Trust Your Ears



Wilma Cozart Fine, lead producer of the Mercury Living Presence catalog during the 1950s and 1960s, conducted her professional career in the recording industry according to this simple philosophy: "Trust your ears." Wilma's ability to remember the sound she heard at a recording venue was legendary. She became remarkably proficient at judging a recording's verisimilitude to the live musicians. Her first goal was always to preserve the sound of a performance's "Living Presence"—capturing the event as she heard it in the concert hall.

She worked closely with her husband, recording industry pioneer C. Robert (Bob) Fine. He provided his music-driven engineering expertise and offered a constant stream of innovations in equipment and techniques. Together, they set out to tape a series of classical recordings that were as closely faithful to the original sound as the technology allowed. Wilma produced over 200 classical records, many of which are still considered references for lifelike music reproduction.

When it came time to remaster the Mercury Living Presence catalog for CD, she brought the same exacting standards to this new media as she demanded when producing the analog originals. As Wilma considered the equipment she'd use to convert the analog master tapes to digital, she eschewed products used by most engineers and producers of the time and searched for a better solution. After evaluating several alternatives, she ultimately chose the then-new dCS 900 for its high resolution, musicality, flexibility, and unique ability to produce 24-bit files—technology dCS pioneered.

Now, as part of the 70th Anniversary of the Mercury Living Presence label's inception, Decca Records has released the entire digital catalog to the major streaming services, allowing more music lovers than ever to access and enjoy Wilma Cozart Fine's legacy of vibrant, timeless classical music, lovingly recorded.



Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the first Mercury Living Presence Recording.

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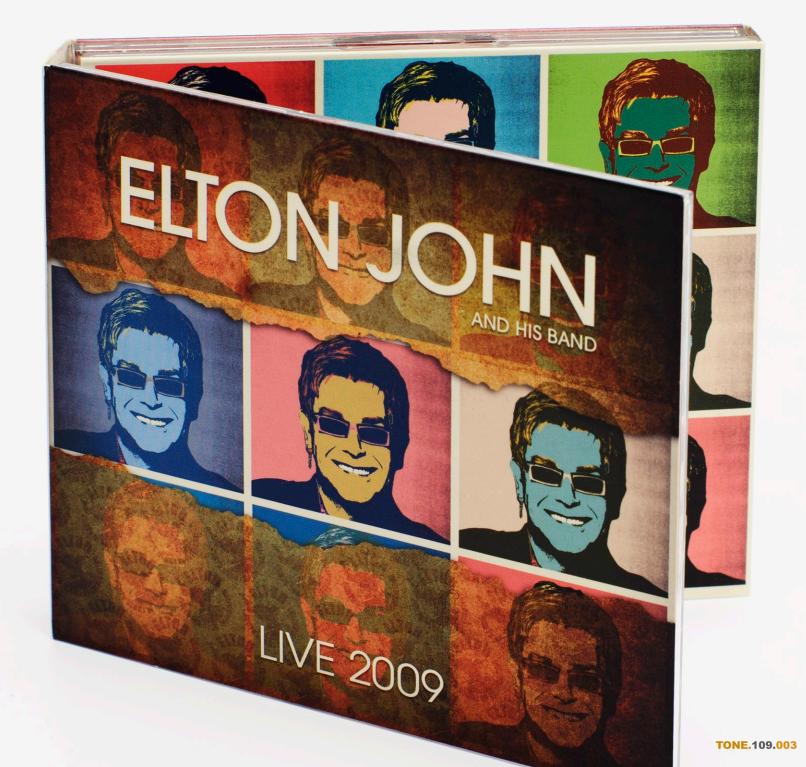




SVSound.com

t's become somewhat of a ritual, starting work on the issue, revisiting the past - especially concerts from the past. On this lovely English evening, I had the pleasure of not only seeing Sir Elton and his band, in top form, they chose to make this an evening of favorites and greatest hits from Goodbye Yellow Brick Road and back, with precious little Lion King-era tunes.

Best of all, at the end of the show, you could purchase a CD of the evening's performance.



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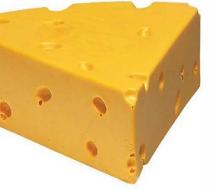


Staff

Photography and Design - Man & Machine
Digital Retouching - Sean Zloch
Publisher - Jeff Dorgay
Music Editor - Jaan Uhelszki
Audio Historian - Ken Kessler
Senior Contributor - Rob Johnson
Analog Master - Richard Mak
Administration - Pamela Dorgay
Research - Earle Blanton, Ken Mercereau, Scott Tetzlaff
Musicologist - Tom Caselli



Contributing Writers



Juan Cavillo
Emily Duff
Ben Fong-Torres
Bob Gendron
Lawrence Devoe
Lionel Goodfield
Jim Macnie
Eric Neff
Jerold O'Brien
Shanon Swetlishnoff
Pam Szeto-Griffin
Cameron VanDerHorst
Kevin Wolff



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Sponsored By Qobuz

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visting the
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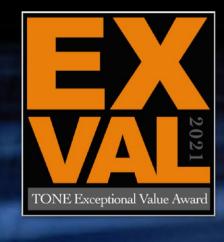
"... nothing short of stunning..."

Jeff Dorgay Tone Audio on the C7 XD





















Formula xHD rev. 2











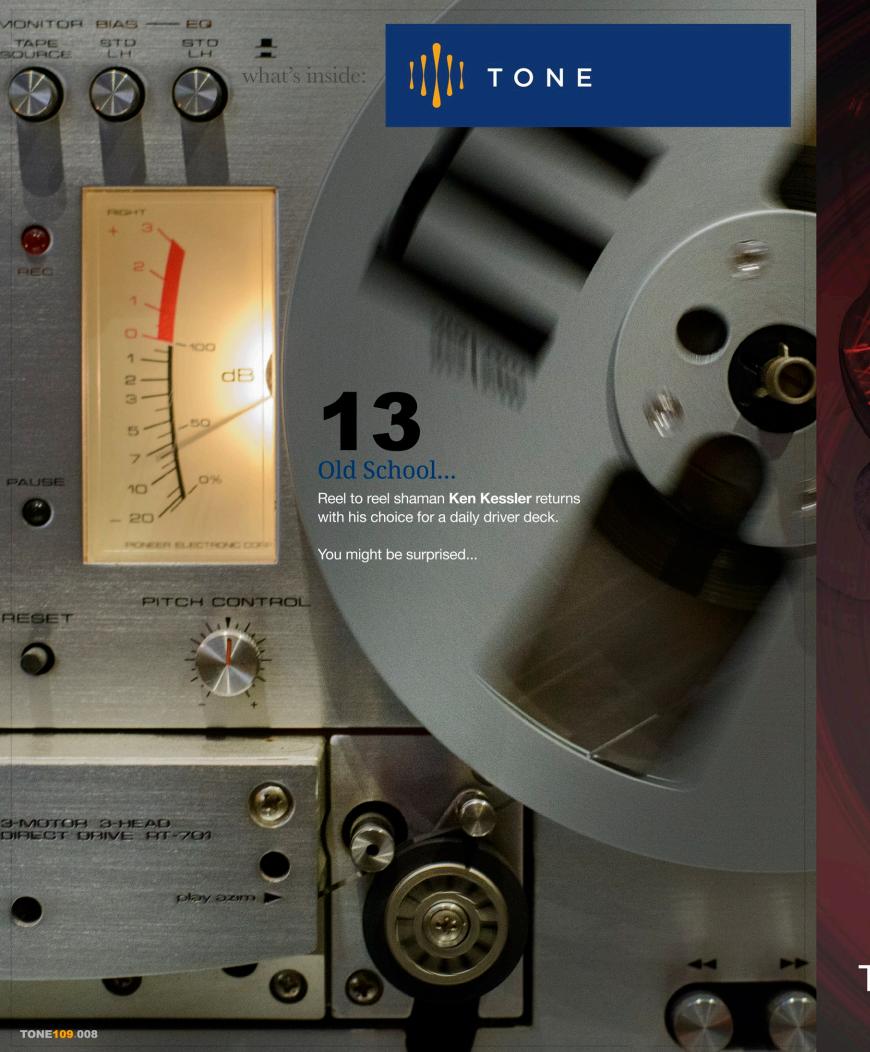
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MAKING THE CONNECTION

new arrivals...

ot exactly new, our former senior editor Ben Fong-Torres returns to tell us about his recent adventure this summer of putting together an audiobook on Little Feat.

Never one to not be busy, Ben has also been the subject of a documentary, "Like a Rolling Stone." It was just recently honored by the Critic's Choice Documentary Awards, naming Ben as "one of the 9 most compelling subjects of a documentary."

Others on that list include Rita Moreno, Dr. Anthony Fauci, and Val Kilmer, to name a few. As Ben is fond of saying, "Crazy." He's certainly one of the most compelling people I've had the pleasure to know.





mise-en-scene



Cover Shot:

his issue, we've got a trio of great integrated amps from Audia Flight.

And, we captured this group with the iPhone Max 12, in portrait mode. No idea what the settings were.

Scary good for a phone...





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no.109

Publishers Letter



ow. Time really does fly when you're having fun and dodging a global pandemic.

I truly can't believe that 16 years have passed since that day I walked into the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest and started showing industry people and consumers the first issue of TONE on my laptop. I remember talking to Mark Schifter, then of AV123, and Lew Johnson, from Conrad-Johnson. "Say, how long has this been out?" Me, "about six hours." Crazy.

Nearly 110 issues later, we've evaluated nearly 2000 components, and because I take all the pictures, I've listened to every single one. Nope, this is not a side hustle. When I started TONE, I was still freelancing for a few photo magazines, but by issue two, we had already climbed to over 100 pages and there was no time to write for anyone else. Fortunately, TONE has been profitable since issue number one.

A lot has happened in that time. We've seen the economy bounce up, down, and sideways, along with a number of other things change on the world stage. We've seen analog become more popular then ever, digital become a mature technology, and streaming services serve up a lot of our day-to-day musical listening. I've said it before, I'll say it again, where are those flying cars we were promised?

Some things haven't changed. A rubbish day at TONE is still better than doing anything else. Selfishly speaking, I still love this job. Our readers have always been what makes this such a pleasure, and many of you are still chatting with us via phone, email, and our various social media platforms. It's been great to see your systems and record collections evolve over the years, along with ours.

Other things never change in terms of our love for heated discussion. We're still arguing about the same stuff, are cables valid? Is vinyl better than digital? Are tubes better than transistors? And of course, we have a few new ones.

The only real disappointment has been how many people both the music and audio industry have lost since we started doing this. I know if I head back to the Munich High End show next year in 2022, there are a lot of faces that will not be in the rooms. This is the only shadow on the past two years. So many great guys like Dieter Burmester just aren't there anymore.

But the good news, regardless of platform, we're all still as passionate about listening as ever. There is more great gear than ever. That gives me a lot of hope. Here's to the next year. And as always, I hope you are all safe and sound. It will be nice to see you in person.



paradigm.com

B efore "home theater" and "multichannel," there was Quad sound. Of course staffers Tom Caselli and Jerold O'Brien have dedicated quad systems.

Here's a few favorite quad tracks, complete with wacky panning effects in the mix!



Jeff Beck – Head for Backstage Pass

Aerosmith – Toys in the Attic

Argent - Hold Your Head Up

Bachman Turner Overdrive - Not Fragile

Black Sabbath - Iron Man

David Essex - Rock on

Focus – Hocus Pocus

Tommy James and the Shondells – Crystal Blue Persuasion

Kraftwerk - Autobahn

Edgar Winter - Frankenstein



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Pioneer RT-707 (and 701)

A Very Accessible RTR Deck.

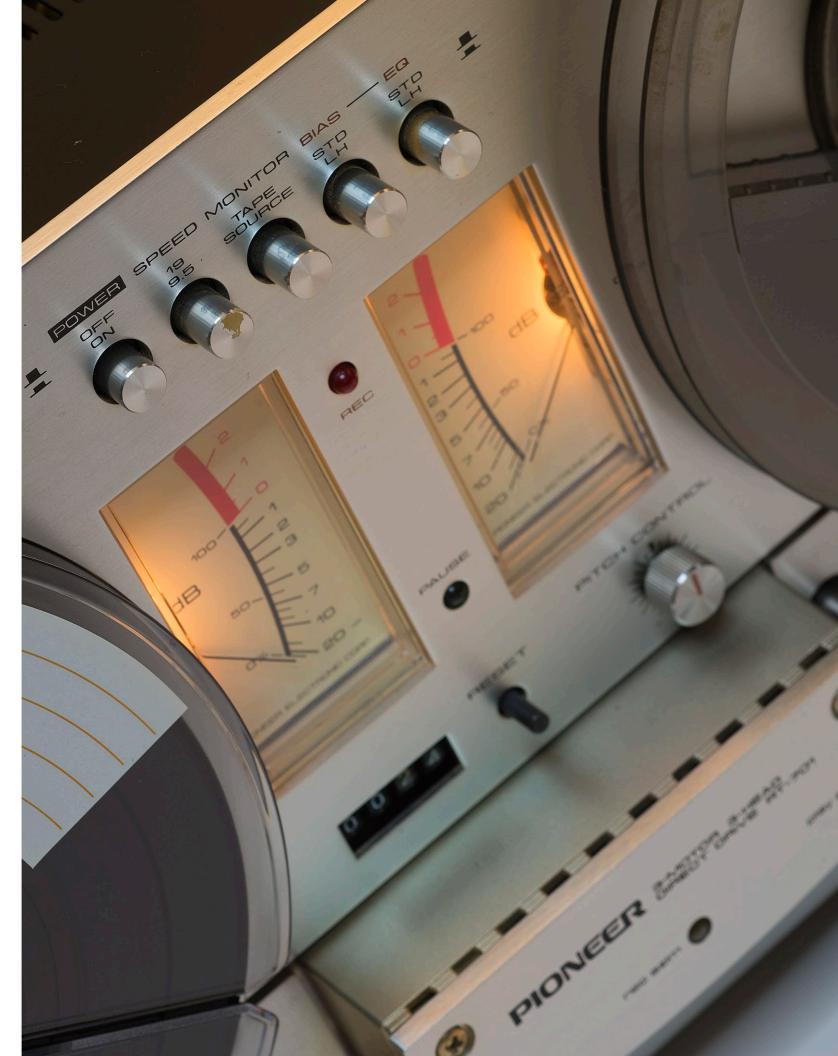
\$600-\$1,500 (current market price)

hen writing about most vintage components, it's safe to assume ample general knowledge in the reader. You are probably *au fait* with tubes vs transistors and moving-coil vs moving-magnet cartridges. Open-reel tape decks, currently enjoying a renaissance in the wake of the vinyl revival, are a whole 'nuther thing. Think of them as cassettes without the convenience.

That little preamble is my way of fending off hate-mail or unsolicited mansplaining on the topic, because some of you are gonna start screaming about pro or semi-pro hardware. The Pioneer RT-707 open-reel tape deck is firmly NOT a professional recorder. To make it perfectly clear, it is from the world of ReVox, not Studer, or TEAC, not TASCAM. So, please, keep your preference for Studer 810s to yourselves.

Pioneer's now hotter-than-hot-on-eBay RT-707 is so clearly aimed at the domestic user that its 19in "rack mount" screw notches are almost comical. That's because it is to an ATR or a Lyrec what a Jeep Wagoneer is to a mil-spec Humvee. I tell you this because the Pioneer only operates at the speeds of 3¾ and 7½ ips, in ¼-track form, and can only handle spools up to 7in. that is not studio-oriented.

Editors note to the pedantic: Because Ken is in the UK and we're here in the Pacific Northwest, we're using a 701 for our photos. Sometimes convenience is everything.



Here's where presumed knowledge may be wishful thinking, because open-reel hasn't been a widespread home-based source for some decades. It's tape speeds and formats which separate domestic hardware from pro. In case you're not a former reel-to-reel user, briefly, ¼-track tapes are the ones that you flip over and play in both directions, like cassettes.

Professionals use as a minimum the 2-track format (also know as ½-track) which play in one direction, and they depend on 10in spools to hold enough tape for high-speed consumption. Although the earliest commercial pre-recorded tapes were also 2-track, this ended in the late 1950s when the labels found that ¼-track was sonically acceptable, thus halving the amount of tape needed for an album. When they dropped the speeds to 3¾ips, they halved the amount of tape once more. This was the situation from the late-1950s until the mid-1980s, when the labels stopped issuing open-reel tapes: the vast majority of pre-recorded tapes were ¼-track, although both speeds were used, e.g. 7½ips for classical stars like Leonard Bernstein on Columbia.



Further positioning the RT-707 in the domestic camp was its chunky, rack-friendly form, conceived to sit in a stack with matching Pioneer components. This wasn't a unique element of its appeal, though, as ReVox's B77 was a cosmetic match for that company's separates, while Akai, Technics, Sony and others ensured that their open-reel machines would look right in an all-brand set-up.

