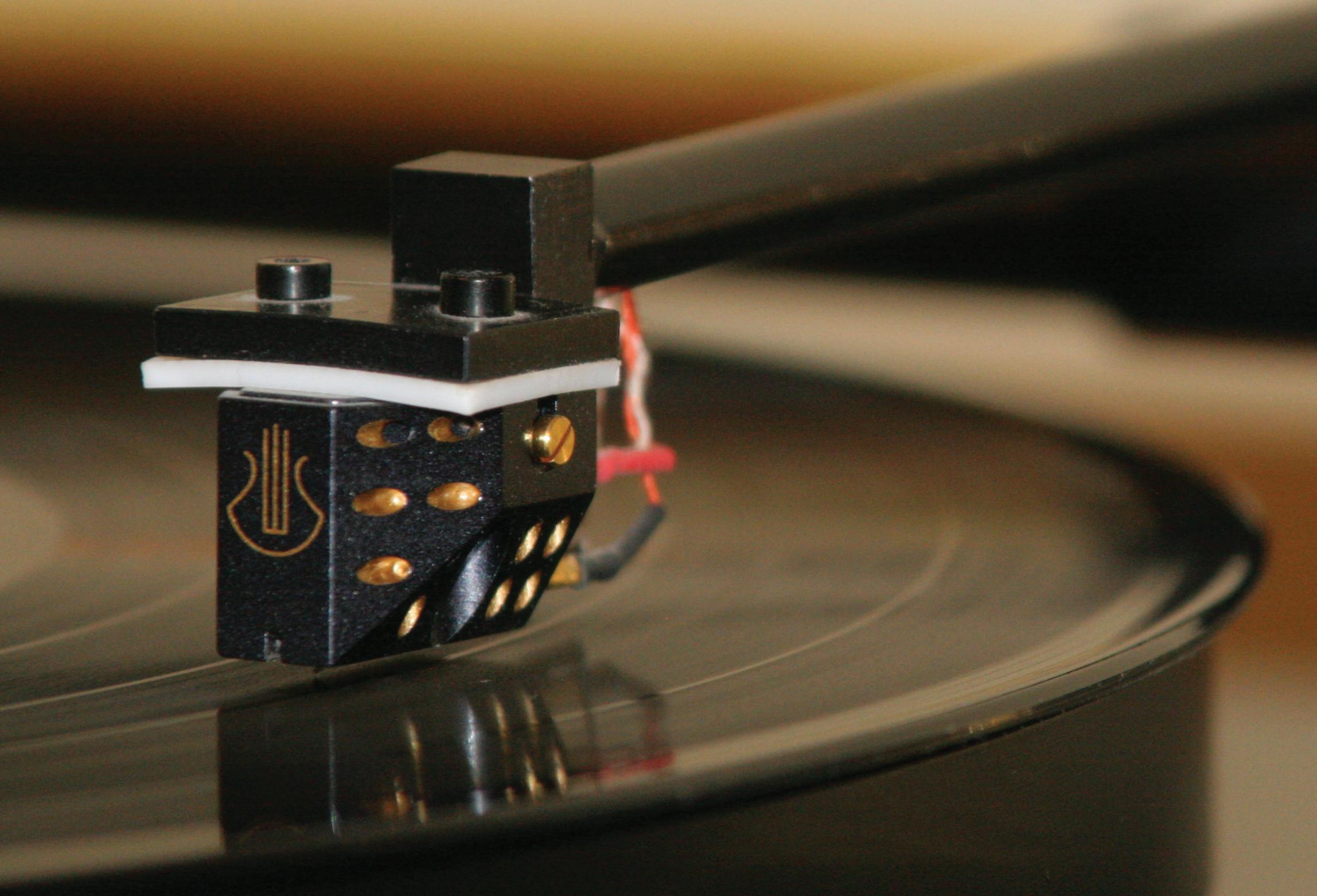


VINYL LP PHILE

June 2010 Issue 1

The digizine for discerning music lovers



Distributed in Canada by
AudioScape Canada Inc.
www.audioscapecanada.ca
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(905) 833-0010



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VINYLPHILE

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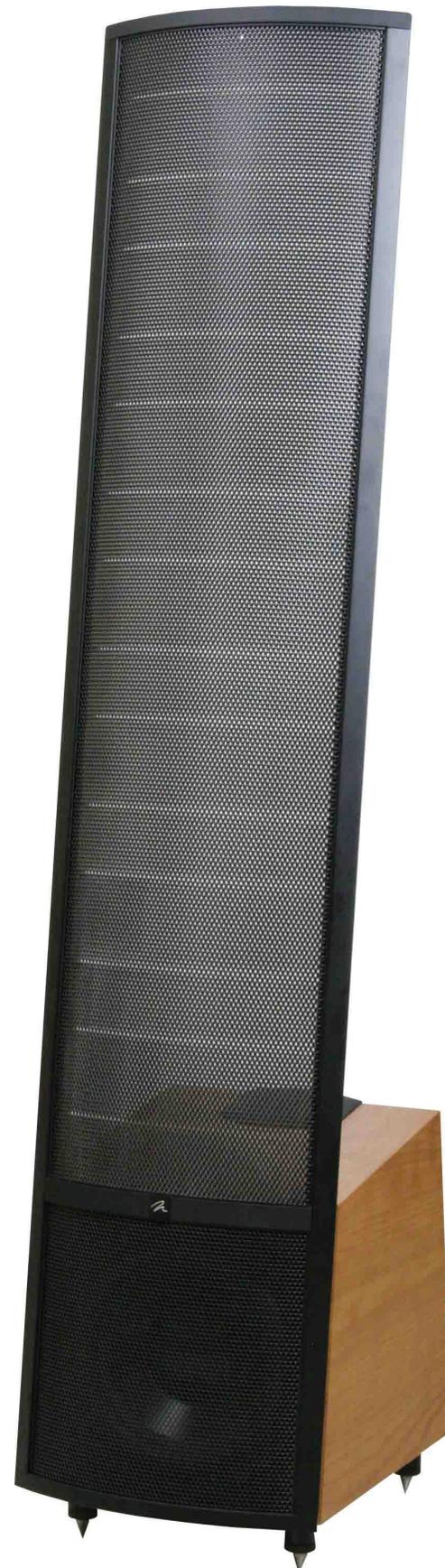
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Editorial



Hi there, and welcome to the first issue of *Vinylphile*, the digizine for discerning music lovers! In this magazine, we'll be reviewing vinyl records, and everything you need to play them: turntables, tonearms, cartridges, phono stages, amplifiers, speakers, accessories, and so on. The magazine is vinyl-centric, not vinyl-exclusive, so we will also review digital gear sometimes. We might even take an occasional look at multichannel audio, but we'll be leaving home theatre coverage to our friends in other magazines.

So why another audio magazine, and why the digital-only distribution? The reason for another magazine is pretty simple: I've always loved music on vinyl, and noticed that most, if not all, of the usual magazines tend to have limited vinyl-related coverage. Sure, they review

turntables and cartridges now and then, but most of their software reviews are about CDs. Vinylphile will turn this on its head: we'll be focusing on vinyl records and playing equipment, with only an incidental nod to the digital world.

There are a couple of reasons for the digital-only distribution. First, digital distribution means that we completely eliminate printing and distribution expenses, thereby allowing us to make the magazine available to you at no cost. All you need is an Internet connection to download it, and you can read the magazine from anywhere in the world. Second, we free ourselves from the print-magazine constraint of having to use a certain number of pages, so our articles can be as long (or as short) as necessary. One of my pet peeves is reading reviews that deliberately omit information due to a lack of room. And finally, by sticking to digital distribution, we're doing our bit to save the planet and its precious resources: we won't be cutting down trees to print the magazine, and we won't be using up fossil fuels and contributing to the greenhouse effect by delivering it.

Digital distribution also allows us to be innovative about the magazine's form factor: it's no accident that Vinylphile's square pages are 305 mm (or 12") on each side—it's the same size and shape as an LP's sleeve! Whereas a different form factor might prove to be a disadvantage for a print magazine—if only because it makes it awkward to fit

into stores' magazine racks—it makes no difference for a digital publication. So for the foreseeable future, we'll be sticking to our 305 mm x 305 mm page size.

Editorial Philosophies

So, exactly what is Vinylphile, and what do we stand for? Our goal is to provide readers with an informative—and, hopefully, interesting—magazine. In addition to the regular record and gear reviews, we will publish other audio and music related feature articles we think you'd like to read. These include dealer and factory visits, reader's systems, audio show reports, and the occasional technical article. What we don't intend to publish are "lifestyle" articles, like reviews of cameras and watches. It's not that we don't like those items—we do—but we don't want the magazine's scope to wander too far from our initial vision of a freely-downloadable, vinyl-centric audio mag.

We take our responsibilities as a source of reviews very seriously. You, the reader, are entitled to honest reviews, so that you can make informed purchasing decisions. Note that we are not in any way suggesting that you take our reviews as gospel; the only way you can tell whether a piece of gear is for you is to audition it yourself, preferably in your own system. The best we can do is make some recommendations about what gear to try (or to avoid).

Despite being supported by our advertisers, some of whom may be the subject of a less than glowing review, this is a promise we undertake: all of our reviews will be as honest and truthful as we can make them, without prejudice. To do otherwise, we think, would be a disservice to both readers and advertisers. Being an advertiser in Vinylphile is no guarantee that we'll review a manufacturer's gear, or that such a review will be positive. Similarly, a manufacturer need not advertise with us in order to secure a review. Basically, if we think that an item is interesting, whether it be entry-level or ultra high-end exotica, we'll probably review it. (But there are still costs associated with producing the magazine, and we need to pay our bills, so advertising from suitable companies is most welcome! Just don't expect us to tie an advertising deal to a favourable review, because that ain't gonna happen...)

There are three types of (not necessarily mutually exclusive) review: objective, subjective, and observational. Over simplifying, objective reviews rely on measurements. The unit being reviewed is hooked up to various bits of test equipment, measured, and the results pronounced based on those measurements. In subjective reviews, the writer describes how good (or bad) the test piece is in his or her subjective opinion. Observational reviewing was pioneered by Harry Pearson at The Absolute Sound, and is the model we will use. In an observational review, the reviewer's job is to convey to the reader how something sounds (a task, it turns out, that isn't as easy as it would seem). We hope our reviews do indeed give you an idea of how something sounds.

As I alluded to previously, we think that there is no substitution for the expert help and advice from your local dealer. Most high-end dealers are interested in cultivating a longterm relationship with their customers, rather than making a quick buck. Yes, you might be able to save a few dollars by going to a big box store (if they sell the gear you're interested in), but the experience a specialist dealer brings to the table is invaluable. So, don't sell yourself short: befriend your local dealer, and above all, trust your ears.

