray Perahia (piano). SONY 62785 (69 min). ★★★★★

Murray Perahia, best known for his solid performances of Classical and early Romantic piano music, takes on early eighteenth-century harpsichord literature in a



dashing and pianistic manner. Curiously, his three Handel suites are characterized by a lot of elegance and even delicacy, but his seven Scarlatti sonatas are brilliant, energetic, and full — exactly the reverse of the characteristics ascribed to these composers by Handel's biographer Mainwaring (quoted in the lively annotation). *E.S.*

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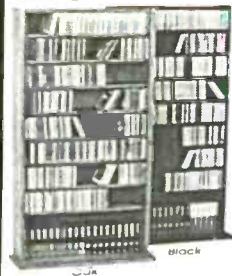
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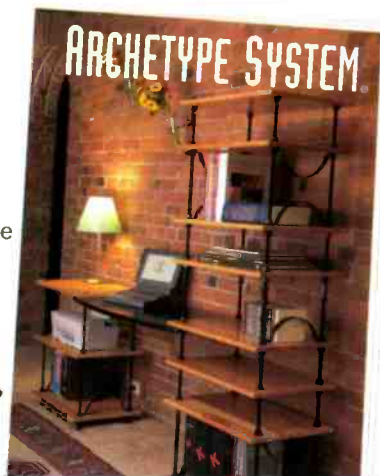
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THE HIGH END

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Return of the Son of Digital Cannons

Maybe DVD really stands for Déjà Vu Disc. Fifteen years ago, I was a hi-fi-crazed teen hunched over a Technics SL-1600 direct-drive turntable, one of the last and best of the 1970s S-shaped-tonearm battleship tables, before the sad days of Duran Duran and P-mount cartridges. I was trying to set it up to play Telarc's infamous digitally mastered LP of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* with the torture-track cannon shots that chewed up lesser phono cartridges like so much Chex party mix.

Man, what a scam. They even put a photo of a microscopic view of the cannon-shot grooves on the cover! I didn't even like classical music, but I was hooked. I fed that Technics turntable every phono cartridge I could get my hands on (including a wicked-cool ADC Integra that looked like the nose of a black Concorde jet) till that proud moment when I got hold of a Shure V15 and finally heard those stupid digital cannons boom through my beloved Cerwin-Vega thunderboxes without the needle jumping the wildly undulating groove with a nasty crack. And then it hit me: *I was a teenage hi-fi geek!* I ripped the Telarc disc off my turntable, threw on *Sabbath Vol. 4*, and swore never to sit through a hi-fi demo disc of the *1812* again.

Fast-forward to today, and what am I doing? I'm sitting here in my living room listening to Delos International's *DVD Spectacular* (Delos DV 7001 \$24.98), a music-oriented DVD, jointly produced by Dolby Labs, whose showcase is a wowiewowie 5.1-channel Dolby Digital version of the *1812*! Am I insane? Maybe so. But let me tell you, this disc is a glimpse of the audio future — of the DVD-Audio disc — done right. I've carped in these pages about the gimmicky production of some of DTS's remixed 5.1-channel CDs, but the two music tracks on this Delos DVD — Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, conducted by Andrew Litton and performed by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and Richard Rodney Bennett's *Barcarole*, performed by pianist Carol Rosenberger — are the real deal. Instead of

ping-ponging the instruments around the speakers, the 5.1-channel mixes spread the music across the front three speakers and present the actual sound of the concert hall in the stereo surround channels.

Look, I'm not a classical-music nut, and I could've lived without ever hearing the *1812* again, but the *DVD Spectacular* version is, bar none, the most realistic and lifelike 5.1-channel recording I've heard to date. I wish every recording engineer

**The 5.1-channel
"1812 Overture" on the
Delos DVD demo disc
sounds clean, open, and
free of "AC-3 harshness."**

on the planet could listen to this Delos disc on a good home-theater rig just to hear how much better multichannel music recordings sound when the producer keeps the music in the front channels and the recording venue's natural ambience in the rear surrounds, instead of panning everything around to all the speakers for that cheesy "Sound! Sound! All Around!" effect.

Famed recording engineer John Eargle has long promoted the idea of multichannel surround sound for music, and he has been recording his sessions in both stereo and surround for some time in preparation for the DVD era. Actually, Eargle couldn't even wait for DVD — Delos has released more than a half-dozen classical music CDs mixed in Dolby Surround for playback on any home-theater system with a Dolby Pro Logic decoder. Eargle and Delos don't feel like waiting for the DVD-Audio format either, so they're releasing Eargle's surround mixes on DVD-Video discs, which means that the 5.1-channel audio is encoded in Dolby Digital AC-3, held at its maximum bit rate of 384 kilobytes per second for the best sound quality.

I've been to Myerson Hall in Dallas where the *1812* track was recorded, and this recording brought me closer to the sensation of actually being there than any of the two-channel stereo CD recordings I've heard that were made in the same hall, Eargle's included. And I hold this disc up to any critic of Dolby Digital who claims that it's not nearly good enough for music recordings. Of course, I'm still holding out for uncompressed 24-bit PCM digital audio on DVD-Audio, because I think it will sound better than AC-3. But let me tell you something, the 5.1-channel music recordings on this Delos disc sound amazing. They're clean, open, and free of the so-called "harshness" that uninformed critics of AC-3 attribute to the format. This AC-3-encoded source material is so pristine and well recorded by John Eargle that you may be just as surprised at what you *don't* hear as at what you do.

But the real star of the show is Eargle's 5.1-channel mix of the *1812*. When he recorded the Dallas Symphony Orchestra at Myerson Hall, Eargle used twelve microphones in a combination of stereo and close-miking techniques to capture, as accurately as possible, the sound of the musicians onstage and the ambient swell of the concert hall. A pair of Sanken CU-41 cardioid microphones, crossed in the classic ORTF stereo-pickup pattern, were used as the main mike pair located near the front of the stage, flanked by a pair of Sennheiser MKH-20 omnidirectional mikes on either side. A pair of ORTF-crossed Neumann KM-140s were positioned closer in on the stage to pick up the woodwinds, while a pair of widely spaced Neumann KM-130 omnidirectional mikes were used for the chorus at the back of the stage. The tympani and basses were miked with a single KM-140 apiece, and a pair of these mikes were placed in the rear left and right corners of the concert hall, pointing away from the stage, to isolate and capture the rich, sonorous ambience. It's the stereo ambience feed from these KM-140s that you hear in the rear channels of *DVD Spectacular's* 5.1-channel recording of the *1812 Overture*.

Besides the two music recordings, *DVD Spectacular* is chockful of other treats, like a full complement of audio and video test tracks to help you set up your home theater and a slew of Dolby Digital theater trailers to rock your living room just like they do at the movies. All in all, it's a hell of a lot of fun for just 25 clams, and a mouth-watering taste of the kind of spatial realism we can expect to hear from recorded music once DVD-Audio arrives in the flesh.

You can purchase *DVD Spectacular* at any store that carries Delos CDs, or you can order the disc directly from Delos at 800-364-0645, or on the World Wide Web at www.delosmus.com. □



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