But the Pioneer begged to be stacked. The RT-707 measures only 9x18.5x14in/ 230 x 480 x 356mm (HWD), which is, to give you a sense of context, roughly the size of a decent power amp. It was also auto-reverse-capable, which – again isn't something that mattered to studio denizens, but it sure made the RT-707 a joy to use if you set up your tapes to trigger the auto-reverse

playback with sensing tape. Despite its non-professional mien, more than a few did find their way into studios, especially for making ¼-track demo copies for artists to take home and listen to the day's sessions.

In production from around 1977-1984, the RT-707 sold for \$695 in its final years, equivalent in 2021 to \$1975. Amusingly, that's only slightly more than you would pay today for a 100 percent mint survivor, and "survivor" is another key word in the pro-vs-domestic battle. Second-hand decks like RT-707s are now so coveted because nearly all ex-studio machines once ran 24/7/365 and are worn to within a molecule of their lives, and even with pro maintainence, spares are becoming an issue.

Enjoy the Experience



5777

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Omestic machines, as a rule, suffer far lower mileage. And as the RT-707 was a hit which sold in the many thousands, especially in the USA, it's not particularly rare – the high values are simply a result of the near vertical demand trajectory, and eBay vendors are canny vultures. Contemporary rivals of the same specs for speeds and spool size, e.g. the autoreverse TEAC X3R (\$650 in 1983), are available today at lower prices, probably because of the RT-707's compactness.

Based on the earlier RT-701, the RT-707 added the aforementioned auto-reverse, an output level rotary, DIN rec/play socket and switched AC terminals at the back. The front left out nothing, with users enjoying pitch control, a manual direction change switch to override auto-reverse during play, repeat play and more. There is absolutely nothing missing. Even the headphone output is good by current standards.

Until the open-reel tape revival of the past five years or so, the RT-707 was a sleeper, not taken as seriously as other domestic machines, such as the ReVox B77. Why? Because it was too pretty, and far too user-friendly, instead of reeking of codprofessional touches like rack handles or other macho fittings, or being a pain-in-the-ass to operate. But even its unadorned technical specification tells you it wasn't "all show and no go": 4 heads, 3 motors, AC Servo Direct Drive capstan.

Performance? 0.05% WRMS wow/flutter, 58dB signal-to-noise, 20-28kHz frequency response. For the recordist, the RT-707 also provided two-step bias and

What has been overlooked is the sound, even though reviewers were positively predisposed in general. It's like this: I own eight open-reel machines. The Tim de Paravicini-modified ReVox G36 is far and away the best-sounding, but runs hot thanks to a few dozen tubes within. It is followed by the Denon DH-710F. Best all around machine? Either the Technics RS1500 or Otari MX5050 if you want 3 speeds and both ½- and ¼-track capability. But the Pioneer is the one I use the most. My only complaint is that the output level control is inconveniently placed at the back. (Ed. Note: the single direction RT-701 only has fixed level outputs.)



If you live in the USA, you are spoiled for choice when it comes to second-hand RT-707s. Deeper pockets? Got for the 10-in capable bigger brothers, the RT-909. I know a couple of other tape obsessives who own far more elevated hardware – including those holy grail 800-series Studers. But they also cherish their RT-707s. Why? Because the Pioneer RT-707 is one of those rare hi-fi components that (Shock! Horror!) is actually fun to use.





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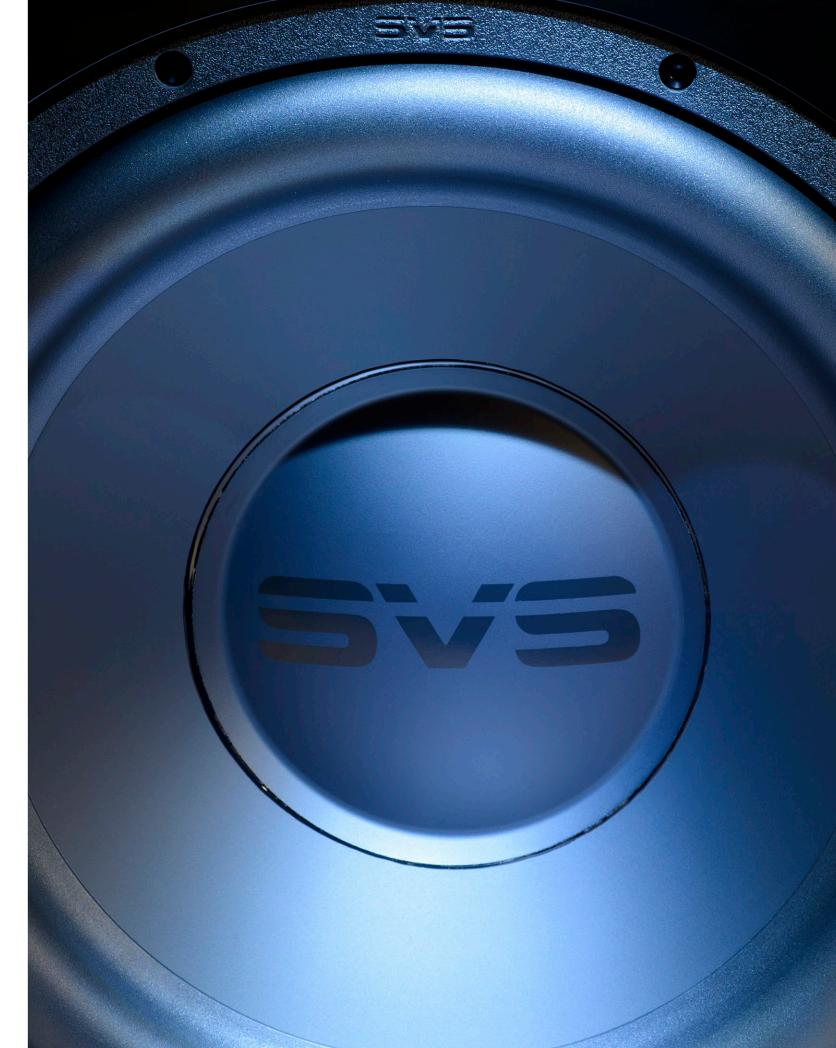
ere's a twist for you. Normally, I'm always comparing cars to hifi gear. But not this time. There's a great burger place in my neighborhood called Killer Burger, that plays metal music most of the time and their burgers all have great names. My favorite burger is called "the fun guy." That's what the 1000 series subwoofers are from SVS. The fun guy. Big fun.

If you haven't heard of SVS, they aren't far away. No other audio company is more ubiquitous in the world of social media. Not JBL, Not McIntosh Group. None of them come close. They are always doing cool product giveaways, group chats, instructional videos, and just plain entertaining stuff. They even posted a video the other day of the PB (ported) 16-Ultra sub knocking down a platoon of plastic army men with the bass ports. How cool is that?

I had to try this for myself, so I set up some army men and cranked up some Public Enemy through the PB-1000 we have here for review. About 20 seconds into "Fight the Power," I'd slain them all. I told you that hifi should be more than charts and graphs.

Fun guys indeed

Billie Eilish's recent release, *Happier Than Ever*, is full of deep, rumbling bass lines. It's a testament to the SVS engineering team and production team's prowess. These are some incredibly good subwoofers for \$599 and \$799 respectively.





Clear Beyond Interconnect

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"No one offers a better combination of high performance, classic good looks, and functionality in a compact form factor than Nagra does with their Classic Line. When you want maximum performance in a minimal footprint, this is the way to go!"

Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio



1095

Advanced setup

Should corner placement not work, go for placement up against the wall. Try starting about a foot away from the wall and do the same thing, though you will probably have to turn the level up a little higher. With 325 watts on tap, you can still pull this off with ease. If your room is reasonably symmetrical, do the same thing on the other side of the room.

Here's what makes the 1000 series easier to use than the rest. In addition to their built-in DSP processing, you can adjust it all from the comfort of your listening chair.

This is awesome for two reasons: it's a time saver and you can fine-tune the setup just right from your exact listening position. Just download the SVS app to your tablet or smartphone. I use this app with my PC-4000 and 3000 Micro subwoofers, and it's a snap to use.



In addition to allowing you to set crossover frequency and level, the SVS app gives you a parametric EQ and the ability to save multiple setups. It's like the 1, 2, and 3 buttons on your car's adjustable seats. This makes it easy for different people or different moods.

Thanks to said presets, if you happen to be an audio enthusiast that uses multiple speaker setups, or want to mix it up now and then, being able to store a few setups makes it a lot easier to work with multiple speakers. Using a pair of stand mounted monitors for a more intimate system, perhaps swap for some large floorstanders, or drag a pair of Magnepans out?

Easy, and I did just that, trying the 1000 series subs with a pair of small Maggies, a pair of Sonus faber Lumina 1s and a pair of Focal Arias. All are easy to mate with the SVS subs. I wouldn't hesitate to use them with anything.

Final thoughts and listening

Hundreds of hours spent putting both subwoofers through extensive listening, with many different speakers proves them to be musical and of high quality. These are the easiest subwoofers to use on the market, and that's as fun as hifi gets. Grab a pair of SVS 1000 series subwoofers and be the fun guy to everyone, except maybe your downstairs neighbors.

Another Exceptional Value Award winner, to be sure!

And, tons of fun.





FEBRUARY 18-20, 2022

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Kevin Hayes, VAC

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Jeremy Bryan, MBL North America

The PrimaLuna EVO 100 DAC

Just tubey enough.

\$3,395 primaluna-usa.com primaluna.com upscaleaudio.com

hen you hear the name PrimaLuna, the first thing that probably comes to mind is affordable, high quality tube amplifiers. Makes sense. After all, Prima Luna has a stellar reputation for their vacuum tube components. Comparing their gear to products costing twice as much, PrimaLuna easily holds its own. They're virtually synonymous high value tube-based amps. What they aren't as well known for are tube DACs, something they're hoping to change with the \$3,399 EVO 100 Tube Digital AnaLogue Converter.

Visually the EVO 100 Tube DAC shares its DNA with the rest of the EvoLution line. It sports the same clean, modern look with exposed tubes, looking classic and futuristic (available in either silver or black finishes).

The front panel is nice and simple. There are two LCD displays on the front; one revealing which of the four inputs are selected; the other displays the resolution of the currently playing music. There are four smaller buttons to toggle between the various inputs (AES/EBU, Coaxial, Optical, and USB). A magnetically attached tube cage that will keep out both prying little fingers and curious doggy snouts. On the left side, close to the front you will find the power switch which is easily accessible even with the DAC setup at the bottom of my cabinet. The back panel has an Analog Output section with unbalanced RCA-style left and right outputs (there are no balanced outputs here), a Digital Input section with inputs for AES/EBU, Coaxial, Optical, and USB, and the input for the AC cable.



udiophileApartment

Down to business

The EVO 100 Tube DAC comes with two 12AX7 tubes, two 12AU7 tubes, and two 5AR4 rectifier tubes arranged in a dual mono configuration. There is a seventh tube inside and it is the "secret sauce" of the EVO 100 Tube DAC, called the SuperTubeClockTM. PrimaLuna has replaced the typical solid-state oscillator that is typically found in the digital clocks of DACs and replaced it with a low-noise mini-triode vacuum tube which lowers jitter and noise while increasing detail and dynamics.

For the purpose of this review I kept the tubes stock but if you're into tube rolling, there is plenty of opportunity for play here. The EVO 100 Tube DAC has a Burr Brown PCM1792A digital to analog converter and a Burr Brown SRC4192 upsampling converter, allowing it to handle PCM files from 16bit /44.1 kHz up to 24bit/192kHz and DSD64-DSD128. It does not play MQA encoded music.

Tidal users will need to use software like Roon to perform the first unfold before the EVO 100 can play it.

The first thing you'll notice when opening up the box that it came in was how solid the EVO-100 is. The build quality is phenomenal. Setup was a breeze. Everything was hooked up and ready to go in under five minutes.

They even provide a high-quality USB cable in the box which I used to connect the EVO 100 to my Intel NUC running ROCK (Roon Optimized Core Kit). A small, sleek remote control for toggling through the various inputs, mute the audio, and turn off the display is also included. And the gloves. Every Prima Luna product comes with a pair of cloth gloves to keep that shiny finish shiny. A nice touch.

It is what it is

One thing to make clear before going any further is that the EVO 100 is simply a straight forward, no-frills DAC. That's all. It's not a pre-amp. It's not a headphone amp. It's not a streaming box. There's absolutely nothing wrong with in all-in-one boxes like that, in fact I use one in my home office, but if you already have a serious HiFi, then you are better served by a DAC that's purpose-built to give you the best digital playback for your buck. At least at this price point. Every single penny of the EVO 100's \$3,000 price tag is spent on enhancing digital playback and it shows.



TONE109.021-Audiophile Apartment

Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



We know. Sorting through the jungle that is pre-owned hi-fi gear can be tough. Myriad Internet forums and online shopping sites just don't offer the expertise required to make sound decisions.

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There's a 60 second countdown on the display letting you know when the tubes will be warmed up and ready to go. I was in an 80s mood, so Ultravox's *Vienna* on Qobuz (16/44) via Roon. The clarity and resolution this DAC provides hits you immediately, getting even better over the first 30-minutes of playback as the tubes warm up. The imaging with this DAC is just top notch. The soundstage during *Vienna* was downright panoramic, going far wider than my speakers and deeper than the back wall of my listening room. The experience was absolutely holographic, cinematic even. Every instrument was clearly articulated in space, and the sound was smooth lacking the sterility like you would expect from an old 80s synth pop record.

Staying in the 80s I switched over to Tracy Chapman's self-titled album ripped to Flac from CD. This album is a more "proper" audiophile recording and the EVO 100 does not disappoint. The shimmer and texture on the acoustic guitar on "Fast Car," sounds life-like as if it were being played in the room. Chapman's vocals are smooth without any hint of brightness prevalent on recordings from that era. The bass is fat and tight, shaking the house but never becoming bloated and losing its definition. Compared to the operatic vista of Vienna, Chapman sounded like she was in a small, intimate club and the EVO-100 easily renders both kinds of spaces without missing a beat.

Queuing up some Beach Boys titles from Analogue Productions were the perfect test for the EVO 100's DSD playback capabilities. It decodes the DSD files perfectly, and after the majestic intro to California Girls, I was questioning the Beach Boys vinyl on hand. The EVO 100 sounds so analog-like that I haven't touched my turntable since it's been here.

Is it the tubes?

The tubes are no doubt responsible for the warm, lush sound that I was hearing, but don't think that they're a magical panacea. Bad recordings are still bad recordings. Streaming the 24/192 version of Kiss' *Hotter Than Hell* still sounds as bad today as it did on your turntable in 1974. The EVO-100 doesn't perform alchemy during playback creating gold from lead, but it will squeeze every single bit of performance out of whatever music you play, in whatever format that you have it in.



Enjoy the Experience



5477

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L've listened to a bunch of similarly priced DACs over the years. While I've certainly enjoyed listening to them, none of them floored me like the EVO 100 did. Straight out of the box the sound was richer and more saturated than what I had before. It's like when movies went from regular color to glorious Technicolor. The sounds are more vibrant, the textures are deeper, and the images presented more panoramic. This DAC is a great destination DAC. To do better than this you would easily have to spend more than double the money. I'd rather take that cash and go buy a ton of used CDs instead. Highly recommended.

Additional listening: Jeff Dorgay

Though I've been a PrimaLuna fan/owner for nearly 20 years, I've only spent time with the PrimaLuna CD player a number of years ago. Before streaming really came into play. Before sending the EVO100 DAC to Sean, I managed to spend a bit of time listening after the photos were taken. All of his comments are on the money, and in retrospect, this DAC is a huge problem solver, especially for that analog enthusiast that approaches digital begrudgingly. So many of the \$1,000 - \$3,000 range are very good, however, they still sound like DACs, if that makes sense. You don't really get the "I can't believe it's not digital" thing until you spend crazy money on a DAC, even today. Most DAC's under \$10k, even the really good ones sound great until you put a record on your turntable. Then you twist your head like a dog, or say, "it's pretty good for digital."