We hope you enjoy reading Vinylphile as much as we did putting it together. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to send them to me, rich@vinylphilemag.com. In the meantime, keep spinnin' that vinyl, and thanks for reading!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rich". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent "R" and "h".

Obituary

Malcolm McLaren: 1946 – 2010

By Rich Teer



Photo courtesy Steve Wheeler.

Malcolm McLaren, perhaps best known as being the ex-manager of the 1970's British punk band, The Sex Pistols, lost his long battle with cancer on April 8, 2010. He passed away in Switzerland, aged 64.

Malcolm Robert Andrew McLaren was born on January 22, 1946 in London, England. Having never got on with his step father, McLaren left home in his teens. After a variety of jobs and attending several art colleges, he opened a clothing shop in London called Let it Rock with his girlfriend, the designer Vivienne Westwood. (Their son, Joseph Corr , later co-founded the lingerie brand Agent Provocateur.)

In 1972, having met the group The New York Dolls, McLaren renamed his store to Too Fast To Live Too Young To Die and supplied the group with stagewear. The Dolls eventually broke up in 1975, by which time the store had been renamed SEX, selling S & M attire. It was about this time that McLaren had started managing a band called The Strand, who would later become The Sex Pistols after guitarist-songwriter Wally Nightingale was kicked out and John Lydon—who was subsequently dubbed Johnny Rotten—became their new frontman.

In 1977, The Sex Pistols were signed to Virgin Records. Other record companies with whom they were signed previously deemed them to be too controversial, after such publicity stunts as playing their rendition of *God Save the Queen* opposite the Houses of Parliament in a rented boat on the river Thames. In October that year, The Sex Pistols released their album, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*. Within a year, the band had split up amid arguments and accusations of McLaren's mismanagement and withholding of funds. The 1980 movie, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, told the story (from McLaren's perspective) of how McLaren had planned out The Sex Pistol's career. The 2000 movie, *The Filth and the Fury*, later told The Sex Pistol's version of the story.

In late 1979, McLaren was approached by Adam Ant to manage his group, Adam and the Ants. Three members of that group left to form Bow Wow Wow, which McLaren also managed. Later, he managed Jimmy The Hoover, who would sometimes support Bow Wow Wow on tour.

In 1983, McLaren released his first solo LP, *Duck Rock*, which contained

music based on African and American influences. Two singles from this LP, *Buffalo Gals* and *Double Dutch*, became top-ten hits in the UK. The following year, the electronic opera track, *Madame Butterfly*, reached number 13 in the UK charts.

His album from 1989, *Waltz Darling*, was inspired by funk and disco. It incorporated elements from his earlier works, and featured musicians such as Bootsy Collins and Jeff Beck. It's glitzy, Louisiana-style production was aimed at the US market.

In 1992, McLaren co-wrote the title song to the movie *Carry on Columbus* (it played over the film's end credits), and in 1994 he released the concept album, *Paris*. Released by McLaren in 1998, *Buffalo Gals Back 2 Skool*, featured songs from *Duck Rock* covered by hip-hop artists like Rakim and KRS-One. In 2005, his song *About Her* (which was based on the Zombies hit, *She's Not There*), featured in Quentin Tarantino's movie, *Kill Bill Vol. 2*.

Much of McLaren's solo work, especially from the *Duck Rock* era, has been sampled and used by numerous other artists. Also, his and composer's Yanni arrangement of *The Flower Duet* was featured in British Airways' "World's Favourite Airline" advertising campaign during the 1980s and 1990s.

In addition to his music and band management activities, McLaren has been involved with several other projects, including several films and television shows (e.g., 1991's *The Ghosts of Oxford Street*, 2006's film adaptation of *Fast Food Nation*, 2007's *The Baron*, and 2008's *Big Brother: Celebrity Hijack*). An article in the December 1999 issue of

New Statesman fuelled speculation that McLaren was considering standing for Mayor of London (ultimately, he didn't run), and in 2003 he wrote an article called *8-Bit Punk*, championing 8-bit music.

In 2008, nine pieces of McLaren's 21-part sound painting series, *Shallow*, were premiered via MTV's HD screen in New York's Times Square. He spent much of his later years living with his girlfriend, Young Kim, in Paris and New York.

Dealer Spotlight

Vernon's The Hi Fi Attic

By Rich Teer



Something that we keep emphasising here at *Vinylphile* is the importance of a good relationship with a knowledgeable dealer. No matter how hard we try to convey how something sounds, at the

end of the day the only way for you to decide whether or not a piece of gear is for you is a personal audition. A good dealer will not only let you audition gear—preferably with your own music—they will also allow you to try gear in the

only place it really matters: in your own system in your own home. Dealers can also provide system matching advice, and introduce you to alternatives you might not be aware of. With all this in mind, we decided to have a semi-regular feature where we interview a specialist audio dealer.

Our first dealer is The Hi Fi Attic, in Vernon BC, run by Lyle Duffield and Chris Morey. I've known Lyle and Chris for several years, and they were (and still are!) very supportive about my plans for *Vinylphile*. Now that the magazine is a reality, it seems only right that I return the favour. I interviewed Lyle one afternoon this past March, where we spoke about all things audio.

What's your background? Tell us a bit about yourself.

Well, I guess from high school electronics has always been a hobby, and when I graduated from high school I went to SAIT and took electronics for two years there.

SAIT?

Yes, Calgary. Southern Alberta Institute of Technology.

Oh, OK.

So I took a technologist course, and then I worked in the oil industry for three years doing electronic metering and stuff for some oil companies. And then I decided that I was married and had a child on the way, wanted to settle down, didn't want

to be in the field. A friend of mine had started the very first Kelly's franchise in Kamloops—Rae Meier—and I had worked for him in Calgary (for an oil company), and he sorta said, "Well, you know, if it goes well I'll phone you one day". The first time



Some of the brands represented by The Hi Fi Attic: Marantz, MartinLogan, and Focal.

he phoned me I was on the Madeleine Islands off PEI [Prince Edward Island], and of course all I got was a message that Rae phoned, and no return address or anything because everybody in the hotel only spoke French! [Laughs] So it was sort of a broken message and I didn't know how to get a hold of him or anything. Then I went back to Calgary and my wife said that Rae had phoned, but didn't know his number. And then next time I was in Peace River, a little place where there's more muskeg and trees and water than there was anything else. Rae phoned and said, "How would you like to sell electronics?" I said, "Sure," and I was out of there the next day! [Laughs]

I went to Kamloops where he had started his first store, and the second store was in Kelowna—that was Grant Putnam—and then what happened was Rae and Grant joined and I was the third store, which was Vernon, and we were a company. I originally wanted to go to Penticton, but Rae said, "Well, we're not opening in Penticton, we're opening in Vernon. But if you want to, when we do Penticton you can move there." After living here I went back to Penticton to look, and decided that I liked Vernon better. It was more of an all... The community was thriving all year round, as opposed to Penticton which thrives in the summer and is dead in the winter. So anyways, we chose to stay here, and I basically hadn't sold anything in my life or anything. I just had a love for electronics, and that's where it started.

From where did you get your love of hi fi?

My father was in the Air Force, and we were in Germany in the 1950's, and of course my father bought a Grundig tape recorder way back in probably '56 or '57. The only thing you could really listen to on the radio was the BBC, and I used to record it and listen to that. That's probably where it started more than anywhere, it was just recording and listening to stuff into the evenings.

This was as a kid, right?

Yeah. I would have been probably six to ten years old I guess, when I was there. Then I started playing with it and I got really good, so that I was the one that recorded and did everything. The Canadian Armed Forces actually had a radio station, and the year we went over was the year it closed down. That's why we were listening to the BBC. They were disposing of all their tapes that they used for when they were on the air, and dad

bought a whole bunch of those, and I got listening to those. I actually to this day still have some of them.

This is reel to reel tapes?

Yes. So that was where my love of music first started. And then when I was in high school in Saskatchewan, I used to order Heathkits—what else do you do on the prairies during a cold winter? [Laughs] You listen to the radio, and I used



Turntables from Nottingham Analogue Studio and Marantz are complemented by SimAudio CD players and amplification, and Totem speakers.

to start building equipment. I just fell in love with that, and that was probably the forerunner of me going to SAIT and electronics.

My next question was going to be “How did you start The Hi Fi Attic”, but I think you’ve already covered that, haven’t you?

That would have been with Rae and Grant, and this was the first store.

So this store was the first?

Well, for me. They had Kamloops first, Kelowna was second, Vernon was third. We did that for 20 years, and then times were changing. The Kelly’s franchise had dissolved—we were still running it as Kelly’s, which was no problem because we owned our own stores, locations, everything—and we sorta I think at that time outlived the franchise concept, and decided also that to survive the store would have to evolve. And how do you compete against the big box stores? We’re not on the same level, and to survive would be to chose pieces of the whole industry and go after those and become more...

Specialist?

Yes. I can react to things quicker, I’m not selling a fridge, or a computer, or anything else. I’m just doing this part. We actually broke Kelly’s into three stores. Back then it was Cantel, which was cellular (we had the Cantel store which we later sold to a group from Surrey that then moved it into the mall and became Rogers). All the car audio went out and we formed another company called Autosound Plus, and we developed a couple of other stores with it. And then Brian, my partner,

decided that he wanted to buy me out, which was what I had always planned anyway: I wasn’t interested in car audio anymore. He bought that, and that left me just this part, which is hi fi. We’re not doing ghettoblasters, or... In the Kelly’s days we did records and CDs, and we sorta got out of all that and just chose to do high end electronics.

How important is it for you to have a great relationship with the manufacturers of the products you represent?

Oh, extremely important. If I sell you something and you have problem, I want to be the middle man. I’m here to help you resolve your problem, and I need that relationship with the manufacturer or distributor to be able to resolve things.

You need to know that they’ve got your back?

Yes, exactly. So relationships mean more to us with distributors and manufacturers. There’re many good products out there, but we chose to deal with people we know and trust, and have had a relationship with for many years.

Right, and you can’t represent everything.

No.

Do you sell used gear in addition to new, and if so, roughly what percentage of your business comes from buyers of used gear?

Probably a very small percentage, I would say maybe 10% is used at the very most. It’s more of an accommodation for long term customers, that have bought something and want to move up. We’re

able to take that back in and get them into a new piece. We’re not interested in used pieces coming through the door—we’re not a pawn shop. But we are interested in helping our customers advance and get better gear. It’s a way of them getting out of it, and a lot of people don’t want to sell their own pieces. They don’t like people coming to their door, or whatever, or just don’t like the process of dealing with it. So we try to accommodate good customers...

So would it be fair to say that the used gear that you do have is essentially just from customers trading up, as opposed to Joe Random Non-Customer saying “Hey, do you want to buy this from me so that you can sell it”?

Yes, generally it would be from a good customer. We *occasionally* will accept something on consignment from somebody if it’s a very good piece in great shape. We might accommodate them, but it depends on the room in the store, how much used stuff we have on the shelf at that time.

How has the global economic slowdown affected your business? Are more people buying used gear than before?

No. [Laughs] I guess when things sped up and we went through the big boom era, our high-end sales of individual gear slowed down and everything else, like doing houses and home theatre, really took off. As the housing industry slowed down again, all of a sudden we saw an increase in individual sales of high-end gear. So it’s sorta like a teeter-totter, and goes back and forth for us, so we’re somewhat lucky that way.

Also, the people we're dealing with can afford to buy things whether the economy's good or bad. What happens is, if you're selling cheap gear and the economy goes soft, it's the people with no money that can't afford to buy. So we've sort of positioned ourselves a *little* above that. It still affects us somewhat, but not a great deal.

What are the benefits of buying from The Hi Fi Attic?

The knowledge we possess, our knowledge of equipment. Basically, a passion for music and trying to do what's right for you. We're not interested in unloading this big pile of equipment we bought when we shouldn't have. [Laughs] We're really trying to find out—for your budget—what will do the most for you, make your toe tap and enjoy it.

So it's the more personal service that you're talking about?

Yes, as yourself will know, it's more relationships and people become family almost.

How would you describe your average customer, and roughly what proportion of your customers are new (as opposed to repeat) business?

Repeat is very high. I would guess that repeat business is 60%, maybe even higher. Usually we have customers bring in new people to us; referrals are very big with us. We don't do a lot of advertising, very minimal. Everything is word of mouth, and people just find out and they tell their friends. You know we do these evenings where people come, and we're not trying to sell you anything, we're just trying to let you see what's out there and different brands and what they do. People come to those things and all of sudden they're at a dinner party, it goes quiet and then they go, "I was at The Hi Fi Attic the other day, and believe it or not they had a \$20,000 single CD player!" It's a piece of conversation and people get interested and they come down. It's not that we sell a lot of those, but it starts the interest as a place to come and look.

Roughly what proportion of your clients have analogue sources, and how has that trend changed over the past few years?

Well, back in the Kelly's days vinyl was extremely important to us, it was a big part of the store. I'd say it's dwindled to probably about 10% of the store. We still sell turntables, cartridges, record

cleaners, and we have a bunch of used records that people are always going through. It has dramatically dropped off, but at the same time, people with collections have maintained the interest in maintaining their record players and cartridges. We see young people now—they're not droves—but young people all of sudden get interested in the fact that they can buy cheap records, and a lot of music is great from that era. They come in and buy a used turntable and sometimes they move up to a half decent new 'table. So, it'll never come back, but there will probably always be a certain market for it. All of our competitors are basically out of it; they're not selling turntables for their surround sound with six speakers, it doesn't exist. We're able to fill that market and do OK.

You host several after-hours events every year. What impact do they have on your business, especially from new customers?

Umm, quite a bit. We encourage people that are coming that we invite to bring somebody that they know. It's not like we're gonna arm wrestle anybody to buy something—as you know, we're very relaxed and calm about it—but it's to show them what we have. A lot of those people do come back and buy, or they bring other friends. Again, it's a word of mouth thing. You know, "You've gotta come and see this little place!" This isn't Vancouver or Toronto. This is Vernon, a small city, and we do quite well with high end.

How do you decide whether to take on a new line?

A new line has to have something of interest to us: one thing is the quality of the line. We need to see a hole or we're not happy with something else. We don't jump lines and change every day, but at the same time we're always looking for something new to bring into the store so that when people come in, they're like, "Oh wow, when did you start doing this?" But at the same time, we're not just gonna jump ship and change lines we're doing well with. So we go through this flow all the time, and we have our standbys that will always be here, but lines have ups and downs just like stores do. They're either hot or they're cold, and some lines are very strong in the store and whether they're hot or cold we'll stay with them. Other lines we'll slowly drop off. You just wonder why you're doing a lot of work to try to sell them, and then it's time to move on.

What's the best demo session you can remember? And the worst?

Oh the worst! [Laughs] A guy came in one day and he wanted an amplifier—I forget what the price was, probably \$299—so I said we have this line. Back then it wasn't a very strong line, but we thought it was good. It was called Electra. They're no longer around, so I'll use the name. He said, "Is this pretty good?" and I said, "Yeah, it's 50 Watts RMS per channel, it's well built, and got all the features you want." So he said, "Well let's hear it", so I turned it on, we both stood back and were watching this thing... going up in smoke! [Laughs] He looked at me and said, "That's the best you have?" I looked at him and shrugged, and he never bought anything. [Laughs] So that was kind of an embarrassment, but after I assured him it was a great product, but oh, that was embarrassing.

Umm, the best sale or demonstration? I had a guy come in one day. Actually, he just wandered in—he'd been playing golf. He came over to see what we were about, he was from out of town. We were sitting there talking and showing things, and all of a sudden he walked out with \$30,000 worth of stuff, just boom! He was just playing golf, on his holidays! He was, "OK, that sounds real good. I've never heard anything like that". He bought it all, and I was like, "You want it all now?!"

As a specialist audio dealer, you presumably have access to pretty much whatever gear you want. What's currently in your home system?

Ooh, you shouldn't ask me that one!

An old Dansette?!

[Laughs] Yeah! Actually, I've just been remodelling my soundroom and just redid the whole thing. I have a Dreamvision

projector, which is up there—it's quite nice. I'm running a Pioneer Elite receiver, and Parasound in-wall speakers. They're temporary, they're just in there until... I actually ordered MartinLogans, in black, but they have never come. You can only get them in white, and I need black. They have a cloth so I couldn't really paint them. So I'm sort of in between; I'm looking at several other brands right now, and I'll probably change. I have a MartinLogan subwoofer, prior to that I had the Velodyne Servo 1200. And I have VHS, StarChoice, and I'm running a Pioneer Elite Blu-ray player. It sounds better than what I thought it would. Whether that's the room and how it was designed, I don't know, but it's remarkably nice to listen to, and it's probably slowed me down! [Laughs] But I have to finish it. I'm sorta like the shoe maker, you know, you do shoes all day, you go home and you go barefoot. I'm sorta the same way sometimes, but every once in a while I reach a point where I've got to do something, and away I go and change it.

Upgradeitis strikes?

Yes!

How much time to you get to spend listening to music at home, and what are some of your favourite records?

Oh, actually, I spend most evenings listening to some music. When I get up in the morning I like to wake up to Huey Lewis, things that get me moving in the morning. I really do use music to change my mood. I like to get up, it's a sunny day, fresh. I wanna be pumped, I wanna go out there. When I come home at night, I really want to just relax and settle down. It's more blues and jazz. The era I've really come to like is the doo-wop

years. For some reason I just love that music. But I'm a pretty eclectic guy, I listen to everything, but if I really want to sit down and just really enjoy something, that's the era I would go for.

I think you mentioned this before, but presumably you've become friends with many of your clients over the years?

I would say most of them, yes. We were talking about worst things earlier. I'll tell you a story. I had sold a gentleman a Thorens turntable. He used to come in every week and buy records, so I said, "How do you like your new turntable?". He said, "Well, every now and then it play backwards". I said, "How does a record play backwards? I've never heard of such a thing." He said, "No honestly, it play backwards." So I said, "Bring it back in and I'll look at it." So I had it for three days. It worked flawlessly and I gave it back to him. The next week he's in buying records on a Friday, and he says, "It's still playing backwards." I said, "Next time it's playing backwards, I want you to phone me".

Three days later, the phone rings. "Lyle, you've gotta come: it's playing backwards!" So out to his house I go, and sure enough it's playing backwards. I brought it back to the store, it would not play backwards. And then all of a sudden, on about the fourth day, it started playing backwards. So immediately we were on the line to Thorens, saying, "We've got a turntable, and it's playing backwards! What's with this?" What the problem was is this: it was a 24-pole motor, and one of the windings had been soldered on backwards. So it was like a roulette table: you spin it, and if it landed on that spot, when you next start it, it would go in reverse. You had a one in 24 chance

of that happening each time you started it. So anyways I got it fixed for him—they replaced the motor—and everything was fine. He worked for the newspaper and he moved away. I hadn't seen him for a long time, and one day, about four or five years later, he comes into the store and says, "Lyle, my turntable's still playing OK!" [Laughs]

So our customers are long term. People move away, we have people all over the country and they still phone us and we ship them stuff or they ask our advice. It's not always about the sale, it's just being there for people.

What's next for The Hi Fi Attic?

Retirement! [Laughs] I've got a few years to go yet, but it's getting closer. When my wife retires I will probably retire. Ideally it would be to maybe sell the store, and I would not walk away from it. I'd still like to work—I don't even care if I get paid. I'd just come to work when they needed me, so I could still buy some equipment cheap. But in the short term, say the next five years, we're entering some interesting times. Technology is really changing. Instead of turntables we're dealing with iPods and Internet music. It's a whole new world again, and it's coming very fast, and it's getting very good. It's gonna be interesting to see what comes.



The Hi Fi Attic's Lyle Duffield (left) and Chris Morey (right).

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Reader's System

By Rich Teer



When we're not hidden away in our music rooms listening to music, us audiophiles can be quite a sociable bunch. When we meet in a social context, the conversation invariably turns to our love of music and the gear with which we listen to it. I see Vinylphile as more than just an electronic audio review magazine. I also see it as a medium through which the community of vinyl-loving audiophiles can get together and share their passion for music. To achieve this, we'll have a regular feature in which a reader's vinyl-centric audio system is showcased. Some of these systems will be ultra high-end, others not so much. The key attribute they will all share is that the vinyl source will be

at least as important as other sources in the system.

Our first reader's system belongs to Greg, a Vernon-based real estate agent.

From where did you get your love of hi fi?

When I was about 17 years old, I used to listen to the radio all the time and I just really liked it. So I started saving up and I remember the first stereo that I bought. It was one of those Kenwood jobs, I think, all in one with a turntable on it. It had separate speakers, though, so you could move the speakers, so that was pretty cool.

I've always liked listening to music, and I like records! I always have listened to records ever since I was a young kid. A lot of my friends think I'm crazy because I still have records! I tried playing music once. The guitar—I owned a guitar for many years—but for some reason I just couldn't ever pick it up. But I really loved listening to music so whenever I had a few extra bucks, I'd buy something.

Roughly how many records do you have?

I've got about 1,000 records. I also have quite a few CDs. I also have SACDs, and DVD-A discs, because the player I have plays all the formats.

Roughly how often do you listen to vinyl as opposed to your other sources?