Let it roll

PrimaLuna gear comes out of the box sounding great with the factory tubes. You can visit their owners group on Facebook and drive yourself crazy, leave it stock, or perhaps find a little peace somewhere inbetween. Nearly every week, someone claims to find the perfect set of tubes. More ; 5 5 often than not, tube rolling gives you more different, than better, so if you are new to this game, keep this in mind. If you aren't you probably think I'm nuts and just don't have enough patience to find the right tubes



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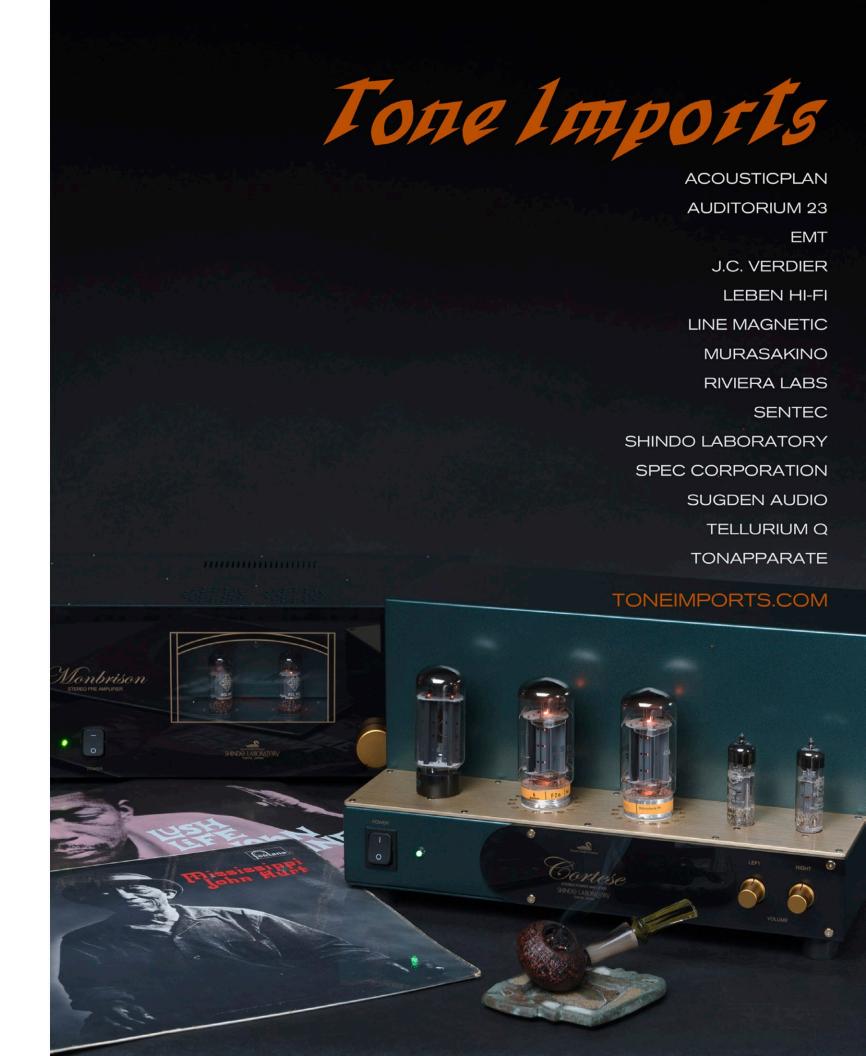
PrimaLuna always runs their tubes pretty easy, so should you decide to buy a mega pair of 12AX7s, and 12AU7s, it won't break the bank. Don't be surprised if you get 10,000 hours on a set of NOS tubes, maybe more. The rectifier tubes are another story. Swapping these tend to change the characteristic of the bass response slightly, and the ultimate noise floor of your DAC. Again, none of these differences are Earth-shattering, but once you've gotten used to your EVO100, you might want to make a change for fun. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Another winner from PrimaLuna

The PrimaLuna EVO 100 DAC nails it in the sense, that it offers great dynamic drive and lush tonality that you expect from tubes, without going soft, and rounded off, merely to take the digital edge away. Even some of the worlds finest DACs with five and six figure price tags can sound fatiguing after a while, which ultimately keeps you out of the listening chair. But it does have a tonal balance that is more saturated, and has a bit more ease, which makes it so lovely to listen to long term.

I'm with Sean, this is one I could easily live with, and he's actually going to make it part of his reference system, so this piece not only deserves an Exceptional Value Award, consider it #toneaudioapproved as well.





Late Night Garage Playlist -Jeff Dorgay

I seem so be spending more and more time in the garage lately, now that I've installed a Cyrus CastONE. As a ROON endpoint, it's a breeze to have access to my entire digital music collection.

Garage is usually music for a mellow mood, but some stubborn bolts have led to more aggro choices.



FEAR - I Don't Care About You

Dead Kennedys- Nazi punks

The Tubes - I Was a Punk Before You Were a Punk

The Sex Pistols - God Save the Queen

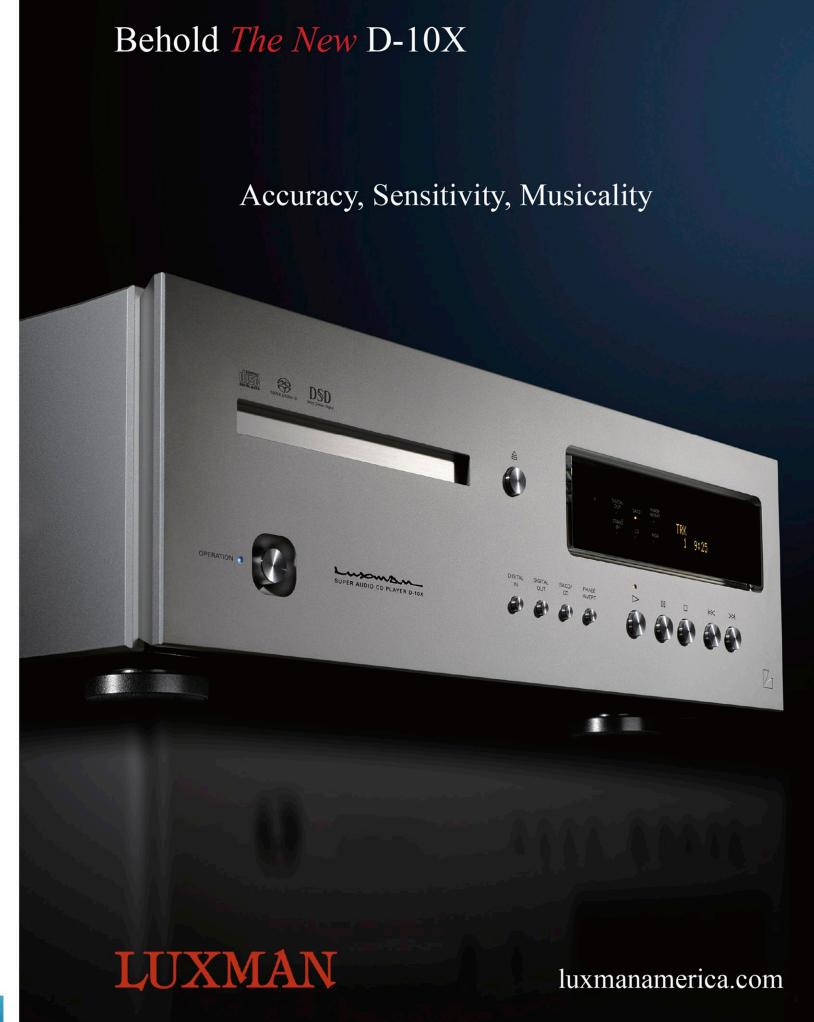
Rollins Band - Liar

Frank Zappa - Bwana Dik

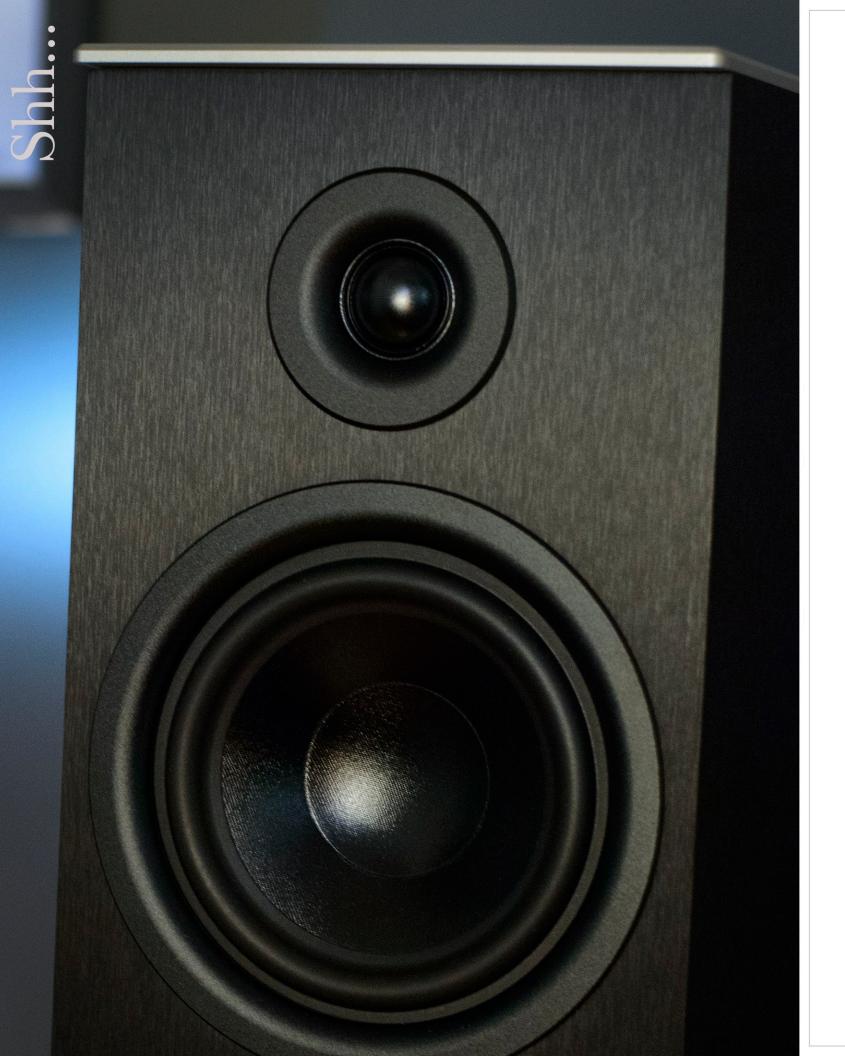
Ian Dury - Sex and Drugs and Rock & Roll

Plasmatics - Pig is a Pig

The Tubes - White Punks on Dope

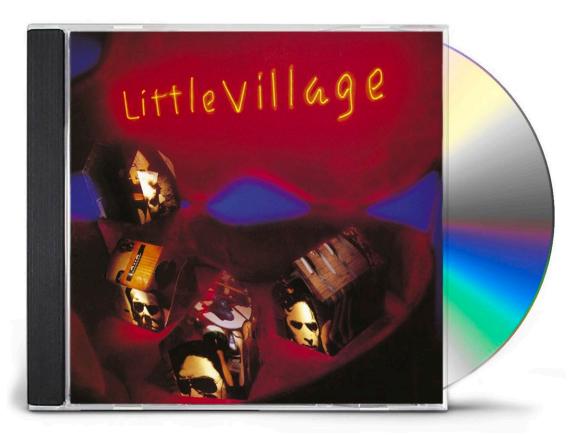






If you still love playing CDs, the value proposition of the T+A Caruso R is off the chart. Its front-loading mechanism (all controlled by the slim remote) makes it so easy to switch from streaming to physical media in seconds.

Don't laugh. As all things old become new again, many are inheriting parents' CD collections, just as some of us of a certain age inherited our parents' vinyl. And, there's plenty of talk on the internet about "crate digging" for CDs as well.



Our listening begins with the self-titled collaboration from the group Little Villiage, consisting of John Hiatt, Jim Keltner, Ry Cooder, and Nick Lowe.

If you're fans of any or all of these guys individually, it's the same lineup that produced Hiatt's *Bring The Family* album in 1987. So chances are you either love or hate this record.

But, the great harmonies, and sparse, yet jangly arrangements make for some great quiet listening.



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As you can see from the rear panel, the Caruso R is well equipped. With a built in FM/DAB tuner, a plethora of digital and network inputs (including wireless), T+A hasn't forgotten one of the most important things - a pair of analog inputs so you can connect a phono pre, or even a tape deck. There's even a subwoofer output, and a variable line out, just in case you'd like to change up the mix for amplification.

Good as the onboard 50+50w power amplifier is, we made it a point to connect a few small tube amplifiers to stay on point with our low-level listening credo.

Again, the Caruso R succeeds brilliantly, no matter how you choose to use it. at \$3,800, there's a lot of functionality in this compact enclosure. Those wanting one stop shopping can add the R10 speakers (shown on previous page) to the list, to round out an all T+A system.

This all makes for a great small room system that's quick to setup, and thanks to built in streaming, will have you listening in a few minutes. All popular formats are supported, and you can even use it as a ROON endpoint via AirPlay.



The ifi micro iPhono 3 Black Label **Phono Stage**

Major upgrade.

\$999.99 ifi-audio.com

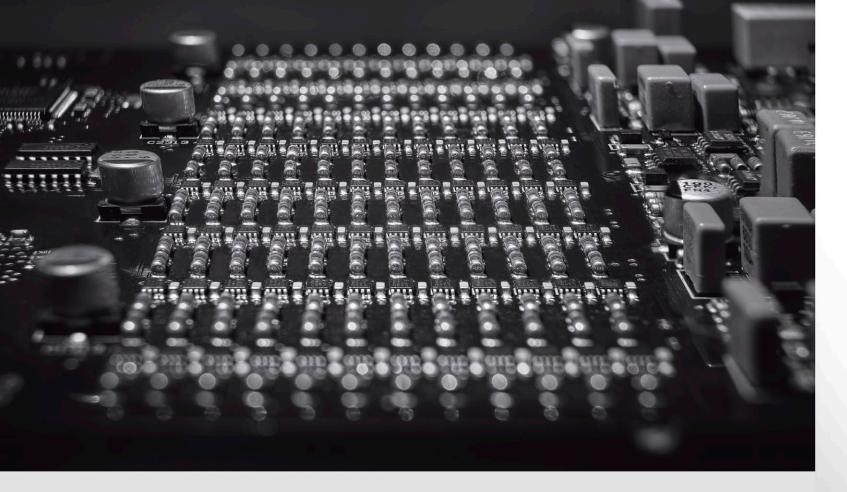
ne of the first upgrades often made to your analog front end is a better phono stage. Or, if you have one of the current crop of integrated amplifiers, you may not have an on-board phono section. If your budget will accommodate a thousand-dollar purchase, ifi's iPhono3 Black Label is an excellent choice, if you'll be pairing it up to MM or MC cartridges in the \$200 - \$2,000 range. At \$999.95, with an ifi iPowerX (A \$109 value on it's own) included, the iPhono3 is a top performer.

Our listening begins with the new Technics SL-1500, with its bundled Ortofon 2M Red – one of the finest \$100 cartridges going. The SL-1500 is particularly fun because it offers auto return at the end of the record, just like the SL-1600 did many years ago. It's a great party table, because when the drinks and the conversation are flowing, inevitably someone will forget to lift the tonearm when the music stops. The iPhono 3 extracts a stunning performance from this budget cartridge. Swapping a stylus assembly from a 2M Blue ups the game in every way – bigger image, more extension at both ends of the frequency spectrum, and more inner detail.

The MM portion of this review stops when the new Ortofon Concorde Supreme arrives. This 700-dollar moving magnet cartridge is not a DJ cartridge by any stretch. With its fine line stylus and quick transient response, it's more like a Super OM 40 in an easy-to-use package. Again, the iPhono 3 is more than up to the challenge. Again, a massive increase in analog performance.

In case you didn't know, ifi's parent company is Abbingdon Music Research (AMR). Their flagship product is the five-figure PH-77, with an incredible reputation as far as reference analog phonostages go.





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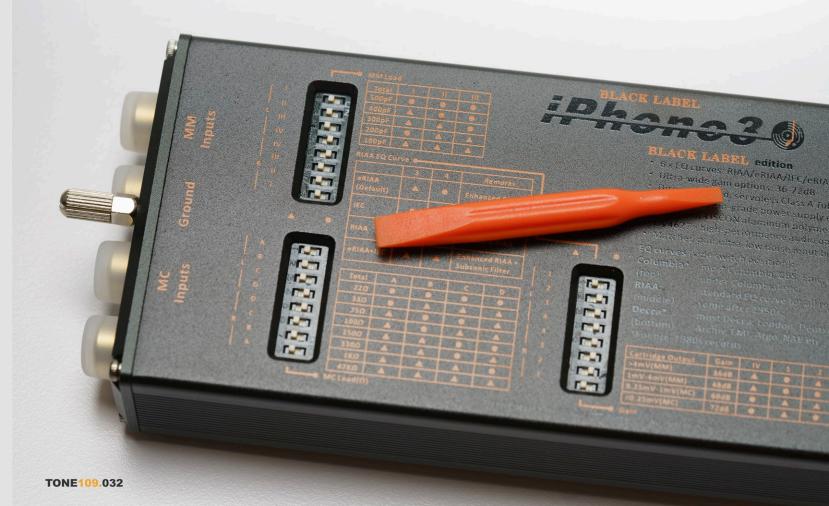
Ready, Set, Go

The iPhono3s major strengths hit you immediately. This preamp is extremely quiet, with a lot of low-end weight, with a slightly warm overall tonal balance. All great things to enhance your vinyl experience. The iPhono 3 makes a fantastic first impression.