I probably listen to my record player about once per week, and I listen to my CD player the rest of the time. I enjoy the vinyl more, it's just the convenience of CD: when I get up in the morning I put a CD on. But when I'm sitting down reading or something, I like to listen to records. Sometimes in the evenings or on weekends, when I get a few extra minutes, I like to sit down and just spin some vinyl.

What was your first system, and how has it evolved over the years?

Well, I used to have my own business, called Vernon Audio Heaven, so I've had lots of different systems. Some have been quite expensive, and some have been quite cheap. There is no logic to it, because for many years I actually sold equipment, so I would get some really nice speakers and then sell them and buy different speakers, and the same thing with turntables. I've had Rega turntables, I like the Pro-Ject turntables. For entry level they're quite nice—I gave my son one—so I've used most of the Pro-Ject turntables, and I really like the Regas. And this is my latest turntable, which I really love, the Interspace. It sounds so nice!

As for amps, I've had mostly British stuff. I had a Creek 5350 SE; that was a really nice amp. And then Monitor Audio, I've had a few of those pieces. I've had Linn. I like Linn quite a bit, so I've had Linn amplifiers, players, and I owned an LP12. I owned it for about 6 to 8 months, and then I sold it. The LP12 was a really nice turntable, but it was really fussy.

Yes, I've heard that they're a bitch to set up, and a bigger bitch to keep set up. They're not exactly set and forget.

No, unlike this turntable. I just turn it on and away it goes.

So, what's next on your wish list?

Umm, I think I want to get some better speakers. These are nice little speakers, but they're little. You know, just entry level audiophile stuff, so I want to get some better speakers, and I want to get a better amplifier.

Would you go separates, or would you stick with an integrated?

It depends on how much money I have! [Laughs] I'd like to get an amp/preamp combination. I really like the Moon stuff, Simaudio Moon. Or the Linn; I'd like to get a Linn multichannel amp or something.

Any particular speakers you're eyeing up?

Not really. There're so many out there! I'll just have to go to [the Hi Fi Attic's] Lyle and say, "Hey Lyle, play me something good"! So I guess speakers first of all, and then maybe another amp.

Would you consider a new cartridge maybe?

Yep, possibly.

What cartridges are you interested in?

I haven't given it too much thought—so I don't have any specific make or model in mind—but I'd really like to try a moving coil cartridge one day.

Equipment list

Analogue source Nottingham Analogue Interspace Junior with Ace Interspace arm.

Cartridge Goldring 1012GX (MM).

Digital source Linn Unidisk SC.

Phono stage Simaudio LP5.3.

Integrated amplifier Musical Fidelity A3.5.

Speakers Monitor Audio Silver RS6 and Epos ELS 10" subwoofer.

Interconnects and cables Interconnects: Nordost Frey and Ecosse; speaker cables: Ecosse; AC: XLO ER10.



Annie's Audio Adventures

Is It On or Is It Off?

By Annie St. Jean

One Saturday morning, while I was resting from a very busy week teaching grade four, my husband came back from our favourite local high-end audio store with a little box. It's grey and black with two little light bulbs on the top. He also brought some very cute grey cables that match the colour of our new anniversary present: the Chord CPM 2600 integrated amplifier (much more fun than a diamond ring, if you ask me!).

So, my husband installs the pretty cable and box, and tells me to close my eyes and try to guess whether the little box was on or off. If you know us, you already know that we are very competitive when we play games together, so I was ready to be tricked. We took out some of our favourite testing songs, including Michael Bublé's Feeling Good, Sarah McLachlan's Gloomy Sunday and Blackbird, Melissa Etheridge's You Can Sleep While I Drive, Harry Connick Jr's Love Me Some You, and of course, Fairfield Four's These Bones. I closed my eyes to listen better. Well, try as he might, my hubby was unable to fool me! I could tell before the second bar of the song whether the little box was on or off—so I won! Well, I guess he won too, because now I don't want to listen to our CD player (a 10 year old

Parasound) without that little box being on!

You might be wondering what the little



box is. The little box is officially called the Grant Fidelity B-283 Tube Conditioner. What it does is run the audio signal from the CD player through the tubes and then back to the amp. What happens during this transfer is like magic: the sound becomes very warm, rich, and round. The stage expands and you really feel like you're there, easily able to visualise where the instruments are, especially in a piece like Feeling Good that has a big band sound.

Voices are very clear without being too bright, and you can hear Sarah's breathing in Gloomy Sunday. Bass instruments are very rich and deep (try Love Me Some You's double bass intro!), and everything else in the middle has its own space where everything blends in beautifully.

Of course, we've listened to other CD players since buying our Chord, but I must say that this little box is a great alternative to buying another CD player. So, until I get the Chord CD player to match the amp, this box is definitely staying on! I guess hubby and I will have to play round two of our game if the Chord CD player ever comes to our living room! In the meantime, I'm listening to all our favourite CDs all day!

Product details

B-283 Tube Processor
Price \$175

Grant Fidelity

36-2323 Oakmoor Drive SW
Calgary, AB T2V 4T2
Canada
(403) 251-0466
www.grantfidelity.com

Allnic Audio Labs H-1200

Phono Stage

By Rich Teer



One of the difficulties faced by new audio magazines like Vinylphile is that of obtaining review samples of gear. One can understand the reticence of established companies: it takes a degree of trust to send expensive equipment to unknown reviewers, and on a more practical level, many companies can't afford to lend out review samples (that can't later be sold at full price) to every Tom, Dick, and Harry that asks for them. Fortunately, these reservations aren't universal, and some companies are willing to take a chance with fledgling publications. One such manufacturer is Allnic Audio Labs, distributed here in North America (and elsewhere) by Dave Beetles' Hammertone Audio.

Allnic Audio Labs is a Korean company that specialises in tube amplifiers, cartridges, and speakers. There are currently four phono stages in Allnic's line up: the entry-level H-1200, the mid-range H-1500 II SE LCR and H-1500 II SE Plus, and the top-of-the-line H-3000 LCR Reference. It is the first of these, the H-1200, that is the subject of this review.

Technical Details

The H-1200 is an approximately shoe-box sized, single chassis tube phono stage. It features two pairs of single-ended inputs (one for MC cartridges,

the other for MM cartridges), one pair of single-ended outputs, solid state voltage regulation, zero negative feedback, and pure Class A operation. Permalloy (iron-nickel alloy) MC step-up transformer cores are used, negating the need for an external step-up device. My Lyra Parnassus has a relatively low output of 0.3 mV; the H-1200 had more than enough gain to handle it with aplomb.

All audio sockets are gold plated, and the AC cable is detachable so that you can substitute your choice of cable in place of the stock one if desired. Fit and finish are good, and the front faceplate—which is available with a natural or anodised black finish—is made from a

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H-3000 LCR
TRANSFORMER COUPLED OUTPUT
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\$10900 USD

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5 mm (0.25") thick sheet of machined aluminum (very impressive at this price point).

Sound Quality

The very first thing I noticed when I added the H-1200 to my system was the large increase in gain. As good as it is, the phono section of my Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2 barely has enough gain to make it usable with very low output cartridges like the Lyra Parnassus, so the additional gain provided by the H-1200 was more than welcome.

With one or two reservations that I'll get to in a minute, I found the H-1200 to be quite a good performer. The frequency response was quite extended, imaging was fine (suggesting that temporal information was being passed relatively unblemished), and macro dynamics were pretty good.

However, I did notice a little rolling off at the frequency extremes and a touch of midrange suckout. The bass thrum that can be heard periodically during the first epilogue of Jeff Wayne's musical version of *The War of the Worlds* [CBS 96000] and the bass drum on the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's rendition of Prokofieff's *Lieutenant Kije* [Classic Records/RCA Victor LSC-2150] are examples of

where the bass is rolled off a mite and is a little soft and wooly. Similarly, the bells that accompany the piano near the beginning of Mike Oldfield's excellent debut LP, *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001], don't have quite the sparkle they should. Perhaps paradoxically, the tambourine in the first epilogue of *War of the Worlds* is quite well defined.

Low level micro dynamics were quite good, but not up there with the best. The best way I can describe this is as a slight veiling with some graininess. I sometimes found myself turning up the volume to hear details I knew were on the recording. For example: when listening to *War of the Worlds* on a very revealing system, you can hear—by subtle variations in reverb and tonality—the different sessions in which Richard Burton's narration was recorded. When using the H-1200, I found these differences much harder to identify.

Perhaps a victim of the same graininess, some leading transients were also curtailed, being softened somewhat. The plucked nylon acoustic guitar strings near the beginning of *Tubular Bells* illustrate this: although they're plucked using a plectrum, when using the H-1200 they have a slightly softer leading

edge, resulting in them sounding like they're finger-plucked.

I think (and this is just speculation on my part) that this is partly attributable to noise and hum, which is just audible at normal listening volumes (when no other signal is present) but becomes increasingly intrusive as the gain is increased. At full gain, I'd describe the noise and hum as being moderately loud (although I'd have to say that I couldn't actually listen to music at anywhere near that gain level!).

Looking back at what I've just written, it might seem like I'm panning the H-1200, but nothing can be further from the truth. I auditioned the H-1200 in a very high-

end system—one that is probably far more revealing than those in which the H-1200 is likely to be placed—so all of its weaknesses (as well as its strengths) were ruthlessly exposed. Systems that are more in keeping with the H-1200's modest \$999 price tag are not likely to be so revealing, so I suspect that many of the issues I raised above will be much diminished in severity, if not eliminated completely. Let's also not forget that the H-1200 is Allnic's least expensive phono stage, so some compromises are inevitable.

Verdict

With the H-1200, Allnic and Hammertone Audio have an entry-level tube phono stage of which they can be proud. Yes, it's not perfect and does have a few limitations, but it's unreasonable to expect anything else from something at this price point. The sound quality is actually pretty good, and the build quality and fit 'n' finish are quite remarkable for \$999. I think that the Allnic H-1200 would be a great addition to the right system, and I have no qualms about recommending it for an audition if you're in the market for a phono stage in this price range.



Specifications

Description Tube phono stage.

Frequency response ±0.3 dB of RIAA.

Gain 70 dB at 1 kHz (MC), 38 dB at 1 kHz (MM).

Distortion Less than 0.3% at 1 V, 1 kHz.

Input impedance Up to 30 Ohms (MC), 47k Ohms (MM).

Output impedance 1.2k Ohms.

Phono equalisation RIAA.

Polarity Non-inverting.

Maximum input voltage 300 mV at 1 kHz (500 mV at 10 kHz), MM non-clipping.

Signal to noise ratio 68 dB (CCIR, 1 kHz).

Tube complement Two 6112 (first gain stage), two 6021 (second gain stage).

Dimensions (hwd) 93 mm x 112 mm x 250 mm (3.67" x 4.4" x 9.8").

Weight 2.2 kg (4.9 lbs).

Finishes Natural aluminum and black anodised.

Serial number of unit reviewed N/A.

Price \$999.

Warranty Two years transferable (1 year on tubes).

Hammertone Audio

252 Magic Drive

Kelowna, BC V1V 1N2

Canada

(250) 862-9037

www.hammertoneaudio.com

Associated Equipment

Analogue source Forsell Air Reference Mk 2 turntable and arm.

Phono cartridges Lyra Parnassus.

Phono stage Allnic H-1200

Preamp Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2.

Power amplifiers PrimaLuna ProLogue Sevens.

Cables Phono: Nordost Frey. Interconnects: Nordost Frey. Speaker: Nordost Frey. AC: stock.

Accessories Target and SolidSteel equipment stands; Mission Isoplat; Furman Elite 15-PFi power conditioner; Audio Physic cartridge demagnetiser; Last record and stylus cleaning products; The Cartridge Man tracking force gauge.

MartinLogan Spire

Electrostatic Speaker

By Rich Teer

When thinking about high-end audio equipment, certain manufacturers are almost synonymous with particular categories. For example: it's hard not to think of Krell or Pass Labs when talking about high powered solid state amps, Audio Research or Conrad Johnson when talking about tube amps, and SME or VPI when talking about turntables and tonearms. MartinLogan is practically synonymous with electrostatic speakers (at least on this side of the Atlantic; one might argue that Quad enjoys a similar reputation in Europe, especially in its native Britain), having introduced the audio world to their curvilinear line-source (CLS) technology in the mid 1980s.

One of the problems with electrostatic speakers is that they usually require very large panels in order to reproduce bass frequencies, especially if the music's dynamics are to be faithfully portrayed. Large panels can be harder to accommodate in a domestic setting, and are cumbersome to move around. Consequently, most of MartinLogan's speakers are hybrids, with one or more dynamic cone woofers handling the bass frequencies while an electrostatic panel handles the mid-range and treble.

In 2008 MartinLogan introduced the CLX, the long-awaited full-range successor to the CLS. At about the same time, they announced the first hybrid to benefit from a trickle-down of the CLX's technology, the Spire.

Technology

Measuring a relatively room-friendly 150 cm x 32 cm x 45.1 cm (59" x 12.5" x 17.75"), the Spire features a 112 cm (44") CLS XStat electrostatic transducer, which handles the mid-range and treble frequencies above 320 Hz. The electrostatic transducer is housed within a rigid extruded aluminum and composite structure MartinLogan calls an AirFrame, and is comprised of three components: the Mylar-film diaphragm (whose back-and-forth pistonic motion creates the sound we hear), a pair of insulated stators between which the diaphragm is suspended, and a number of horizontal clear spars that stiffens the assembly across its width. The stators contain numerous holes through which the sound passes; MartinLogan claim that the latest version of the MicroPerf stators expose almost twice as much of the diaphragm's surface area as an equally-sized traditional electrostatic panel,



without compromising the AirFrame's structural integrity. By exposing more of the diaphragm's surface area, the efficiency and dynamics are said to be greatly improved.

Bass frequencies up to 320 Hz are handled by a single high excursion 25.4 cm (10") aluminum-cone PoweredForce active woofer. The woofer is powered by a built in 200 W (into 4 Ohms) amplifier, and enclosed in a sealed, non-resonant asymmetrical chamber.

Perhaps the most significant technology to trickle down from the flagship CLX is the hand-built Vojtko crossover (named after its designer, Joe Vojtko), which features audiophile-grade polypropylene capacitors and air-core coils.

On the rear of the cabinet, the Spire features two pairs of three-way, gold-plated custom speaker terminals (to facilitate bi-wiring if desired), a toggle switch to select the intensity of the logo-shaped LED on the top of the enclosure (high, low, or off), a 35 Hz level control (± 10 dB), and an IEC mains socket with power indicator LED. The Spire comes fitted with rubber feet which can be replaced at the user's discretion by custom Energy Transfer Coupler (ETC) spikes. My listening room has a carpet-on-concrete floor, so once the review Spires had broken in I installed the ETC spikes, which resulted in a fuller, tighter bass.

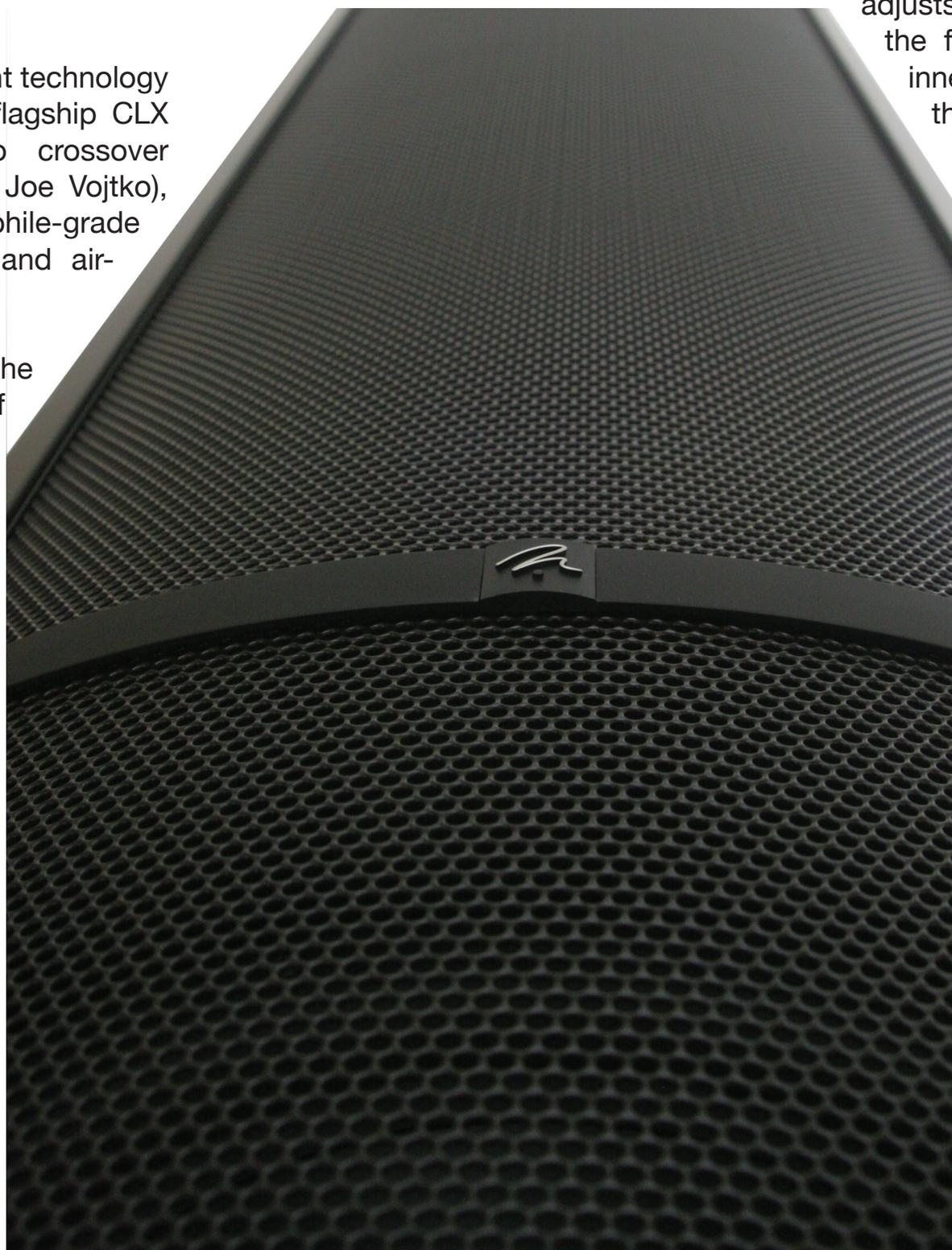
Room Placement and Listening

The Spire, like all electrostatic speakers, has a dipolar radiation pattern, which means that as much sound energy comes out their back as their front. Consequently, the Spire needs plenty of room to breath, and should be placed fairly far away from walls (especially the front walls—those behind the speakers). After a bit of experimentation, I ended up placing the Spires as recommended

in the "Extra Tweak" section of MartinLogan's excellent user manual. The distance from the front wall (to the centre of the electrostatic driver) was about 147 cm (58"), and they were about 137 cm (54") from the side walls. The distance between the two centre panels was about 221 cm (87"), and my listening position is about 350 cm (138") from the speaker plane. Using ye olde flashlight trick (whereby one points an under-chin flashlight at the electrostatic panel and adjusts each speaker's toe-in until the flashlight is reflected in the inner third of the panel), I thought that in my room a slight toe-out yielded the best imaging and treble quality.

Out of the box, the Spire sounded very veiled, as though a thick blanket had been thrown over them. The bass was wooly and ill-defined, and the treble was muffled. Fortunately, these issues quickly cleared up as the Spires broke in: the bass became fuller and richer, and the treble became more airy and clear. By the time I settled down for any serious critical listening, the Spires had been playing for well over 100 hours.

Two things immediately struck me when I listened to the broken-in Spires: their extended frequency range, and how clear they sounded. Most speakers I've listened to so far have at least some veiling, the degree of which ranges



from almost as though the speaker has a carpet in front of it to as though the carpet had been replaced by a thin cotton sheet. I don't hear that veiling with the Spires—they are very revealing about the quality of the signal being fed to them, but without sounding etched. Some speakers have a rising, emphasised treble that can lead some listeners to believe that they're somehow more revealing or detailed, but I find listening to speakers with this false clarity to be very fatiguing. And listening to the Spires is anything but fatiguing: I've had many multi-hour listening sessions where I've listened to numerous records, without any sense of fatigue.

An example of the clarity I'm talking about is the sound of the cash registers at the beginning of "Money", from Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* [EMI/Harvest LPCENT11], and the clock chimes from "Time" on the same LP. The Spires' clarity and neutral tonal balance can lend a real "you are there" palpability to the right recordings. On *Send in the Clowns* [Jazz Planet JP 0779-12], I could've sworn that Bill Henderson was in my room. Or more precisely, I could've sworn that I was one of the patrons in the restaurant where the track was recorded. Henderson was right there, as was the piano and other patrons (in addition to their clapping, the latter were given away by the occasional glass quietly chinking, and other background sounds typical of a restaurant).

The Spire's bass is fast, extended, deep, and tuneful, but—and this is a little but—perhaps lacking a bit of heft at the lowest frequencies (admittedly, I might be picking nits here). Some speakers smear the bass, making it hard to follow the bass line. Take, for example, the bass in "Telegraph Road" from Dire

Straits' third LP, *Love Over Gold* [Vertigo 25PP-60]. When the track gets busy as it builds up to the finale, the Spires let you hear the individual notes of John Illsley's bass guitar, even though there are lots of other things going on.