Setup is easy, kind of. While very straightforward, with multiple gain, loading, and capacitance settings, along with a nice, orange plastic tool to set the DIP switches, the instructions to set said DIP switches are in about three-point type. Even the 20-something enlisted as a seeing-eye audiophile mentioned difficulty reading the fine print.

Once enlarged for proper viewing, the iPhono3 offers two MM gain settings, 36dB and 48dB. The lower gain is particularly handy if you have a Rega MM cartridge, as these have a higher output of 7mV. The Ortofon 2M series only produce 5.5mV, and most of the Clearaudio MM cartridges about 3.3mV – will respond better to the 48dB setting.

With separate MM and MC inputs, you can use either cartridge with the iPhono3. There are separate RCA inputs for each, with a single grounding post in the middle of the two sets of jacks. The other side of the iPhono3 has a pair of RCA outputs, and there is a DC power supply input for the iPowerX. iFi suggests NOT using any other power supplies, so to respect their wishes, I did play it straight. However, I wouldn't be surprised if a higher current, linear power supply might not coax even more performance out of this product.



With 60dB and 72dB gain settings for MC, nearly any cartridge should work. Loading options of 22, 33, 75, and 100 ohms (along with 400 and 1k ohms) put a lot of great cartridges at your disposal. The iPhono3 is an incredibly versatile phonostage!

It was precisely these settings that make a heavenly match with the Denon 103r. However, this budget high performance benchmark, only has .25mV output. Paired with the iPhono3's high gain and ultra-low noise floor, it really can make a reasonably priced table shine. Plugging in to a Technics SL-1200 with this cartridge is a dynamic, lively, and musically engaging package. The Denon/iFi combination offers such a big sonic window, it might just be tough to justify the big bucks' stuff!

Swapping headshells, replacing the Denon with a vintage Shure V15 type III (equipped with Jico stylus assembly) is another killer budget analog combo via the iPhono3. The Shure's legendary track-ability and great dynamics, combined with the iPhono3s ability to set capacitive loading to 400 or 500pf maximizes the V15s abilities.

Moving upmarket to the Dynavector 17D3, the iPhono3 shows how well it can keep up with this punchy and exciting low-output MC. Switching the program material up for heavier rock makes for an enormous soundstage. Working through most of the earlier Led Zeppelin and VanHalen records proves completely convincing, with drums and layers of guitars having the necessary force to engage.

Because of the single ended RCA outputs, best results will be attained keeping the iPhono3 within ten feet of your line level preamplifier or integrated amplifier.

Experimenting with longer cables, a tiny bit of low-level noise started creeping in, when we went from 10-foot cables to 20, and definitely noticeable with 30-foot cables. This probably won't be an issue for most of you, but just in case you're doing a little space planning, this will help.





Integrity endures.

Since 1981

Many hours in the chair with the iPhono3 confirms the first impression that this is an Exceptional Value Award winning product. Don't let the compact size fool you, the density of thought behind this product is off the chart good. The past version of the iPhono was excellent, but the 3 takes it to a new level of performance. Comparing them side by side, the 3 is all about refining what came before.

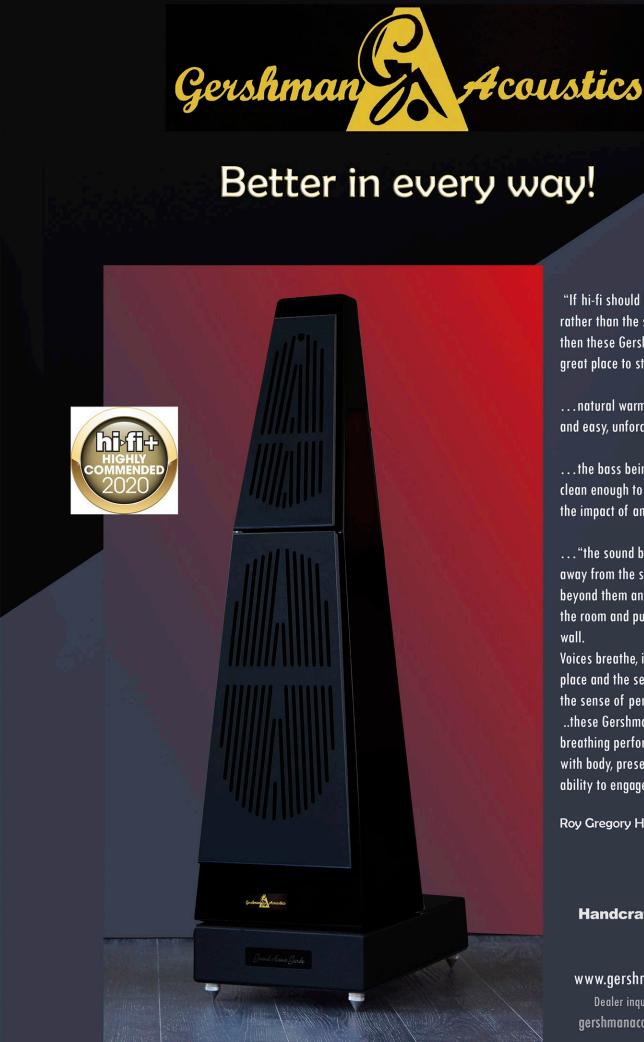
Swapping back and forth between the two, it's all a change for the better. Particularly in the areas of low-level detail retrieval, and additional smoothness up on top. Cymbals are powerful, yet smooth, free of grain, and other electronic artifacts that take away from enjoying analog fully. Tracking through densely recorded tunes, the iPhono3 keeps things in perspective. Again, offering a level of fine resolution (even with a modest cartridge) that will keep you spinning record after record.

The iPhono3 does nothing wrong. None of the tonal spectrum is exaggerated or ignored,

is as close to perfect as it gets. Yes, the big ticket phonostages can resolve more detail, go deeper, and provide a wider dynamic swing, but they all cost a lot more. The iPhono's overall neutrality makes it compatible with tube or solid-state amplification. If anything, it is ever so slightly warm in overall tonal balance. This also allows a wide range of cartridges that will provide pleasing sound.

If you can keep your analog front end in perspective as a complete system, the iPhono3 makes perfect sense. If you're using it with a table/cartridge combination in the \$1,500 - \$5,000 range it makes a great showing, and if you're starting with a more modest setup, it gives you plenty of room to grow. Thanks to the compact form factor, and minimal power draw, you need only to plug it in, set gain and loading, and play records.

Within the price constraints, analog doesn't get any better than this. If you've been investigating phonostages in the \$500 - \$1,000 range wondering if it's worth ponying up for a bit more, the answer is a solid "yes." This is an excellent product in every way.



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...natural warmth, musical presence and easy, unforced dynamics ...

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Voices breathe, instruments fall into place and the sense of the song and the sense of performance lock in.these Gershmans bring living, breathing performers to your room, with body, presence and a natural ability to engage and entertain"...

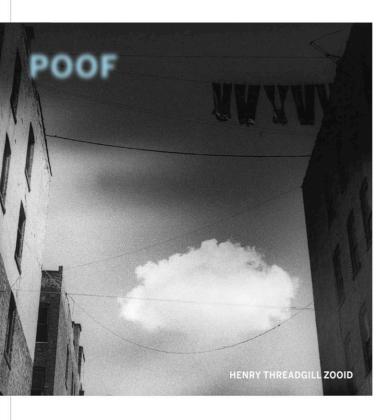
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Henry Threadgill Zooid *Poof*

Pi Recordings - CD, Download

Flux is everything in Zooid's music. For two decades, the fetching propulsion of Henry Threadgill's strings-brass-percussion-reeds outfit has paralleled the definition of its biological namesake: an entity that's part of, but can move autonomously from, its parent organism. The composer-bandleader, who picked up a Pulitzer for Zooid's previous album, In For a Penny, In For a Pound, designs his charts in a way that prioritizes percolation, independence, and spontaneity. Flow is job one in the group's occasionally bewildering web, and the music's attractions multiply when rhythmic currents take dramatic turns.

Threadgill says this album is entitled Poof because, like a magician's slight-of-hand ploys, key motifs might appear or disappear in a flash. That means these five abstract concertos invite shifts in direction while granting each instrumentalist a turn in the spotlight. Trombonist Jose Davilla's ramble on "Beneath The Bottom," guitarist Liberty Ellman's sauntering on "Happenstance, the saxophonist's forlorn alto rumination on the title cut (sounding a tad like Ornette's plaintive cry these days) - each makes a case for the program's vivid use of textures. A peppery ensemble section pulses one minute, and moments later a lone voice provides a bridge to another vista.

The 77-year-old's chamber music is undergoing steady refinement, and the remarkably poised Poof resounds with experience and elegance.

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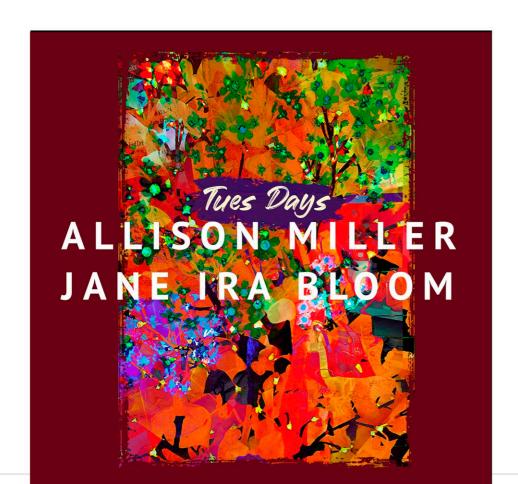
Jane Ira Bloom/Allison Miller Tues Days

Outline Records

On paper, most improvised duets should have a natural sparseness - the fewer the instruments, the more gaunt the music. But from Haden/Jones to Blackwell/Cherry to Halvarson/Frisell, that "on paper" stuff often turns to hooey. The wisest improvisers know how to sculpt their presentations to conjure the impact of a full ensemble. This new duo exchange between soprano saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom and drummer Allison Miller pulls off such a trick. Agile, yes. But in an uncanny way, flush with gambits that bend sound towards elaboration. The 11 fully improvised performances, cut in Brooklyn last spring during Covid down-time with no initial intention of being shared with an audience, glow with a unusual heft.

A lot of this victory has to do with the breadth of sound that Miller's percussion is capable of. On "Technicolor" that means a parade of kinetics. Morse code on the toms, clanging cymbals, circus press rolls, and metallic chatter - with her mate's nimble horn lines brocading the action, the drummer turns the piece into a poetic flourish. Other tracks follow suit. The flutters that Bloom delivers in "Crayola" accumulate nicely, their feathery swoops becoming part of a rich foreground. "Upon Seeing JP" simmers and simmers, intermittently threatening to boil over.

And if you do wind up yearning for a hushed passage that still has plenty of cool particulars, "Light Years Away" is right there waiting for you.



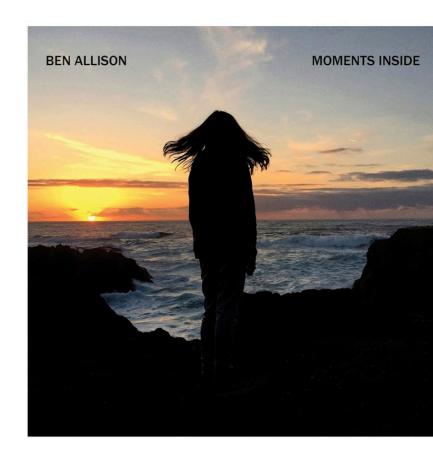
TONE109.036

Ben Allison Moments Inside Sonic Camera - CD

The lithe interplay. The inspired poesy. Nods to all things sensual. When Brazil delivered bossa and samba to the pop world in the late '50s and early 60s, and then augmented them with the progressive insights of Tropicalia just after, 20th century musicians had a wealth of provocative ideas to absorb. Jazz improvisers took to it fast, and the joyous sounds of Brazilian pop still fascinate many. *Moments Inside* finds Ben Allison putting a personal spin on the music's building blocks, helming a twoguitar ensemble that glides through 6 new originals and a supple update of Herbie Nichols' "House Party Starting." As they breeze along, they prioritize the same kind of nimble interplay Tropicalia

oddities used to craft their memorable auras.

The bassist-bandleader has long been a melody man, and this new music is warm and genial, dodging dissonance and stressing accord. From his earliest titles some twenty-plus years ago, he has found ways to craft catchy themes that band members address in a kaleidoscopic manner, simultaneously refracting several aspects of the music and presenting them as a kaleidoscopic whole. That tack is somewhat downplayed on Moments Inside, though guitarists Chico Pinheiro and Steve Cardenas spend the entire record darting and weaving around each other. Together they create a web of fluid lines dedicated to nuance - grand gestures are verboten. The rhythm section of drummer Allan Mednard and Allison find a unique bond that makes lilt sound like oomph. (Mednard is a pro at this: check the way he lifts Brandee Younger's harp work on her recent Somewhere Different.) From "The Chase" to "A Child Sings In Stone," this music floats as often as it soars. And there's intimacy at work.



The performances are vivacious, but it sometimes seems like the band is sharing a little secret with you - a nice balance.

Pinheiro is a native Brazilian who grew up with his homeland's pop tunes; Cardenas is a pro known for his stylistic breadth. Both have built a rep on the expressive touch they bring to their instruments. As they trade lines on "Breakfast With Eric," you can see why Allison paired them. Together they crochet the breezy sensibilities of Brazil into a jazz mindset that makes Moments Inside a familiar yet unique treat.



Matt Mitchell & Kate Gentile Snark Horse

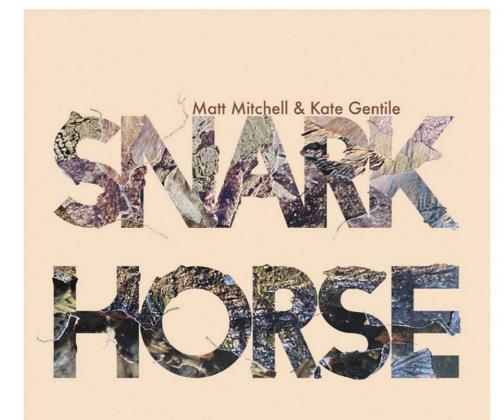
Pi Recordings

All hail experimentation! For their Snark Horse adventure, percussionist Kate Gentile and pianist Matt Mitchell invited an improvising cohort to have their way with a series of one-bar phrases specifically written to generate a wealth of ideas. Sometimes a kernel is all you need to launch engaging extrapolations, and on this six-CD set (!) said cohort finds numerous directions in which to head. The Zip codes of their final destinations are far flung locales to say the least. Amiable dissonance, wobbly riddims, and clashing motifs make for luminous dreamscapes, anxious waiting rooms, and psychedelic confessionals.

Those familiar with the leaders' previous work shouldn't be shocked by the daunting variety of these soundscapes.

Those familiar with the previous work of their guests - saxophonist Jon Irabagon, bassist Kim Cass, guitarist Brandon Seabrook, violist Mat Maneri, trumpeter Davy Lazar, guitarist Ava Mendoza, trombonist Ben Gerstein, and saxophonist Matt Nelson - probably know that they're pros at painting themselves out of corners.

Free improv is thrilling when the instantaneous ensemble mind-meld becomes deep enough (see the Morse Code pulse moves of "tooth helmet"), and though the Snark squad has chosen some dangerous territory on which to plant their flag, much of its effort - including the Lee Perry ambiance of "fertile pinwheels," the off-the-menu caprice of "feral pineals," or the Franz Waxman spookiness of "alphabotanical" - is vital in ways that only the sturdiest abstraction can be.





The reviews are in.

