Another track which shows off the Spires' great tuneful bass is "Way Down Deep" from *The Hunter* by Jennifer Warnes [Cisco CLP 7063]. The bass guitar and especially the talking drum are exquisite, the Spires wonderfully portraying the latter's deep "boing" sound. Gary Karr's 1611 Amanti double bass on *Adagio d'Albinoni* [King Record KIJC 9125] has the right weight, without being overpowering.

What I've just said about the bass applies to low to medium playback levels. But when the volume is really cranked up, the bass has a less visceral impact than real life. Played loudly enough, the bass drum thwacks in the opening track of *Lt Kije* [Classic Records LSC-2150] should be felt in your chest as well as heard, but at the end of the day, there's only so much air a single 25.4 cm driver on each channel can move. I don't want to make a too big a deal of this, though, because the Spire's bass is generally very satisfying. Those who want to add more slam to the lower registers might want to consider augmenting the Spires with a pair of MartinLogan's Descent i subwoofers (if space permits), or using the Spire's bigger brother, the Summit X, which has two 25.4 cm bass drivers per channel.

Where the Spires really shine is their superbly neutral midrange. Free from the boxy colourations that plague most conventional dynamic speakers, the Spires reproduce sounds like female voices beautifully. The Spire reproduces

delicate sounds like the shimmering of triangles, or the chiming of bells, with aplomb. On the right recordings, you can hear the air surrounding such instruments. And because the electrostatic driver is so lightweight, transients are also well reproduced.

Detail is another area where the Spires shine. I know it's a bit of an audiophile cliché, but the Spires revealed to me numerous previously-unheard details in records I know intimately. A couple of examples that immediately come to mind are the triangle sweep near the beginning of the first epilogue of Jeff Wayne's fantastic (and much under-appreciated on this side of the pond) *The War of the Worlds* [CBS 96000], and the various little sounds that appear throughout Jean-Michel Jarre's second record, *Equinoxe* [Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs MFSL 1-227]. Subtle details that allow emotions to be communicated are well portrayed by the Spires. When we were listening to "Linus and Lucy" from The Vince Guaraldi Trio's *A Charlie Brown Christmas* [Fantasy 8431], a friend of mine commented that you could really tell that Vince Guaraldi was really enjoying himself. On other speakers it sounded like he had just turned up for his day's pay and gone though his set. What the lesser speakers were not reproducing was the feeling and subtle intonations the Spires reveal.

Imaging and sound staging are also great with the Spires. Given the right recording, not only is the sound stage wide, but it's deep too. Take, for example, the breaking glass in "Private Investigations" from the previously-mentioned *Love Over Gold*. You can hear it just left of centre, but wayyyy back. The layering of orchestras is also well portrayed, with the percussion clearly behind the

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strings, woodwinds, and brass. On electronic music like *Equinoxe*, the Spires make it easy to pinpoint where various sounds are coming from, and easy to follow around the three-dimensional aural landscapes Jarre creates. One thing is for sure: properly set up, the width and depth of the sound stage created by the Spires is not limited to the listening room's boundaries.

Verdict

Let me get straight to the point: the MartinLogan Spire is one of the finest sounding less-than-stratospherically-priced speakers I have had the pleasure of auditioning. Minor quibbles about the weight of the low bass aside, the Spire's top-to-bottom coherency, tuneful bass, sparkling highs, and excellent imaging make it a real winner. If you're shopping for a speaker at the \$10,000 or so price point—and you have the space required for them to perform at their best—the Spire should be on your “must audition” short list. Very highly recommended, I put my money where my mouth is and bought a pair.



MARTIN LOGAN®

The Great American Speaker Company

www.martinlogan.com

Specifications

Description Electrostatic/cone hybrid loudspeaker.

High-frequency transducer 112 cm (44") CLS (curvilinear line source) XStat electrostatic.

Low-frequency transducer 25.4 cm (10") high-excursion aluminum cone woofer.

Crossover frequency 320 Hz.

Frequency response 29-23,000 Hz \pm 3 dB.

Sensitivity 91 db/2.83 V/1 m.

Nominal impedance 4 Ohms (0.8 Ohms at 20 kHz).

Power handling 250 W

Dimensions (hwd) 150 cm x 32 cm x 45.1 cm (59" x 12.5" x 17.75").

Weight 26.3 kg (58 lbs) per channel.

Finishes Natural cherry, dark cherry, black ash, or maple veneer (other finishes available to order).

Serial numbers of units reviewed SPTL 008 and 009.

Price \$8,495 per pair.

Warranty 5 years non-transferable.

MartinLogan

2101 Delaware

Lawrence, KS 66046

USA

(785) 749-0133

www.martinlogan.com

Associated Equipment

Analogue source Forsell Air Reference Mk 2 turntable and arm.

Phono cartridges Lyra Parnassus.

Preamp Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2.

Power amplifiers PrimaLuna ProLogue Sevens.

Cables Phono: Nordost Frey. Interconnects: Nordost Frey. Speaker: Nordost Frey. AC: stock.

Accessories Target and SolidSteel equipment stands; Mission Isoplat; Furman Elite 15-PFi power conditioner; Audio Physic cartridge demagnetiser; Last record and stylus cleaning products; The Cartridge Man tracking force gauge.

Nordost Frey

Interconnects and Speaker Cables

By Rich Teer

Cable reviews are somewhat of a thorny subject, usually met with derision from detractors who claim that all cables sound alike. On the surface, their arguments can be compelling: after all, provided it is of sufficient gauge to do the job it is being tasked to do, a wire is a wire, right? While I do agree that cable differences are usually more subtle than (for example) those between speakers, I've heard with my own ears differences between enough cables to accept as an incontrovertible fact the proposition that cables can sound different. (Note that I am not asserting that all cables do sound different, just that they can sound different.) As an aside, it's interesting to observe how many cable sound detractors cite measurements and what others say to support their arguments, and how few of them will actually expend any effort testing with the only tools that matter: their ears. One can only speculate how much higher the signal to noise ratio of some audio forums would be if those detractors spent as much effort in listening to cables as they did in telling us how they all sound the same, but I digress...

Nordost first appeared on my audio radar screen about 10 years ago, when I read about their breathtakingly expensive—but, by all accounts, breathtakingly good—Valhalla cables. A few years later I managed to buy myself a pair of near-entry-level Blue Heaven interconnects, with which I was very impressed. In 2007, Nordost once again upped the

the latter), to their Reference (Tyr and Valhalla) and Supreme Reference (Odin) series. Straddling the huge performance (and price) gap between the Flatline and Reference series are the cables in the Norse series. In ascending price, these are the Baldur, the Heimdall, and the Frey. It is the latter of these which is the subject of this review.



Technical Details

At the pinnacle of Nordost's mid-range Norse series of cables, the Frey is available as an interconnect and a speaker cable. The Frey interconnect is made up from six 26 AWG strands of 99.99999% pure oxygen free copper (OFC), extruded over each of which is 60 microns of silver. Wrapped around each of the six strands is a fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP) monofilament thread, wound in an open helix, and extruded over that is an FEP sleeve. FEP is very similar to PTFE (which is most well known by its DuPont brand name, Teflon), sharing its properties of low friction and chemical inertness.

stratospherically priced cable ante by launching their current statement cable, the Odin.

Fortunately for us mere mortals, Nordost's wire wares are available in several price ranges, from their entry level Wyrewizard and Flatline series (the Blue Heaven cables are a member of

The best dielectric is none at all (i.e., a vacuum or air), but a cable constructed

using such a dielectric would be unwieldy; in addition to mechanic integrity, real world cables require a degree of flexibility. The purpose of the monofilament thread then is to act as a spacer between a strand of cable and its FEP sheath. This results in a dielectric which is about 80% air, because the FEP sleeve never touches the cable strand itself. To provide a high degree of immunity from radio frequency interference (RFI), the six strands are wrapped in a 97% braid. Finally, the whole assembly is sheathed in a purple FEP tube and terminated with WBT NextGen gold-plated copper connectors, which are said to offer a superior low-mass connection between the cables and the equipment to which they are connected. High quality XLR connectors are also available to facilitate the cable's use in systems that use balanced connections.

The Frey speaker cable is constructed in a manner similar to its matching interconnect: it is composed of twenty eight 24 AWG strands of 99.99999% pure OFC, extruded over each of which is 60 microns of silver. Each of these strands is wrapped in a FEP monofilament strand, over which is extruded an FEP sleeve. The strands are arranged in Nordost's trademark flat array in groups of seven, and terminated in either low-mass Nordost Z plugs or gold-plated copper spades. As well as being aesthetically pleasing, the flat array is said by Nordost to minimise electrical interactions within the cable (specifically the cable's capacitance and inductance).

The Frey speaker cables can be ordered with either two or four connectors on each end (to facilitate bi-wiring); the review set was configured in typical bi-wiring manner, with one pair of spade connectors on the amplifier end of the cable and two pairs of spades on the speaker end.

Setup and Listening

Apart from dressing them so that signal cables are as far as possible from each other and (more importantly) AC cables, and if they must touch, try to do so perpendicularly, there's not much one needs to do to set up cables. The tiny signal from a cartridge to the phono stage (or preamp if it has a built-in phono stage) is the most important—and most delicate—signal in a system with vinyl as a primary source, so that's where I placed the Nordost Frey interconnect (the six metre interconnect between my Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2 preamp and my PrimaLuna ProLogue Seven monoblocks is also Nordost Frey).

After evaluating the interconnect, the Frey speaker cable was added, replacing the QED Qudos. As I suspect it is with many cable families, the strengths of the Frey are cumulative, and become more apparent as it makes up more of the signal chain. The following therefore describes the effect of having my whole system, from turntable to speakers, wired with Frey interconnects and speaker cable (matching power cables will have to wait until another time).

From the first track I played, it was obvious that the Nordost Frey was something special. Music had a much fuller sound: before I installed the Frey interconnect the sound was a bit muffled, as though being heard through a door. But with the Frey, it sounded like the door had been opened. Not only was the sound more clear, low level details were resolved with much greater precision.

With the Frey, timbral, spatial, and temporal information is conveyed very accurately. Bass is quick, deep, authoritative, and tuneful. The fundamentals of many notes lie in the bass and lower midrange, so accurate bass reproduction is a must if the music played through our systems is to be a reasonable facsimile of the real thing. I could detect no thickening or other nasties to suggest that the bass was being compromised. The bass thrum that can be heard periodically during the first epilogue of Jeff Wayne's musical version of *The War of the Worlds* [CBS 96000] and the bass drum on Fritz Reiner's reading of Prokofieff's *Lieutenant Kije* [Classic Records/RCA Victor LSC-2150] while conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra are wonderfully full yet well defined.

The midrange and treble are similarly unmolested by the Frey. Highs like cymbals, flute, and piano were passed through without hardening or added sibilance. Some cables smear or roll off the treble; fortunately, the Frey is not guilty of such misdemeanours, making sounds like the harpsichord more natural and easy to follow. A couple of my favourite examples of this are from *The War of the Worlds* and Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, as played by the Orchestra Gasparo da Salo del Festival di Brescia e Bergamo on Fone's double LP recorded in 1987 [Fone 87 F 04]. Other examples of the Frey's treble purity are the clarity with which the tambourine that can be heard just before and during the first epilogue of *The War of the Worlds*, the xylophone near the end of the first epilogue, and the bells that accompany the piano near the beginning of Mike Oldfield's wonderful debut LP, *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001].

Talking of *Tubular Bells*, it is a great record for demonstrating the very wide soundstage the Frey is capable of reproducing, and—more impressively—the pin-point imaging of the various instruments. I’ve heard the former before in my system, but I was shocked at how much of an improvement in the latter the Frey engendered. I’m at a loss to explain how a simple cable can effect the imaging, but my theory is that the Frey does a fantastic job of preserving the temporal (and therefore spatial) information in the signal: all the harmonics of a given sound arrive at the speaker at the same time, resulting in more precise imaging. In other words, I think the Frey passes all frequencies at the same speed, whereas lesser cables have small variations in the speed at which the audio signal is passed, which manifests itself as indistinct image placement.

Dynamic range seemed to be expanded with the Frey, too. I don’t mean in an exaggerated, unnatural manner, and I don’t mean that the sound was louder. What I am saying is that although the quietest ppp passages didn’t seem to be much quieter and the loudest fff passages didn’t seem to be any louder, there was a finer granularity in between the two levels. For an analogy of the latter, consider a computer display using an 8-bit palette which is then switched to a 16-bit palette: the brightest and darkest hues are the same, but there are many more shades between them.

Verdict

With the Frey, Nordost have a cable that has many strengths, and few (if any) weaknesses that I can identify. Unfortunately for most audiophiles, such great performance comes at a great price: a 2 m length of Frey interconnect will set you back \$1399 and a 2 m set of Frey speaker cables is \$2499. I say unfortunately because in the right system, the results justify the expense. A general rule of thumb is to allocate a budget of between 10% and 20% of the total system cost on cables, so buying a set of Frey cables for use in a \$5,000 system is preposterous. But those same cables in the context of a \$50,000 system make much more sense (you wouldn’t put cheap tires on a Ferrari, would you?).

More succinctly: with the Frey, Nordost have a real winner. They can be the icing on the proverbial cake in the right system, and I strongly recommend an audition if you are in the market for cables in this price range. Can Nordost’s Valhalla and Odin really be that much better? I can’t wait to find out!

Specifications

Description (interconnect) Extruded silver over 99.99999% pure copper 26 AWG solid conductors, FEP monofilament helix and dielectric. Available with WBT NextGen gold-plated copper RCA plugs or XLR connectors.

Capacitance 26.0 pF/ft.

Inductance 0.06 μ H/ft.

DC Resistance 15.0 Ohms per 1000 ft / 304 m.

Price \$949 for 1 m, \$1189 for 1.5 m, \$1399 for 2 m (add \$210 per additional 50 cm).

Description (speaker cable) Extruded silver over 99.99999% pure copper 24 AWG solid conductors, FEP monofilament helix and dielectric. Available with Nordost Z plugs or gold-plated copper spades.

Capacitance 11.8 pF/ft.

Inductance 0.096 μ H/ft

DC Resistance 3.7 Ohms per 1000 ft / 304 m.

Price \$2059 for 1 m (add \$220 per additional 50 cm).

Serial numbers of units reviewed R01830 (interconnect) and 82425 (speaker cable).

Warranty Lifetime non-transferable.

Nordost

200 Homer Avenue
Ashland, MA 01721
USA
(508) 881-1116
www.nordost.com

Associated Equipment

Analogue source Forsell Air Reference Mk 2 turntable and arm.

Phono cartridges Lyra Parnassus.

Preamp Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2.

Power amplifiers PrimaLuna ProLogue Sevens.

Cables Phono: Nordost Frey, self-made silver. Interconnects: Nordost Frey. Speaker: Nordost Frey, QED Qudos 4-Core. AC: stock.

Accessories Target and SolidSteel equipment stands; Mission Isoplat; Furman Elite 15-PFi power conditioner; Audio Physic cartridge demagnetiser; Last record and stylus cleaning products; The Cartridge Man tracking force gauge.

Record Reviews

By Vinylphile Staff



The Vince Guaraldi Trio

Jazz Impressions of Black Orpheus
Analogue Productions/Fantasy (two 45-RPM 180g LPs)
AJAZ-8089

A while ago I was clicking around YouTube looking at various turntable videos, when I stumbled across one playing a beautiful piece of music (unfortunately, I can't seem to find that video now). After a bit of digging through the Related Videos, I discovered that the track I liked so much was *Cast Your Fate to the Wind*, from the 1962 record *Jazz Impressions of Black Orpheus* by the Vince Guaraldi Trio. I was

very pleasantly surprised to discover that not only was the record available on vinyl, it was part of Analogue Productions' Fantasy 45 Series. So I ordered a copy.

Remastered by Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray at AcousTech Mastering's facility at Record Technology, Inc. (RTI), the Fantasy 45 Series is cut at 45 RPM, and pressed by RTI onto two thick

180g slabs of virgin vinyl. Cutting at 45 RPM results in better sound quality than the more usual 33 RPM because the undulations of the groove are stretched out over a longer distance. To maximise the sound quality, each pressing is limited to only 1,000 numbered copies.

Jazz Impressions of Black Orpheus is Vince Guaraldi's interpretation of four pieces of music from Antoinio Carlos Jobin's soundtrack to the 1959 movie, *Black Orpheus*. The album also includes two standards and two compositions by Guaraldi, the most famous of which is *Cast Your Fate to the Wind*.

I've not heard an original pressing of this record so I can't tell you how this reissue compares to it. But I can tell you that Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray have done a wonderful job. The surface of my copy was silent and blemish free. The clarity, dynamics, and top-to-bottom coherency are fantastic, belying this recording's age.

Imaging is for the most part fine, with Vince Guaraldi's piano dead centre, Colin Bailey's drums usually towards the rear left of the sound stage, and Monte Budwig's bass usually front right. However, a few of the tracks—notably *Moon River* and *Since I Fell For You*—seem to be biased to the right channel (this is particularly noticeable with the drums). Also, the drum kit on *Alma-Ville* sounds like it's 15 feet wide! I assume that all of these are artistic choices by the original producers, rather than mastering or pressing faults.

Musically, my favourite tracks are *Manha De Carnaval*, *Alma-Ville*, and of course, *Cast Your Fate To the Wind*. I'm a relative newcomer to the jazz genre, but I like Guaraldi's work. Sure, \$50 for one record is not an insignificant investment. But it is worth every penny: if you're a Vince Guaraldi fan, you owe it to yourself to snap up a copy of this record before they're all gone. **Rich Teer**



Mike Oldfield

Tubular Bells

Classic Records/Virgin Records (33-RPM 200g LP)

VS 2001

Originally released in May 1973 as the first record on the nascent Virgin Records label, Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* is one of my all-time favourite records: I fell in love with it (especially side one) when I first heard it many years ago in the late 1970s, and have loved it ever since. I have even made a pilgrimage to The Manor, the country manor house in which *Tubular Bells* was recorded. (Unfortunately, The Manor is no longer a recording studio; it was sold to private individuals years ago after EMI purchased Virgin Records from Richard Branson. The then-current owners were kind enough to let me look around for a while.) It's probably fair to say that *Tubular Bells* really took

off on this side of the Atlantic after it was used as the haunting theme for the 1973 movie, *The Exorcist*.

Consisting of two side-long compositions, *Tubular Bells* show off Oldfield's skills as a multi-instrumentalist. He plays a variety of instruments such as guitars, keyboards, glockenspiel, and assorted percussion (to name but a few). The music itself, in my opinion, is

sublime (especially side one), demanding to be played relatively loudly, in a darkened room. Starting quietly with just a piano and tinkling bells, the multilayered texture is gradually built up to the climax of side one, which features the titular tubular bells. Side two is a bit different, evoking images of prehistoric man—until Oldfield's breakneck take on *The Sailor's Hornpipe* kicks in at the end anyway!

The sound quality doesn't disappoint either. Despite being a multitrack studio recording, the sound quality is very good. I'd attribute this to the relatively simple recording techniques and little post processing. The sound is warm and natural without a hint of thinness or treble hardness that sometimes plagues otherwise good-sounding records, and the record is replete with lots of the little details that audiophiles love to spot. Depth is OK, but what a great left to right

sound stage: it is wide, immersive, and enveloping.

As far as comparing this version to the one EMI released as part of their centenary celebrations a few years ago, I'd say that the Classic Records reissue gives up very little to the latter, which has a slight edge in treble purity and detail over the former. Purchasers of the Classic Records version will not be disappointed. (One wonders how great this record would sound on Classic's Clarity vinyl...)

If it isn't already obvious, this record earns my highest recommendation: both the music and the sound quality are of the highest order, and the heavy cardboard sleeve is up to Classic's usual high packaging standards. I'd go almost as far to say that *Tubular Bells* is a mandatory purchase, and should be part of every record collection. If you haven't already got a copy, buy one today! **Rich Teer**



Fritz Rainer and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Lieutenant Kije/Song of the Nightingale
 Classic Records/RCA Living Stereo (four 45-RPM single-sided 200g LPs)
 LSC-2150

I have The Absolute Sound's Harry Pearson to thank for introducing—albeit unknowingly—to this wonderful record. *Lt. Kije* has long been on HP's Golden Disc list and has been mentioned in several of his reviews. My curiosity piqued, I ordered a copy, and I'm very glad I did. Thanks, Harry!

This record actually contains two pieces of music. The first is Prokofieff's *Lt. Kije* and the second is Stravinsky's *Song of the Nightingale*. Both pieces are played by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Fritz Rainer. *Lt. Kije* tells the story of how a typo in military

report created the eponymous soldier, and, to avoid any embarrassment to the monarch (Czar Nicholas I), whose existence had to be documented. *Song of the Nightingale* is a symphonic poem that tells the tale of how a nightingale sings at the court of a Chinese Emperor. When the nightingale finishes its song, a mechanical one (a gift from the Emperor of Japan) takes its place. The real one returns to the fisherman to whom it belongs, only to return when the Emperor is taken ill. The nightingale's song causes the Emperor to fall into a deep, restful sleep, after which he awakes, refreshed. It's mission accomplished, the real nightingale returns once again to the fisherman.