ELYSIAN



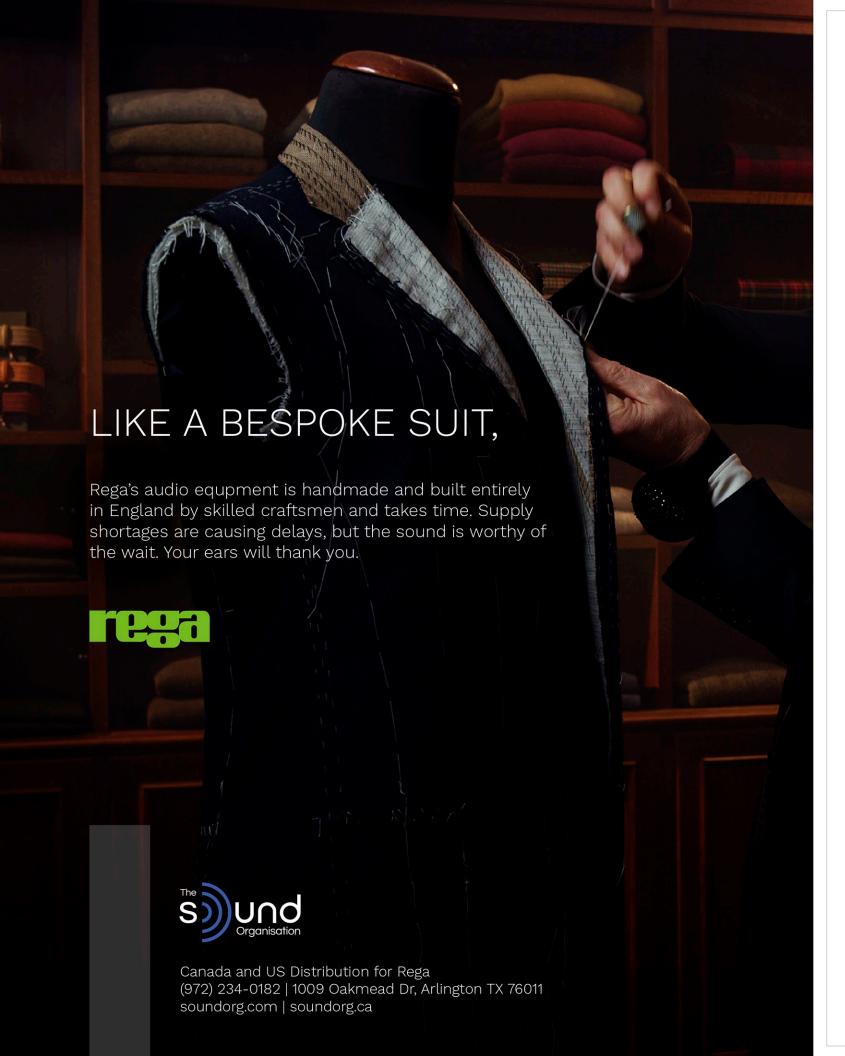
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John Coltrane A Love Supreme: Live In Seattle Impulse!

Jazz fans know the kind of cornerstone status Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* has earned since its release. The 1965 gem, created by the saxophonist's quartet of pianist McCoy Tyner, bassist Jimmy Garrison, and drummer Elvin Jones, is an artistic and commercial juggernaut. Along with Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*, Trane's 33-minute devotional suite is one of modern jazz's most high-vis releases.

The bandleader performed the piece in post-studio settings, but minimally. A fierce rendition captured in Juan-les-Pins, France revealed its own blend of passion and poise, but with mucho marketing behind it, this newly unearthed, just-released document is causing a bigger stir. After cutting *A Love Supreme* in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey in December of '64, the always-evolving bandleader augmented his ensemble during a Bay Area visit.

In the fall of '65, tenor saxophonist Pharoah Sanders and bassist Donald Raphael Garrett were asked to join the group. When they got to Seattle for an October gig, alto player Carlos Ward got the green light to sit in as well. ALSLIS explodes the parameters of the studio version, with the leader and group stretching the suite's themes to a 75-minute excursion that's less focused, but no less fiercely performed than the original. Trane's famous sheets of sound became stormy and sanctified in the Pacific Northwest, and the then-24-year-old Sanders' expressionistic lingo paralleled his boss's fierce eruptions and bolstered the group's collective hosannas into speaking-in-tongues declarations that echoed the fervor of Black church joy shouts.

Though one of the original album's key attractions was its loose design, allowing the foursome's profound chemistry to guide the action without elaborate written material, this live date, made at a club called The Penthouse, is even more unbuttoned. Humans being humans, debates regarding which version transmits more emotional heft have cropped up already. If the Seattle artifact had been captured better fidelity-wise (Joe Brazil, a bandleader who shared the stage that same day, hit the "record" button on his personal reel-to-reel rig so we could enjoy this over a half-century later), perhaps the contest wouldn't be so one-sided.

After a steady week's-worth of spins, there's little doubt that the pith, ardor, and clarity of the primary document carries the day, its key achievement forever being the spectacular lyricism and trenchant grace of its epic devotion. Which isn't to say I won't blast this radical Seattle addendum a few more times at top volume again this weekend.





Andrew Cyrille Quartet *The News*

Jazz albums don't need powerhouse solos to woo an audience. The nuanced exchanges between the members of an ensemble are often rich enough to create the kind of magic that keeps listeners coming back for more. Appreciation of subtlety is the gate-opening mindset for those spending time with Andrew Cyrille's latest adventure; absorbing the somewhat magical give-and-take that defines the participants' work is a reward in itself.

This time around those participants are pianist David Virelles, bassist Ben Street, and guitarist Bill Frisell. There's no reason to cite definitive OMG passages, or go on about how someone's virtuosity is worth the price of admission. This record is a group effort, and as each of the tunes roll by - a meditation here, a blues there - the band members make a point of nurturing each other so the flow centers on atmospheric insight and musical aura.

If an ECM title could ever feel like a Blue Note album, this would be it. That's feel, not sound like. No one ever abstractly plinked strings and provocatively crinkled the New York Times like the guitarist and drummer do during "The News" on Alfred Lion's dime, and I'm not recalling any Blue Note discs that feature romantic recitations by an 81-year-old leader a la Cyrille's poetry during "With You In Mind."

All of which is to say: craft and camaraderie are a potent mix on this jewel.



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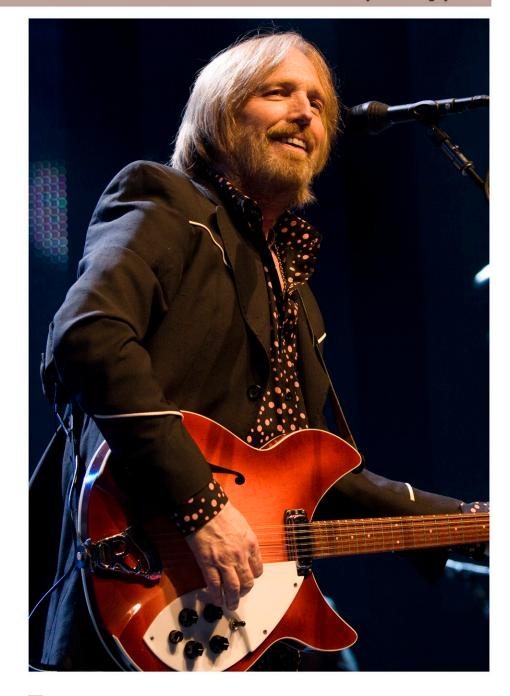


Setlist

Summerfest: Milwaukee, WI

June 26, 2010

Photo by Jeff Dorgay



Back in 2010, I couldn't imagine a world without Tom Petty in it.

If you ever got the chance to see TP and the Heartbreakers over the years, you know how much soul this band always had to give. This happened to be the second night Petty played Summerfest, supporting the Mojo record.

True to form, he mixed four tunes from Mojo (five the prior night into a career encompassing set list, always giving the fans a little bit of everything.



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The one that got away. (recently sold on E-Bay for \$44)

While many music critics called The Tubes' *Love Bomb* record a commercial failure, despite the fact is was one of their most commercial releases, the tour with Todd Rundgren (the record's producer and collaborator) was a dream come true for fans of both bands.

The entire stage was doused in bright lime green like the album cover, and both bands put on incredible performances. I remember staffer Jerold O' Brien and I seeing them at Milwaukee's Oriental Theater, then driving to Chicago the next day to see them again. Those were the days.



P am does her usual thorough job on the Nancy Sinatra record on the following page. Lame as the record is, (I agree with her totally) the now out of print 8-track version is fetching over \$400 on EBay.

Ugh.

Meanwhile, she's given us her favorite songs sung by female artists below:



"You Do" - Aimee Mann, from Bachelor No. 2 or, the Last Remains of the Dodo

"Backlash Blues" - Nina Simone, from Nina Simone Sings the Blues

"Art-I-Ficial" - X-Ray Spex, from Germ Free Adolescents

"Sit Down Servant" – The Staple Singers, from Swing Low

"Chain of Fools" - Aretha Franklin, from Lady Soul

"They Make Me Mad" - The Selecter, from Too Much Pressure

"Be My Baby" - The Ronettes, from Presenting the Fabulous Ronettes Featuring Veronica

"China Bird" - Patti Smith, from Gung Ho

"River" - Joni Mitchell, from Blue

"Do What You Gotta Do" - Roberta Flack, from Chapter Two

"How High the Moon" - Ella Fitzgerald, from Ella in Berlin (Mack the Knife)

"Let Me Through" - The Dead Weather, from Dodge and Burn

"I Hear a Symphony" – The Supremes, from I Hear a Symphony

"Early Morning Breeze" - Dolly Parton, from Jolene

"Under the Big Black Sun" - X, from Under the Big Black Sun



Nancy Sinatra Boots

Light in the Attic 2021 Reissue - LP, CD, 8-Track, and Digital (digital reviewed here)

I feel a little sheepish admitting that I'm not very familiar with Nancy Sinatra. Like I haven't done my homework as a female music aficionado. After all, I've read that she broke ground for women in pop music and that her song "These Boots Are Made For Walkin" is about female empowerment. I suppose any woman in pop music during the 1960s was breaking ground, and it's not for me to say whether her most famous song was a feminist anthem since I think that's subjective. All I can say is that other songs, like Aretha Franklin's "Think" and her rendition of "Respect," come to mind more readily in that regard. Nonetheless, I had never listened to a full Nancy Sinatra album so I looked forward to this review as the chance to hear what I've been missing.

Light in the Attic reissued "Boots" in September as part of their 2021 Nancy Sinatra Archival Series. Her debut was remastered from the original analog tapes and, in addition to two bonus tracks, includes some special features like a booklet with liner notes by Amanda Petrusich, although I didn't see this as I reviewed the digital version.

This album came out during a time when it was common, even expected, for artists to release cover versions of the day's popular songs. However, I just couldn't bring myself to enjoy the bossa nova version of "As Tears Go By." Neither did I like the version of "Day Tripper" with the descending bass line that worked for her hit single but really shouldn't have been reiterated elsewhere on the album. None of her cover songs moved me, but I paused with curiosity when I got to "Run for Your Life." Could Nancy Sinatra successfully subvert Lennon's most misogynistic song by changing the gender of the cheater? It doesn't work, in my opinion. The message is still as ugly, and in Sinatra's version the lyrics sound especially odd contrasted with its more pop-oriented arrangement.

I enjoyed the songs penned by Lee Hazlewood much more than the covers. "I Move Around," "So Long, Babe," and "The City Never Sleeps at Night" (one of the bonus tracks) are catchy, and I like the arrangements even though the beginning of "So Long, Babe" sounds very like parts of "I Move Around."

I can see and hear why Nancy Sinatra and this album are icons of 1960s, at least in the United States. Furthermore, I understand that she, like her father, was an entertainer - that largely-bygone breed of celebrity who did double duty as a singer and actress/actor, appearing regularly on variety shows and eventually becoming so well-established in popular culture that they seemed famous for being famous. It's too easy to overlook such artists or to consider them as lacking artistic depth. Admittedly, I held a stereotype of Sinatra as pop fluff and this review gave me a chance to question that assumption and to examine whether I had bought into a groundless, patriarchal dismissal of her as a serious artist. I don't think it's that complicated, though. While I found some of the tracks quite pleasing, the album just isn't my cup of tea.

-Pam Szeto Griffin instagram.com/pamsrecordcollection



By Cameron VanDerHorst



arlier this year, I got married.

I've actually been with my wife for eight years, and in all that time, I managed to successfully avoid the ignominy of a couples Halloween costume. My streak was broken this year when we found out that a close friend was hosting a Halloween party – and costumes were mandatory. We decided to dress up as characters from one of our favorite movies: Smokey & The Bandit. I went as Burt Reynolds; my wife, naturally, dressed as Sally Field.

I wore a red button-up shirt, a cowboy hat, and turquoise jewelry. The most important part of my costume, however, was some Coors beer, since I sadly lack the budget for a '77 Pontiac Trans Am. As you might recall, the plot of *Smokey & The Bandit* revolves around a bet to drive to Texarkana, Texas, pick up 400 cases of Coors beer, and drive it back to Atlanta, Georgia in 28 hours. What made Coors so desirable – and unattainable – in the late 1970s that it was worth making a movie about?

These days, every medium-sized town in America has their own beloved microbrewery, and a culture of beer snobs have sprung up to hunt down the hoppiest, most flavorful beers this great nation of ours has to offer. That wasn't the case back in the 1970s. Instead, those who took their beer seriously demanded the freshest, purest beer available.

Conventional wisdom dictated that that beer was Coors.



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Grover Neville, InnerFidelity



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Al Chieng, Positive Feedback

"An absolute joy to use."
Steven Stone, HiFi+



"It does what an audiophile amplifier is supposed to do...to say it is musical is to barely scratch the surface."

Gary Alan Barker, Headphone.guru





Legal Stuff: While we all enjoy consuming adult beverages, (if you're of legal age, of course) TONE and Cardas Audio ask you to be responsible...

hat made Coors so special? It's simple. At the time, Coors wasn't pasteurized, and it was brewed without any preservatives. As a result, it could only be sold within a state or two of Colorado, where refrigerated trucks could ensure that the beer remained cold enough to stay fresh and safe enough to drink. This also meant that Coors Brewing Company didn't bother to obtain a license to sell their beer outside the immediate area. However, Coors was so revered for its purity that folks far and wide were willing to pay three times as much for a case.

Consequently, bootlegging Coors East of the Mississippi became a lucrative (and highly illegal) way to make a fair bit of cash in those days. Even president Gerald Ford was said to have snuck Coors home in his luggage after a ski trip (his successor, Jimmy Carter, is widely credited with passing legislation that sparked the microbrew craze of the 1980s). By 1986, Coors became available nationwide, which is why I had a much easier time getting my hands on it than Burt Reynolds and Jerry Reed did.

So how is it? Coors Banquet is still brewed in Golden, Colorado with water from the Rocky Mountains, which gives it a hint of prestige that's usually absent from domestic beers in this day and age.

What's immediately striking is the can – it's slightly narrower and slightly taller than a standard 12 oz. beer can, a hint that you're in for something unique and special. Pour it into a glass, and it's got a nice golden brown color without much foam. Coors Banquet is surprisingly refreshing when cold, but it's not so pleasant when it reaches room temperature. Keep it cool, though, and you're rewarded with a noticeable flavor of sweet malted hops with a crisp cutoff (reminiscent of a hard cider) and no real after taste to speak of.

These days, Coors Banquet is just about as ordinary as it gets. Given its unique history, though, it's still special enough to warrant a taste – after all, it was good enough to spawn some of the best car chase scenes and most quotable one-liners in cinematic history. As a result, it'll always have a spot in my fridge.



Cover Story: Three from Audia Flight

FL Three S FLS 9 and FLS 10

\$3,950, \$7,500, and \$11,000

audia.it

One of the most common questions when faced with multiple choices in audio is "where does the point of diminishing returns lie?" In the case of the three integrated amplifiers we have from Audia Flight, it's a linear progression. Where some manufacturers add a little bit more power, and a few extra buttons, each one of these three integrated amplifiers is an excellent choice at its relative price point.

With more and more great integrated amplifiers on the market, not having complete separate components is no longer a black mark on your audiophile soul. Unless you are a hifi whisperer, considering you don't have to match amp and pre, or get the right pair of high-performance cables with an integrated amplifier, I submit it's easier to hit one out of the ballpark going this route. This way you know your components will go together perfectly.

From what our readers have been telling us, a great integrated paired with speakers of your choice and maybe a turntable makes for an outstanding music system that offers high performance with a minimal footprint. As we head towards 2022, not as many people want a massive rack of audio gear in their environment as in years past.



We've got three for you here, and we will be listing these models in their base configurations, because you can configure the smallest Flight Three S(\$3,950) with or without a phono stage. The larger FLS9 (\$7,500) and FLS10 (\$11,000) offer two expansion slots, which can be filled with DAC (\$1,600) MM/MC phono (\$1,000), or additional analog inputs (\$500), giving you a range of configuration exactly to your taste. One of the most common complaints we always hear is "but I don't care about vinyl, why do I need to pay for a phonostage," or similar comments from vinylistas that don't think they need a DAC.

This modularity is awesome for three reasons. Customization is always a good thing – because you never know what your tastes are going to morph into. Second, keeping it all on board makes for a compact, yet high performance system. Third, price of entry is lower. Nothing wrong with that, eh?

The Flight Three arrives with built-in USB DAC, and the phono slot is vacant, so we can't make that comparison. The other two amplifiers each have phono cards installed, and the FLS10 has both DAC and phono, making this a \$13k integrated as delivered. Again, just buying three sets of interconnects and power cords for four separate components could set you back five figures. See why we like premium integrateds so much?

Look and feel

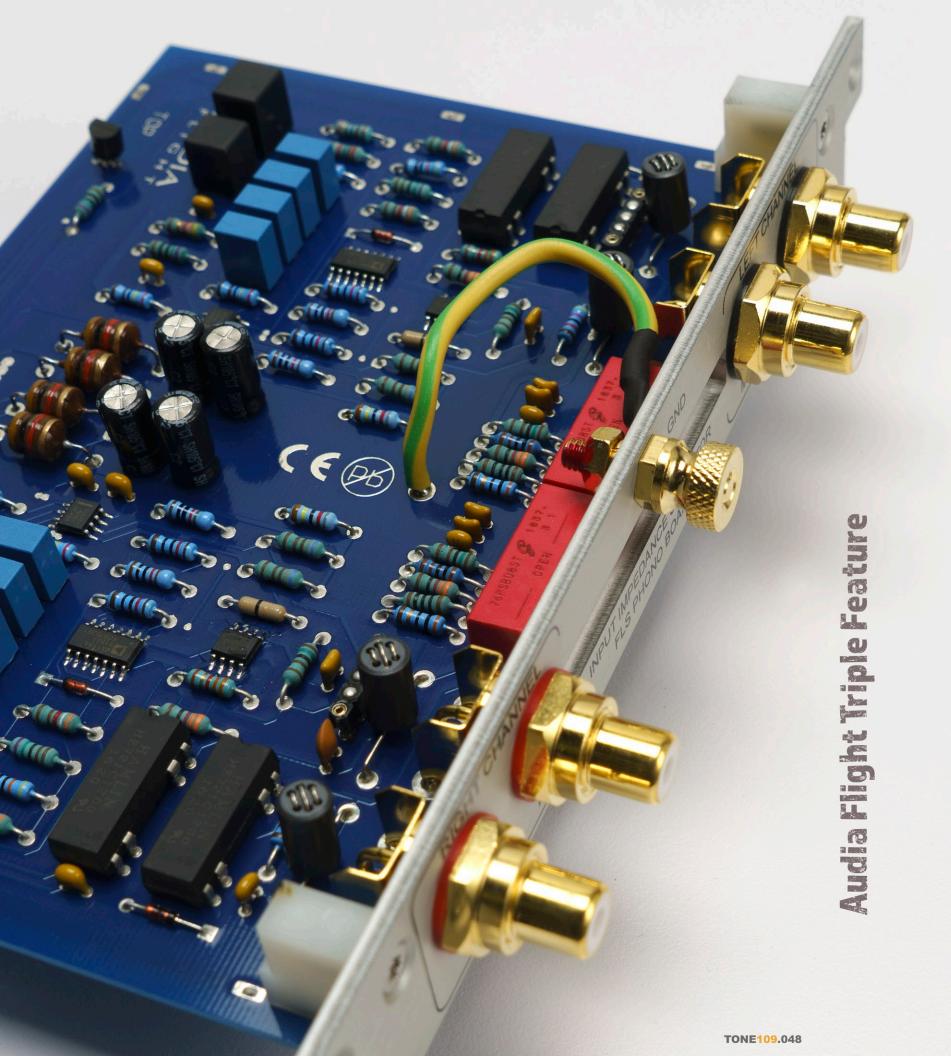
All of the Audia Flight components share a similar design language, featuring their trademark swoop on the front panel with a large, thin volume control and blue LEDs keping you posted on input choice and volume. In case you haven't already guessed, this is an Italian product. Whether you choose silver or black, the Audia Flight amplifiers look gorgeous in any setting. Simply beautiful to behold.

The casework is finely machined and finished, with each box a standard form factor of about 18" wide and 17" deep. The Flight Three is about 5" tall (with feet), the FLS9 about 6.5" tall and the FLS10 almost 8" tall. Flight three is a very manageable 36 pounds, the FLS9, 56 pounds, and the FLS10 weighs 97 pounds.

Fit, finish, and implementation are world class here, but what makes these components even more special is the human engineering. The ergonomics are flawless, with all controls laid out with ease of use in mind. These are amplifiers you will enjoy walking up to, and interacting with, even though the remote is excellent. I suspect that if you buy an Audia Flight amplifier, you'll want to engage with it.







All three amplifiers have tape and preamplifier outputs. Very nice, in case you wanted to add an additional amplifier or connect a tape deck. Now that the cool kids are picking cassette decks again, a good idea. To this end, I actually used the FLS10 to make a few mix tapes on my Nakamichi 1000 to great effect. The Flight Three and FLS9 feature single binding posts for speaker outputs, while the FLS10 provides dual speaker outputs, for those that bi-wire. Aside from optional phono and DAC inputs, all have five line level inputs. The Flight Three offers four RCA inputs and a balanced input, while the other two provide three RCA inputs and two XLR inputs. And, they all feature headphone jacks on the front panel.

Overall sonics

Listening begins with a pair of vintage Acoustat 2+2s and the FLS10. You might think this a bit crazy, but these are tough speakers to drive. Amplifiers lacking in current drive and control roll off quickly. They are almost like connecting a giant capacitor across the speaker binding posts. Don't laugh, more than one "big name" amplifier has shut down quickly, trying to drive the 8-foot-tall relics.

Queuing up Aimee Mann's Lost in Space draws me in immediately. Audia Flight spends a lot of time on their website discussing their approach to amplifier technology, and how they were on a quest for an amplifier with better load control, and quicker signal responses. This led them to a current feedback approach, rather than a traditional voltage feedback design. These 40-year-old speakers never perfomed better, and almost sound like I've added a supertweeter, with all the additional air and detail up on top.

ESLs are never known for major bass extension or detail, but the 2+2s were seriously good.

Switching the program to Kruder and Dorfmeister's "Bug Powder Dust," is tons of fun. This record also offers up a lot of atmoshpheric effects – playing to the strengths of the current feedback topology. The FLS10 makes the monoliths dig deep, which leads to more bass heavy tracks. Thanks to the ultra-low distortion, the familiar rap of ESL panels pushed a little too far comes up to remind me to turn it down. This is really good stuff indeed.

We've listened to a few current based phonostages and they have been equally enthralling – with a signature clarity that few others have matched. The same thing is going on here with the Audia Flight amplifiers. There is a delicacy and airiness that you might normally associate with the finest tube designs – yet they have the bass extension and control that only great solid-state amplifiers can deliver.

All three of these amplifiers produce some of the most balanced sound we've heard, with nothing sacrificed anywhere. Where some amplifiers rely on a certain voice, or emphasis (i.e. killer bass but diffuse soundstaging, or congested highs, etc.) these amplifiers have as little coloration as can be imagined. They are always resolving enough to let the character of the speakers in use come right through without bias. If I were to describe Audia Flight's "sound" in one word, it would be clear. This is a clarity that you usually have to spend a lot more money to get, with tube or solid-state electronics.

Vinyl thoughts

The FLS Phono board is exciting because you get a two-input phonostage, with MM and MC inputs. The DIP switches at the rear allow you to adjust loading between 20 and 1500 ohms, with a lot of adjustment on the lower end of the spectrum. Most listening was done with a Denon 103R, and a recently rebuilt Lyra Helikon SL cartridges. MM duties were handled by the Ortofon 2M Black.



An internal board saves major expense, in terms of more casework, an additional power supply and so on, allowing that \$1,000 phono board to perform much better than you'd get, buying a stand-alone box for the same price. You'd have to pay at least twice as much to get this level of performance, and there's still the issue of another power cord and pair of interconnects. Owners of mega analog front ends will either already have a phonostage they love, or investigate Audia Flight's Classic FL Phono.

Used with the Technics SL-1200/Denon combo, an Avid Ingenium (with alum. Platter upgrade, SME 309 tonearm and the Lyra) and a Rega P10/Apheta, the on-board phono delivers stellar results. The sonic and resolution differences between very different cartridges are easily discerned, and the match with Rega's Apheta MC is excellent. This cartridge gives its best performance when loaded between 25 and 50 ohms. Even some premium phonostages arent up to this challenge, that the Audia Flight amps pass with ease.

As I have the first Ingenium, with dual tonearm capability, the convenience of two phono inputs is lovely. Sporting the Lyra/SME309 at one end, and a vintage SME 3009 and Shure V15III mounted on the other, the FLS9 and FLS10 is a versatile combination.

Sonically, the phono stage is voiced like the rest of the amplifier – quiet, dynamic, and resolving. It is easy to hear the different personalities of the three cartridges used, never feeling inadequate. The only complaint is the slight difficulty in adjusting loading. Turntable enthusiasts endulging in a wide range of cartridges for their ever changing moods, will tire of moving the amplifier out of its shelf to adjust. Especially the 100-pound FLS10.

DAC in the box

Again, Audia Flight goes the extra mile with their onboard DAC. With Toslink, RCA SPIDIF, balanced AES/EBU and a galvanically isolated USB, you will have no problem accessing whatever you use to play your digital library. Only a streamer is missing. Maybe this will be a future expansion board? Hint, hint. That and MQA – which is off our radar.

Once in the menus, five filters are available to custom tailor the sound to your preference, and there are a few settings for DSD as well. Not having much of a DSD collection, this is the only aspect of the Audia Flight amplifiers we did not explore, but good as the PCM side is, I'm guessing DSD will pose no issues.

There is a lot of digital performance here for \$1,600, and for all the same reasons as the phono. As with my reference dCS player, I preferred filter no.1 the Slow Roll Off. Filter 0, the Sharp Roll Off filter may be what more of you without the ability to change filter settings are used to, so start there. It's nice that at this price this is an available adjustment.

Listening to most files via USB and a MacBook Pro, via Roon, everything works as it should. The DAC section has a natural reproduction that feels much better than most DACs you'll find on the market for this price. Much like the Boulder 866, the upcharge for the DAC section is minimal, and the performance gain tremendous.

This is a very "un-digital" sounding DAC indeed.



Getting personal

Along with everything else, all three amplifiers offer a ¼" front panel headphone jack. Head fanatics with a plethora of four-figure phones will still opt for a standalone headphone amplifier, but for those using headphones occasionally, the onboard stage is just fine.

Using some vintage Grados, a pair of Audeze LCD-1s, and our standby Sennheiser 650s (with Cardas wiring) was engaging enough to keep me planted in the Eames Lounge for some fairly long copy editing sessions. Trying a few other phones from HiFi Man and Dan Clark were equally satisfying. This amplifier provides a great platform to explore headphone listening if you aren't already doing so.

Final questions

Every aspect of the Audia Flight amplifiers is sheer enjoyment. Quick, lively dynamics, free of tonal coloration, and their ability to paint a large sonic landscape in all three dimensions is the rule of the day. Even the entry level Flight Three drives difficult ESLs with ease. In the course of trying everything from Harbeth, Dynaudio, Eggleston, Piega, and Sonus faber speakers was a breeze.

The only speaker proving slightly difficult for the Flight Three was a pair of Magnepans, which are notoriously power hungry. The sonic result was good, but the two larger models delivered a more realistic presentation with these speakers.

Going up the range from the Flight Three to the FLS10, each amplifier offering increased resolution and ease in equal proportion. The FLS9 reveals more musical detail and a larger dynamic envelope than the Three, and the FLS10 the most of all. Similar to turning up the ISO dial on a DSLR, from 100 to 3200. The lower number produces images with more nuance in the highlights and shadows, while the higher number produces grainier images.

These amplifiers all exhibit a similar sonic core: delivering a fine line between being highly resolving, but never harsh. Even with the Acora SRC-1, which is one of the most resolving speakers we've experienced, the Audia Flight amplifiers merely allow you to hear further into the mix.

Deciding between the Flight Three and the FLS9 will ultimately decide on how much performance you require from the on board phono and digital sections (should you go in that direction) and if your speakers have enough resolution to warrant the larger amplifier section.

I felt the tougher choice was between a fully configured FLS10 or one with no onboard analog and/or digital section. Using this amp in the center of my reference system with the Sonus faber Stradiveris, Nagra Classic Phono, (with Thrax table and ASL cart) and the dCS Vivaldi DAC is a delight. This is an amplifier that will feel perfect, should you decide to use it with a premium DAC and phonostage. With 200 Watts per channel on tap and a huge power supply, the FLS10 is able to play music much louder than required. This amplifier can easily be the anchor of a \$100k system.

All three amplifiers are executed to near perfection. You will have to be the judge of which one will work best for your room, system, and budget. A great time to visit an Audia Flight dealer and give them all a listen. This trio goes from great to fantastic, and provide a very linear progression of features and performance going up the range.

Great sound, great build, and one of the best feature sets going. What's not to love?

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e 've got two pieces that beg long-term reviews.

The REL Carbon subwoofer, because we had to try it in multiple combinations, with as many speakers as possible, and also to get six of them in for a full array review. (Kevin Wolff handled the six-pack part of this review.) Finally, how does it stack up to the mighty no.25?

The REX 3 preamplifier from Balanced Audio Technology also warranted some major seat time, because of the level it plays at. It would be unfair to everyone at BAT to just plug this one into a reference system, spin some familar records and call it good. (It's actually quite fantastic, BTW.) So, a lot of seat time was required for this one as well.

We hope you don't mind these two rather long form reviews.





July Zuzi

The BAT REX 3-Preamplifier: A New King

\$30,000

balanced.com mofidistribution.com

My least favorite audio review cliches are "Wow, just wow," and "There's just more there there." What does that really mean? So let's spice it up a little, let's have a little more passion, should we?

After living with the BAT REX3 preamplifier (and its companion the REX power amplifier) for nearly a year, I've drawn my conclusion. Fuck me, this is one of the most engaging preamplifers I've had the pleasure of listening to. It's not inexpensive – it's thirty grand.

Yeah, you're probably not going to see *this* quoted in next year's Music Direct catalog, but when something is this good, it's worth going from the inside voice to the loud, outside, potty mouth voice. Fight the power.

Yet in a world where this is now not unrealistic for a top range preamplifier, it stands up. If you're a person that thinks a new Corvette is as good as a Ferrari (and I really like the new Corvette) you don't get it.

Not only does the last bit of performance cost more, the last bit of execution costs more as well. There's no other way to say this without hurting someone's feelings, especially in 2021. And if you're that person that thinks your awesome \$5k preamp is 99% as good as the REX3, it isn't. It just isn't. But there's nothing wrong with that. This isn't the droid you want, and the droid you have doesn't suck. Let's move on.



However, if you happen to be that passionate audio enthusiast that's chosen to build a system at this level, and you're seriously considering a purchase like this, perhaps as your final audio destination, you will not be disappointed. I do suggest budgeting an extra, smaller pile of cash for a re-tube, because the REX3 uses 18 tubes. That's not a misprint, friends and foes. When it's re-tube time, you'll need 10 6H30s, a pair of 5AR4s, 4 6C19s and a pair of 6C45s. Even using standard tubes, that's gonna cost some coin, and if you should happen to really be obsessed (and I suspect if you've got thirty large for a preamp, you might be) and want NOS tubes, you know what that's going to cost. Happily, the REX 3 sounds fantastic as it comes from the factory.

The Balanced in BAT

True to their nature, the REX 3 is a fully balanced linestage from input to output. Unlike some manufacturers that provide balanced XLR inputs and RCA inputs, BAT only offers balanced connections. If you don't have an accompanying BAT (and you should) power amplifier, or other balanced amp, you will need adaptors. You can get these from most audio shops, but honestly, if you can stay balanced you will get the absolute maximum from the REX 3. At this level why compromise?

The rest of the setup is easy. The REX 3 is a two-box design, but it is not built like most two-box preamplifiers, with control and amplification electronics on one chassis, and power supply on the other. The REX 3 has the bulk of the power supply in the power module, with additional transformers and supply in the control module, where all the input switching and volume control are located. As a result, there are two separate power cords for the REX 3, and umbilical cords between both chassis. Spreading the power supply circuits out this way keeps impedance and noise at a minimum.

The power module uses one of BATs massive, oil-filled capacitor Super Pak arrays, now in its third generation of refinement. Its huge power reserve capacity is part of what gives the REX 3 its dynamic presentation. Eight (4 per channel) 6H30 tubes in the solitary gain stage is the other piece to the puzzle. To the best of my knowledge, no other preamplifier made uses eight 6H30s. This is the other half of the REX 3s drive. An added bonus, these 4 mega-triodes in parallel per channel gives the REX 3 an extremely low output impedance, so it will drive any power amplifier with ease. And through long output cables if need be.



here are two pairs of variable level outputs, and as a convenience to tape lovers, a fixed level tape output – which I put to good use with my Nakamich MR-1 cassette deck. This is a broadcast deck that only offers balanced inputs and outputs, so a nice addition to the REX 3 setup. There are also five pairs or balanced XLR, line-level inputs, so even if you have a tape deck, that still leaves you inputs for a DAC and phono preamp with two to spare.



The big sound

Even though by nature, fully balanced circuits require twice as many parts, and many designers swear by simple circuitry, the REX 3 conquers music because of its complexity. I always begin auditioning BAT pieces with Rachmaninoff, but this time Alexander Scriabin's Piano Concerto in Fsharp minor, op.20:3 Allegro is the perfect place to show off the extreme delicacy and resolution of the REX 3. Much as I wanted to go straight to Rachmaninoff's The Bells (which was next), Scriabin's concerto is so soft and smooth, on a lesser preamplifier it all fades into low level nothingness. With the REX 3 it comes alive. You might never have thought there was so much activity between -10 and -20 on the VU meter!

Of course The Bells rocks the house; turned up loud, it reveals so much more about the REX 3. This piece goes from loud to soft and back so much, expanding and contracting between the speakers (in this case, the Focal Stella Utopia Ems) it's like being pummeled.

If you've experienced a full orchestra and chorus, you know how this feels – instant transient response. Normally we don't talk about or listen to that much classical music in our pages. Mainly because most gear doesn't have the ability to deliver enough sheer sonic range to make it interesting.

Few things suck more than listening to classical music get butchered on a small system with small speakers that just go flat. Pairing the REX 3 combo with the high efficiency and dynamic ability of the Focals (94.5db/1-watt) is invigorating. If you aren't an enthusiast, this might get you interested.

The rest of the picture

That being said, Van Halen sounds amazing. Chris Bellman's version of *Van Halen II* is over the top. At the intro of their cover of "You're No Good," as Alex Van Halen hits hard on the opening cymbals, it sounds like there truly is a drum kit in my living room. You need major dynamics to do this. The REX 3 delivers.



WHERE HIGH END AND LUXURY MEET

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PREMIERE FLORIDA DEALER

The Focal Utopias do a great job with this kind of thing to begin with, and the only other time I've heard drums come this alive was with about \$500k worth of Boulder gear driving them. In this context, you could say the REX 3 and matching (\$20,000) REX power amplifier are a steal.

All kidding aside, what you get with the REX 3, which performs equally well with our reference Pass XA200.8 monos, the Parasound JC-1+ monos and a pair of Nagra Classic Amps bridged for mono, is signal integrity. When compared to the Nagra Classic Preamplifier (with Nagra external power supply) and the Pass XS Pre – both relatively close in price, the REX 3 has a sonic signature all its own. The Nagra is slightly smaller in scale, the Pass is a bit quieter still (and the REX 3 is no slouch here) yet doesn't have that last bit of resolution that the REX 3 offers.

For many, this will be splitting very fine hairs, but much like the world's best hypercars, McLaren does it one way, Aston Martin another, and Ferrari still another. You'll have to spend some seat time investigating, but if you like the BAT groove, no one else does it this way.

It's also worth mentioning, in case you happen to only be familiar with legacy BAT products, that the new REX 3, and the companion REX power amplifier, are a completely different movie. Having owned a number of BAT products over the years, their sound has always been voiced on the dark, but powerful/dynamic side. BAT has eliminated the darkness, while keeping all the other aspects of the voicing intact – I think it's even better.

Older BAT VK preamplifiers that we've used have some of the muscle of the REX 3, not as much of the nuance, and not nearly as much of the sparkle.

That's what 25 years of refinement in circuit design and increasingly better parts quality delivers. For all the armchair engineers you've heard spout off at hifi shows or dealer events, saying, "yeah, I could build that myself," you can't build one of these.

More listening

In addition to the incredible low-level resolution of the REX 3, it also delivers an incredible level of sonic texture and contrast, no matter what you're listening to. Again, this is what you can only achieve with the world's finest components. No disrespect to any of the other things we have in for review, but when you bypass the REX 3 and go back to a \$5,000 preamplifier, the magic is gone.

All of those subtle sonic cues that help you hear more music, are what earns the REX 3 your respect. If you're a relatively new listener, you'll probably be bowled over by the sheer amount of musical information you weren't hearing before. If you're listening with many hours logged, you notice how the REX 3 provides a level of information retrieval that helps you to hear the differences between instruments, between amplifiers, etc. The BAT REX 3 might just be the ultimate music geek's preamp.

Fun as it is to listen to Ella Fitzgerald, string quartets and the like, somehow the REX 3 keeps drawing me back to classic rock records with incredible dynamics. Rush, Van Halen, Led Zeppelin, The Black Crowes, and on and on, feel made for this preamp. That extra airiness that an all-tube design (with a huge power supply) delivers is nearly addictive. Neil Young's epic live album *Rust Never Sleeps* feels as big as the giant amplifiers used as props in the movie. If you love to rock out, the REX 3 will make you freak out. It's like hearing your favorite rock guitarist play through a Marshall stack, and then plug into an entire wall of Marshalls.

Bass extension, texture, and control are not always the top sonic attributes of tube amplification – more often than not, it's a "pick two" deal. Again, the REX 3 crushes it, whether you're listening to Stanley Clarke or Geddy Lee.



The BAT REX 3
might just
be the
ultimate
music geek's
preamplifier.





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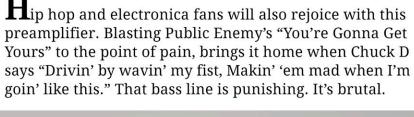
retip

Our insights on cartridge "repairs" What if each cartridge was restored as unique artefact? We do not believe that glueing a cantilever and diamond tip is enough. Aging has an effect on your cartridge as well as usage wear, dust, hygrometry and UV.

Cartridge service: your cartridge does not sound as good as you remember? The damper might have been tampered with, the azimuth of your diamond tip is starting to be off or maybe the piano wire is getting loose?

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Fine-repair: we are able to completely rebuild Neumann DST (or Lumière), Clément cartridges and most MC cartridges available. Open coils? Stiff damper? Broken cantilever? We know how to deal with these issues and will do our best to get your cartridge as close to its original status, even though we can certainly alter your cartridge up to your requests.



And by the way, it's beautiful

BAT has always produced gear that doesn't quite look like every other box out there, and that's another good thing when you're spending this kind of money. Again, they've raised the bar on the newest generation in every way. The way the edges of the chassis fit together, the quality of the machine work on the chassis, even the way it all screws together when you life the tops of the cases on and off. You might think these two boxes were made in Switzerland if you didn't know any better. And, the subtlety of the anodizing process they are now using is also greatly improved, with a finish that is smoother and more evenly applied. In case we didn't mention it, you can get your REX 3 in black or silver.

In the end, incredible

060

Granted, most audiophiles aren't going to play Public Enemy with their REX 3 (you're gonna get yours) but you can. No matter what you love, the REX 3 will give you more of it with the ability to have you leaning forward on your chair to hear the softest bits, and pinning you against the couch with the most forceful ones.

The BAT REX 3 is as near perfection as today's state of the art will allow. It makes no missteps whatsoever. It is one of the finest preamps on the market today, but like anything at this level, there are competitors that offer a different voice. It's up to you to make the final decision on exactly what voice you like best, and if you want to deal with replacing 18 tubes on a regular. Yet there is nothing else that will give you this ride. It's been a real pleasure to live with this preamplifier.

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AUX 1





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REL Acoustics Serie S Carbon Special: Six Pack(and single)

\$3,999 (\$4399 starting January 15th, 2022) Photos courtesy of REL Acoustics

rel.net

The adage goes, "be careful what you hope for." A short time ago, I added a pair of REL Acoustics' Serie S Carbon Specials to my system. To say that I liked them is a bit of an understatement-if you love music and know what live music sounds like, there may be no better subwoofer under \$5,000 available. I concluded this experience with the only question I had left: "how much better can a full stack of six sound vs. only two?" Fast forward to today, I now have six in my listening room comprised of two three-woofer tall line arrays. That's a whole lot of bass drivers and nearly 600 lbs. of power staring at me. Are these six better than just a pair? Simply put, yes. Of course, a bit of explanation is in order.

The most dramatic part of this experience is the arrival of five more subwoofers on a large pallet. John Hunter, Lead Designer and head of REL shipped one extra just if the freight company did the unheard of and damaged one. Because of his insurance, they all arrived safely. The addition of these five to the two empty REL boxes I already had, and you can imagine how my garage now looks more like a distribution warehouse instead of a place to protect my car from the elements.

Setup is straightforward. With a stereo pair already dialed in and sounding fantastic, unpacking four more woofers and placing two each on top of the existing pair burned a few carbs. Bolting them together using the super-stiff metal alignment plates and setting all of the crossovers the same, seemed like a good place to start. Adding a bit of gain to each while lowering the gain on the pair located at the bottom of the two stacks felt logical. But there is more to setting up an entire six-pack, as I would soon find out.



Getting Obi-Wan on the phone

After a long and detailed call with John, there's a bit more to setting six than just duplicating what I had already done. Fortunately, physically I got it right. However, it's in the gain and crossover settings that the magic happens, and some fine tuning was in order. John explains that the bottom two woofers offer the foundation to the system with their proximity to the floor. These will have the lowest crossover settings and highest gain. The middle pair of woofers aim at your head and thus can bloat the system if the gain is too high. Typically these will have a slightly higher crossover setting and minimal gain.

Last are the top two woofers that use more gain than the middle pair but have a similar crossover setting to the middle. All systems are different, so this requires listening to reliable material and trusting what you hear. Ultimately, as suggested, I ended up with the top pair crossing over only slightly higher than the bottom two with less gain and the middle two with a higher crossover setting and limited gain vs. the bottom "anchor" pair as well as the top pair. With John's helpful guidance, I had all six set up reasonably quickly.

More listening

With my list of listening materials from my last session in hand and a few other pieces of music, I was ready for the full six-pack experience. It was from an unexpected source that I first gained insight into the not-so-modest gains. This experience came from playing a bit of background, home "groove" music in the form of Jack Johnson on his 2003 On and On LP. Right from the start, there's a level of articulation and positioning I had never experienced. This is especially noticeable with Adam Topol's percussion work. As simple as all of the music is on this album, it was great to experience it in a new, fuller and more resolved way. Hats off to the guys in the recording booth for capturing the mellow vibe of the beach.

The next priority was to get Sevdaliza's latest 2020 LP, Shabran up and spinning. The title is from the Persian word for "night colored." This album is as three -dimensional as they come. As with most of her recorded work, there is significant pitch correction or shifting to bend her voice into new forms. On Shabrang, she has done this with great purpose, blending her voice with and into the soundscape with various classic and electronic instrumentation. Nowhere is this more evident than on the song "Dormant." The whole soundscape comes together from a record scratch sampling to paint one rhythmic pattern to other samples, placing you in the middle of it with all the six RELs.



The (Really) Big Difference

This clearly illustrates the delta between a pair of RELs and the six-pack. With all six RELs in the system, the richness and textures are close enough to touch. Before adding them, I already liked this album very much. But with all six in the system, the entire album takes me away into another space. Was there more bass? At times there was certainly more sound pressure moving the room and causing new rattles. While this is fun, the most impressive improvements lie in the spaces between instruments and Sevdaliza's "bending" voice combined into a complete sonic soundscape. Removing the six RELs left what was once fantastic sounding now rendered into something far smaller and lacking substance and import.

Taking my listening to a new venue, I decided to play something that a pair of bass towers clearly could not improve. But, of course, I was wrong. One of my favorite pieces of music is Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23, K. 488. My favorite version of this performance is Nikolaus Harnoncourt conducting the Royal Concertgebouw with Viennese pianist Friedrich Gulda. Recorded in 1983, Gulda's rhythmic performance shines brightly under the expert leadership of Maestro Harnoncourt. With the six RELs in the system, the space between Gulda's playing offers a contrast previously absent. Nowhere is this more noticeable than the adaggio and its interplay between piano and orchestra. Simple, single notes floated in space in a new, more believable and palpable manner. With the system complete, music goes straight into the heart with little time for the brain to confuse things.

One can rarely improve their system without swapping out components. As we know, this typically means selling off system component(s) for far less money than original purchase price only to buy new, more expensive ones. In the case of REL, it is possible to take one's system to a new levels without swapping out, and more importantly, losing value in what you already own. The performance advantages are immediate, as I discovered by adding a pair of the new Serie S Carbon Specials to my system. Adding another four to that complete system took things to an entirely new and higher level. If you have the space, I cannot more highly recommend listening to what a Line Array of REL's new Serie S Carbon Specials can do to elevate your system to a new level. It did mine.

Peripherals

Speakers

Wilson Audio - Sasha Series II

Preamplifier

Audio Research - REF 6SE

Phonostage

Audio Research - REF PHONO 3SE

Power Amplifier

Audio Research – REF160S

Digital Source

Linn - Klimax DS

Turntable

Dr. Feickert Analogue – Firebird and Clean power supply

Tonearms

Acoustical Systems – The Axiom and Aguilar

Cartridges

Lyra Atlas, Koestu Onyx Platinum, Sumiko Palo Santos, Lyra Titan Mono

Cable

AudioQuest

Further listening: *Jeff Dorgay*

It was a huge amount of fun to turn Kevin on to the six-pack experience. I've known him for many years, and his level of setup expertise far eclipses my own. Bottom line, his personal system always sounds fantastic. But the REL six-pack thing is a change in perspective beyond anything I've yet to experience in the world of high end audio.

I haven't heard every single thing, but I've I've heard enough benchmarks (like those \$850k Wilsons) and I feel nothing delivers, the level of sheer natural musicality that a good set of \$50k-\$100k main speakers (with a system to match) and a six pack of REL No.25s deliver - especially if it is all tuned to perfection. Yet, the no.25s will keep up with any speaker, cost no object, when required to do so.

I've been living with a pair of Sonus faber Anniversary Stradiveris and a six pack of REL's no.25s for almost three years now. When various internet experts ask the question of "what would you change in your system?" My answer is always nothing. My audiophile ADD stopped the day the no.25s were installed. And, I'll put my hand on any holy book you want, and say that to whoever you want me to. How's that for an endorsement?

But... not everyone has the physical space or supporting system for six of these. They are massive AF. Much as I love, love, love my no.25s, I'm still a middle class kid at heart, that's always looking for the maximum value. How can I get most of the performance of a Porsche 911GT3 on my pay grade? (We can argue about that on Facebook later.) I use a six-pack of REL S/510s in my living room system, and while they do not deliver the same push over the cliff that the no.25s do, it's an incredible setup.

REL's no.25s are \$7,500 each, weigh 168 pounds each, and take up a 29 x 30 inch profile on your floor. They are 21.3 inches high, so when stacked, stand about eyeball height. Fortunately, they sit on a 13-inch thick concrete floor in my listening room. Another issue as these boxes pile up, to be sure. Before you enter into this project, if you're living in a house with a subfloor, make sure your floor can withstand adding that much weight!



The \$3,999 (\$4399 starting January 15th, 2022) **question**

The biggest question to define is the ultimate goal and endpoint of your system. If you're running some main speakers in the \$20k - \$50k pair range, and REL subs will be part of your setup, the tough choice might be between a pair of their new 212SX and a pair of Carbon Specials. At first, the 212SX's might seem more cost effective, and they provide incredible bang for the buck. However, the 212SX is not scaleable. In a world where so many of us might think bigger is automatically better, the Carbon Special offers a level of refinement nipping at the performance envelope of the no.25. However, the nuanced part of the answer is that the Carbon Special only weighs 85 pounds, and occupies a much smaller 17 x 21.5 inch footprint. And at a cost of \$4k each, you're looking at \$24k for an array vs. \$45k.

While this might sound like a silly dilemma, the difference between the audiophile trying to assemble the best system they can in the \$100k - \$200k range has vastly different priorities, and is still making certain compromises.

Putting this all in context, comparing a single Carbon Special to a single no.25, the new Carbon Special comes damn close. Where the no.25 uses one massive, 15-inch driver, the Carbon Special uses a 12-inch, forward firing driver (with the same carbon architecture of the G-1 and no. 15) and a 12-inch, down-firing passive driver.

Having had the good fortune to live with all of REL's significant models over the last five years, anyone wanting no.25 performance for pretty much half the price, can live pretty much happily ever after with the Carbon Specials. Like with any other high performance product, the big boxes still deliver more at the extremes – loud and soft. The no.25 is still more refined, goes deeper, and punches harder – as it should. But the no.25s need a more capable system, main speakers and a larger room to fully exploit its ability. At modest volumes, the no.25 adds more presence than the Carbon Special does as well, but we're talking the last 5-10 percent.

If space and finances are no object, the no.25s, after three years, still deliver the goods like no other. If you're an obsessed but slightly more practical music lover the Carbon Special is the new champion.

www.rel.net.

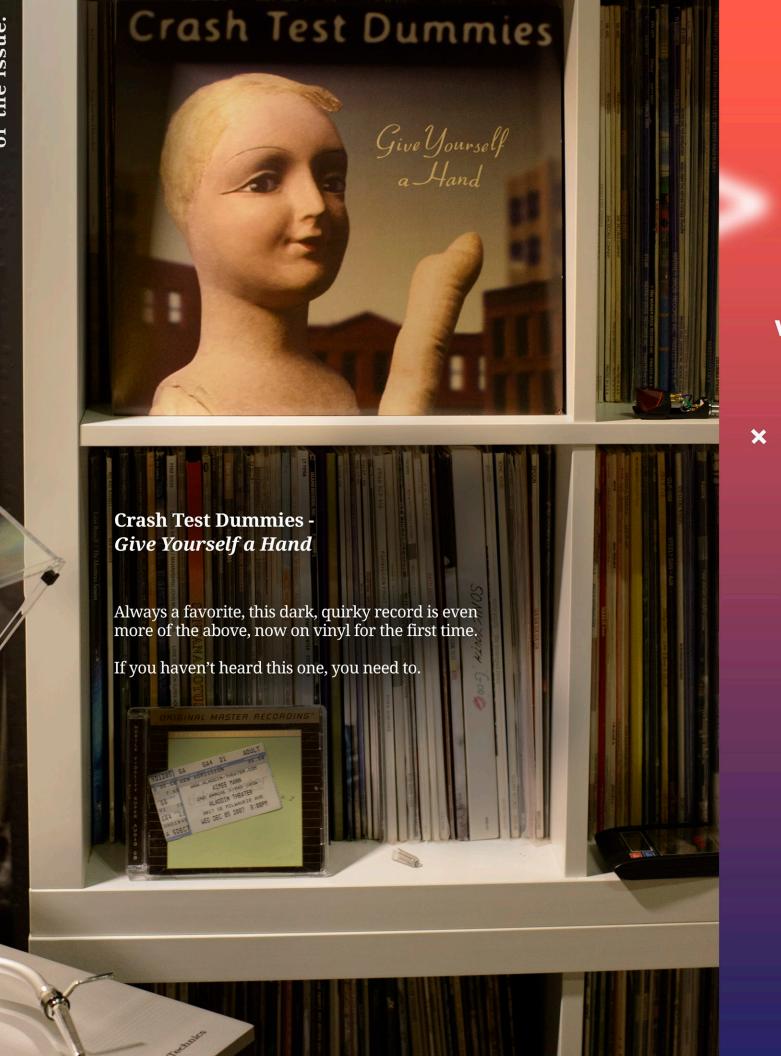




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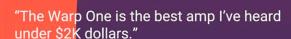
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Jerold O'Brien - TONEAudio September 2021



Greg Voth - Stereotimes September 2021



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Welcome to MINE:

We're not just crazy about music and hi-fi here at TONE. While we can put many labels on our ethos, claiming to be music lovers, audiophiles, or perhaps even qualityphiles, that doesn't even cover it. Having met so many of our readers from all over the globe, I'd say our readers are playful and inquisitive to say the least.

You've told us you like automobiles, motorcycles, fine art, bicycles, toys, cameras... Well, you get the picture. Lumping this all under a banner labeled "Style" seems too limiting. Let's face it, we're all a little selfish when it comes to our stuff.

Let's call it what it is - MINE! We'll be sharing more of our favorites as we go.



Jerry Garcia's MC2300

\$387k sothebys.com

Well, actually this is one that you can't have, it's sold to some collector of rock memorabilia.

But if you would like a rockin' MC 2300 of your own, call the folks on the adjacent page. Steve and his crew will lead you to a great vintage McIntosh amp you will cherish. They also provide service, if required.

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THE COMPONENTS OF EXCELLENCE: LASTING VALUE

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The clear glasses for desk work, feature clear lenses, so you can look brainy and easily multitask. The frames are surprisingly svelte, considering they have woofers, tweeters and microphones built in. The Bluetooth connection is solid, allowing highly legigble conversations.

Audiophiles in the crowd will note that the Faunas are still no match for a six-pack of REL subwoofers, but the result is suprisingly musical.

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If you feel like turntable/cartridge setup is over your pay grade, and are daunted by complicated tools, consider the Geo-Disc from MoFi.

This has been around for decades, and used to be included in the MoFi Box Sets. And it works. This, a little patience, and some free time, will get your analog front end sounding good. And, the Geo-Disc is the perfect tool to de-mystify analog setup.





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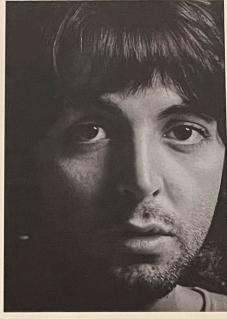
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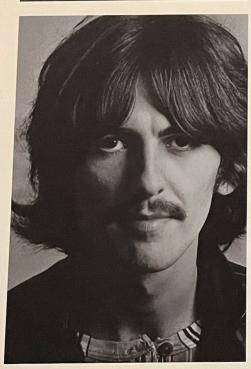
The soundtrack

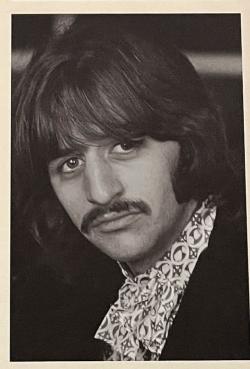
The new box.

The Beatles never go out of style with us, so the new Capitol box set of the White Album looked like a ton of fun. We did get somewhat distracted by the bonus stuff inside! A nice addition to your collection, no matter how much or little you're invested into the Fab Four.









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TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...



Ortofon Concorde Silver

\$700 ortofon.com

Ortofon's Concorde cartridge actually started as somewhat of a fashion statement, that made setting the Technics 1200 a breeze to set up back in the 80s, but it was quickly given a ton of love by the DJ community.

It continues to this day, with a wide range of Concordes at your disposal. Most have lower compliance figures and a very robust stylus assembly for hard core DJ and scratching.

But the silver is something really special. It's fine line stylus, and high compliance make this so much more than a fashion statement. With its roots in the OM40 Super, many say that it's the best MM from Ortofon.

We shall see.

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TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...

HiFi Rose RS150B Reference Network Streamer

\$4,995 musicdirect.com

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Enter the RS150B. Five grand buys you a premium streamer, music server, DAC, and a linestage preamplifier. Best of all, it does feature a solitary analog input, so you can plug a turntable in too!

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geerfabaudio.com



Technics SL-1600 Auto-lift Tturntable

\$1,199 technics.com

Do any of you remember the Technics SL-1500 from decades ago? While not as famous as the SL-1200, it shared a lot of bits with that ubiquitous design.

The kicker? It's tonearm would lift at the end of the record, saving you the trouble of getting up to do it yourself. Handy if you were in the middle of doing something else at the moment.

The SL-1600 brings that tradition back, and it comes with an Ortofon 2M Red pre-mounted. Should you not have a phono preamp, a small, on-board one can be switched in. It's not much, but it will get you started.



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TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...

McIntosh C12000 Preamplifier

\$16,000

mcintoshlabs.com

The latest control preamplifier at the top of the Mac range borrows a little bit from their past. Two generations ago, McIntosh offered their flagship preamplifier with tube and solid-state output modules, a three box design, if you took it all. The C1100 that this model replaces, was only offered as a tube design.

The C12000 hits the stage with tube and solid-state outputs, so you can voice your system to your taste. This should be a ton of fun for Mac collectors - or those driving multiple systems.

Can't wait.







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TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...

Luxman CL-38uC

\$5,999

luxmanamerica.com

It may look vintage-ish, but that's only out of respect to a long line of previous 38 seriesLuxman Tube Control Amplifiers, with a similar form factor and control layout.

This updated version of the CL-38 offers upgraded circuitry everywhere, from the MM/MC phonostage (with seperate transformers for low and high gain MC cartridges) to the line stage itself.

All of this is in part, due to the SRPP (Shunt Regulated Push Pull) circuit topology, now in all stages of the current CL-38uC.

A tape loop is included, along with a pair of balanced outputs.

A fantastic blend of the future and the past.



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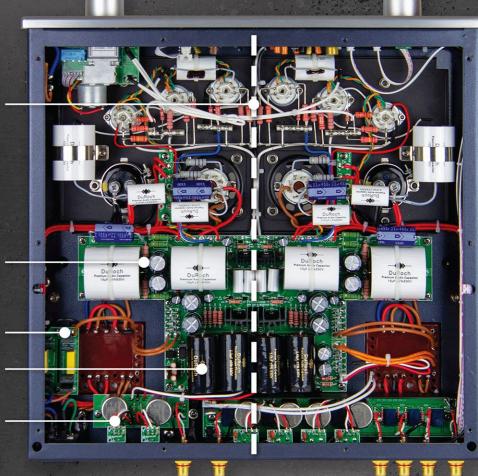
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Reviews in our immediate future...



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The result is a premium MC that compares with the five figure carts.

TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...



A614 (In Altec Grey)

\$5,499 thehereticspeaker.com

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BAT's proprietary intelligent auto-bias and fuseless protection circuits make this a tube amp that is easy to own and operate. You will always have optimal sound and total peace of mind. The balanced amplifier generates 55 watts-per-channel of high current triode power. This amplifier drives speakers with vigor due to the exceptional wide-bandwidth output transformers. With the VK80i, all you need to do is listen.

Contact your nearest BAT specialty retailer to audition this American-made powerhouse.

A Truly Balanced Approach.

For over 25 years, Victor Khomenko and the BAT team have been on a mission to build components that recreate music's natural beauty. When we started the company, we found that many products use complex designs to achieve unnatural perfection. There had to be a better balance.

BAT believes in the benefits of fully-balanced circuits to maintain the purity of the original signal. We use the fewest number of gain stages possible for the shortest signal path, and we go to great lengths to custom manufacture high-quality parts that meet our sound quality and reliability standards. Whether you choose one of our solid-state or tube designs, BAT components will give your system a "breath of life" that you've never heard before!



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 $\Gamma ENSE$ Reviews in our immediate future...

Harbeth Monitor 40.3

\$22,500/pair (cherry) \$24,500/pair - exotic ash, rosewood, or walnut

fidelisdistribution.com

Many are only familiar with the "smaller" Harbeths. But their top of the range Model 40 is spectacular in every way.

Our last go with these, was the 40.1, and we really enjoyed them.

Now, with Harbeth's XD tech fully implemented, this will be a fun review indeed.



TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...



Naim HiCap DR power supply

\$2,490 naimaudio.com

Most Naim products featuring an upgrade path centered around improving the power supply.

Their new HiCap DR (Direct Regulator) supply is a perfect match for their SuperNait 3, which we happen to have as a permanent reference piece.

We've had excellent results with the past two SuperNait amplifiers really coming alive wiht more power. It's looking like the new HiCap DR will continue this tradition.

Review very soon.



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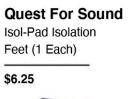


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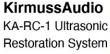
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Dealers That Mean Business:

You've read all the reviews, you've argued with the internet pundits,

and you're ready to write a check. Now what? If you're a slightly used customer that likes to shop for the best bargain you can find on Audiogon, this article is not for you. And, controversial though it might sound, I'm not against Audiogon. If you want a gently pre-owned preamp, love music, and just don't want to buy new, I get that – as long as you know what you're getting into. Audiogon can be a great place to buy pre owned gear if you know exactly what you want - and don't expect ANY service. But someone has to buy it new, so you can buy it used – remember that!

If you are the customer that likes to buy new, loves the feel (and the smell) of taking it out of the box for the first time, knowing no one else has touched it, I get that too. Personally, I'm about 50/50 on this experience, as I am with cars. Ask anyone who's bought a preamp or a used car from me, it's usually pretty pampered.

However, if you are going to spring for new gear, you need a good dealer. Someone who understands you, your music and most of all your perspective. You need someone to help you find the right components that will work together as a system, help you set it up in some cases, and offer support when things don't work out as planned. There's no substitute for experience, and a great dealer knows their products, and knows what will work best for you.

Nearly every audio system that has failed to achieve the greatness expected of it can be traced back to poor component choice (system and/or room) synergy and poor component setup. I've been to hifi shows, homes, and dealers all over the world – hearing sound good, bad, and somewhere inbetween. It always boils down to these two factors if something isn't truly broken, and it rarely is.

The solution is easy. Find a great dealer. While there isn't a hifi shop on every corner like there was back in the 70s, there are still some truly great dealers out there that will help you put together a stunning music system, regardless of your budget. And I'm on a mission to find as many of them as I can for you.

I'm starting with the folks I know, in this new section of the magazine. Most of the establishments in this list are running full page ads in the magazine – and there is a caveat. I will not accept advertising in this magazine from a dealer unless I've been to their place, seen the shop and have talked to a cross section of their customers to know they provide superior service. In most cases, these are hifi shops that I, or someone on the staff has purchased gear from as well.

These are not just people wanting to buy space in TONEAudio. Every one of these dealers carry my personal endorsement, and I hope that will help you on your journey. As we go forward, look for the "TONEAudio Approved Dealer" sticker on your favorite establishment. Know a great dealer, that you've had superior service from? Let me know, I would like to pay them a visit and add them to the list.



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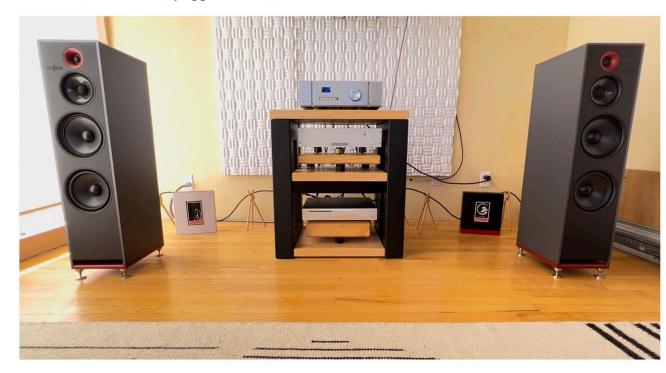
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Club Mix compilation expert, Scott Tetzlaff's theme for this playlist is "Sleek." A soundtrack for living the lush life.

This one's a slick, funky mix with new stuff from Kraak & Smaak, Tycho, and of course something from Thievery. There's a few retro tracks and an old favorite at the end.

Enjoy!



Got A Girl - Did We Live Too Fast?

Sweet Florence (kuniyuki edit) - Jacob F. Desvarieux, Kuniyuki

Thievery Corporation- It Takes a Thief

Glass Animals - Gooey

DK Vado,. Sena - Talk to me, Pt. 2

Todd Terje - Preben Goes to Acapulco

The xx, New Jackson - Swept Away (new Jackson remix)

Kraak & Smaak - The Cypress Garden

Tycho - Japan

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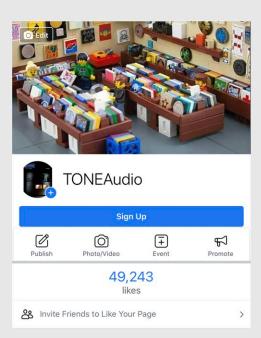
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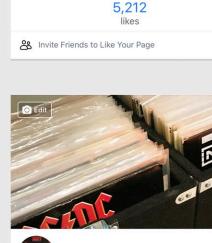
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We've tried to make it pretty easy for you to find us out on Facebook, and have divided up our pages to be a bit more subject specific.

Here they are with links. Just click on the page that interests you most. We look forward to hearing from you when you have a spare moment.



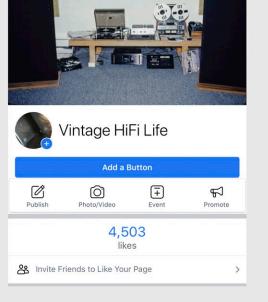


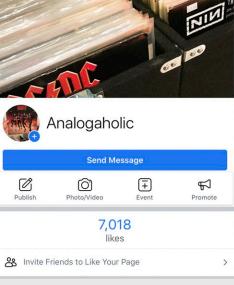
Audiophile Apartment

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TANNOY



"The Tannoy Revolution XT 8F was Robert Harley's top discovery at the 2015 Consumer Electronics Show. His first impression was as follows: 'After listening to it and looking at the real wood enclosure, I guessed the price at \$7000 to \$10,000. The Revolution XT's price was then revealed to be just \$2600 per pair.' After living with the 8F happily for several months, I was ready to declare it a sensational entry-level loudspeaker. But I see that I need to slightly amend that statement—the only thing entry-level about it is the price. The real wood veneers and level of finish don't suggest an entry-level product, and sonically it performs to a much higher standard. I'm in total agreement with Robert's assessment: The Tannoy packs a virtuoso midrange that is competitive with speakers approaching \$10k retail." — DICK OLSHER, THE ABSOLUTE SOUND



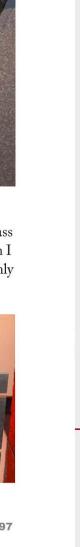
P art of what makes this job so enjoyable, is looking back on where the industry has been, and what products really stand the test of time.

Back in 1981, I had a par of Acoustat 2+2 electrostatic speakers that stood nearly three feet tall. My Acoustat journey started with a pair of 2s, and 3s, but the 2+2 was the holy grail.

These nearly 8-foot tall ESL panels were driven by a Threshold 400A amplifier, one of the newest designs from Nelson Pass. This 100 watt per-channel, Class-A amplifier drove the big Acoustats with finesse, but I always felt like they could have used a little more.

Today, my current 2+2s are powered by a pair of Pass LabsXA200.8s and they are glorious. Way better than I remembered. A REL Carbon Special subwoofer. If only I'd had this setup back in 1981! Fun.







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Next issue, 110:

It's awards time!

Sorry we pulled your leg on 109... We've picked our favorites, and we hope you'll enjoy what we've decided on.

Also, our usual columns, along with some last minute shopping ideas

Stay tuned.

And as always, drop on by our Facebook page and let us know how you are...