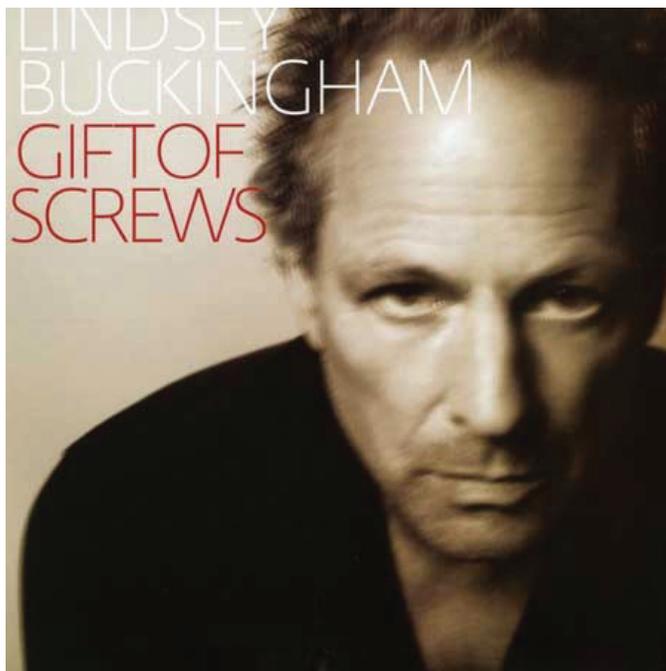
I won't beat about the bush: the sound quality on these records is wonderfully natural. The bass is deep and warm, and trebles have just the right amount of sparkle and shimmer. Violins are not overly strident, and cymbals and bells sound realistic without a hint of splashiness or sibilance.

As for the soundstage: if only all records were this good! The stage is wide and deep, and instruments are well placed (in the sense that their position is clearly delineated) within the soundstage. On the right sort of system, you really get

a feel for the acoustic space in which this record was recorded. The natural sounding reverb of the bass drum thwacks in *Lt. Kije* are a great example of this. These drum thwacks are also great examples of the record's exemplary breathtaking dynamics.

Part of the reason for the great sound quality (especially, I think, the wonderful dynamics) lies with the presentation: four single-sided 45-RPM discs, each containing no more than about 10 minutes of music. The thick, 200g vinyl helps, but one critical observation I must make is this: Classic's single-sided records of this era seem to suffer from excessive "bowling", so they're not as flat as I would like. Fortunately, if my copy of Norah Jones' *Come Away With Me* (which is pressed on Classic's Clarity SV-P II vinyl) is anything to go by, this problem has been remedied in their more recent releases. Of course, the great source material and Bernie Grundman's fine mastering job don't hurt either!

Lt. Kije is by far my favourite piece on the record (in fact, it's one of my favourite pieces of classical music, period); that and the ne plus ultra sound quality earn this record my very highest recommendation. I only hope that Mike Hobson and co at Classic Records can be persuaded to re-issue this wonderful record on their Clarity vinyl. How about it, Mike? **Rich Teer**



Lindsey Buckingham

Gift of Screws

Reprise Records (33-RPM 180g LP)
512970-1

Lindsey Buckingham made his name as part of the group Fleetwood Mac, and *Gift of Screws* is his most recent solo release. Full of toe-tappin' tunes, this LP is likely to please fans old and new. A couple of Buckingham's old band mates make some appearances: John McVie and Mick Fleetwood play bass and drums respectively on the title track and *Wait for You*, and Fleetwood plays drums on *The Right Place to Fade*.

For the most part, the music is upbeat pop/rock, and the Fleetwood Mac influence on some tracks is unmistakable. There's a guitar sound in side one's opening track, *Great Day*, that sounds reminiscent of one of Mike Oldfield's double speed guitars. It's obviously not a sample, but nevertheless the similarity struck me as interesting.

The sound quality is pretty good, although not state of the art. Bass is warm and punchy, and the treble is fortunately devoid of any nasty brightness. The soundstage is a bit flat

but satisfactorily wide. This record also manages to avoid the deadly sin of over compression, which drastically reduces a record's dynamic range (that is, the difference between the quietest and loudest passages).

Pressed on 180g of quiet-surfaced vinyl, this version of *Gift of Screws* includes a copy of the album on CD. I wish more labels would do this because it encourages people to avoid the other scourge of sound quality, MP3, when listening to music on the move (or from a media server). Some records include an MP3 download code, and while I think that's better than nothing, I prefer Reprise's approach of including an actual CD.

With great music and good sound quality, this record is easy to recommend. The addition of the CD copy in the package makes recommendation a no-brainer!

Rich Teer



Marc Cohn

Marc Cohn

Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs/Atlantic Records (33-RPM 180g LP)
MFSL 1-291

Has it really been 20 years since Marc Cohn's eponymous debut LP was released? Wow, time sure flies: I remember singing along with the opening track, *Walking in Memphis*, which was released as a single in the UK all those years ago (it was followed up with *Silver Thunderbird*). Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs (MFSL) remastered this record a couple of years ago, which give me the perfect excuse to re-visit this old favourite.

Walking in Memphis kicks off side one's collection of clean, simple, arrangements. Most of the songs tell a story, in the best tradition of the singer-songwriter. Side two starts with *Miles Away*'s more rocky tempo, and the songs gradually slow down until the final two ballads, *Perfect Love* (featuring backing vocals by James Taylor) and the upbeat *True Companion*.

The sound quality is fine, with appropriately deep bass and sparkling highs. Left to right imaging is pretty good too—the

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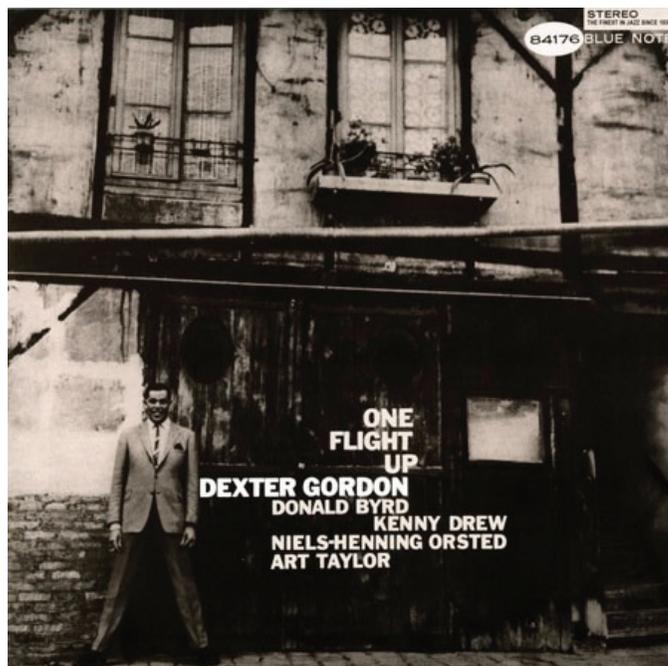
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simple arrangements help here, I'm sure—but the image is somewhat flat. The latter isn't too surprising, given that it's a multitrack studio recording.

I have an original pressing of this record, so I compared it to the MFSL version. The original is surprisingly good, but perhaps a touch more forward than MFSL's version. Also, instrument and voice separation isn't quite as good as MFSL's remastered version, and the bass on the original isn't quite as deep and well-defined.

With its great music and good sound quality, it would be hard not to recommend this one, especially when the dead-quiet pressing on 180g of virgin vinyl and heavy duty gatefold sleeve are taken into account. It is a worthwhile upgrade from the original, but if you have an original in mint condition you could be excused for wanting to spend your money on other new records first. On the other hand, if you don't already own an original pressing of *Marc Cohn*, this MFSL release is a definitely worth considering!
Rich Teer



Dexter Gordon

One Flight Up

Cisco/Blue Note (33-RPM 180g LP)

CLP 7051

I recently purchased this album on the recommendation of a friend, as I told him I enjoyed Dexter's album *Go* and was looking into expanding my rudimentary jazz collection. Not being very knowledgeable about jazz and being somewhat hesitant to try blind buys (because my history with those experiences has more often than not resulted in disappointment), this purchase (much to my relief) came as a welcome surprise. This Cisco release is top-notch in both vinyl quality and packaging, although I was a little disappointed that the vinyl wasn't inserted into a better grade of inner sleeve. I would also have liked the inclusion of a CD copy, especially at the premium price this LP is being sold for.

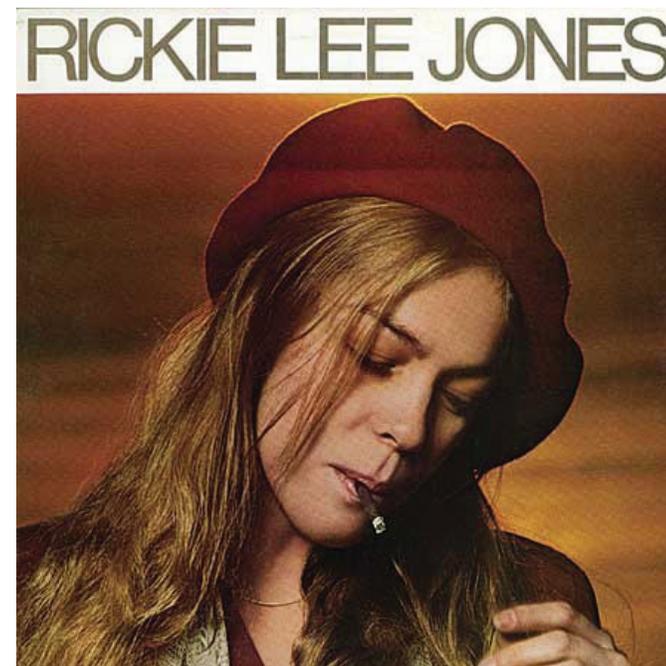
When I review a record it usually takes me about four or five plays to finalise my impressions. On the first go around I give it a casual listen and see if the music grabs me and whether or not the record sounds good in terms of quietness. On the second listen I look for more

detail about the recording/mastering efforts, and continue my take on the performance and likeability of the record itself. The third, fourth, and sometimes fifth listening sessions are spent making sure that my impressions of what I heard during the first two sessions haven't changed. It often does, but not this time: *One Flight Up* grabbed me from the first listen and I still can't get enough.

The thing that was most satisfying to me, and why I think this LP is so stunning, is that on every single track (and there are only three) every musician in this five-piece band was always easily identifiable, and that includes those moments when Dexter (tenor sax), Donald Byrd (trumpet) and Kenny Drew (piano) go off into their own solo showcases. Niels-Henning Orsted's (bass) and Art Taylor's (drums) inclusion as the backbone of pace and rhythm was a stroke of genius, and without them this recording would not have been nearly as good.

If you are one of those people that is on the fence about getting into jazz, don't hesitate to pick this up. It is a stunning recording and I highly recommend it.

John Adrian Spijkers



Rickie Lee Jones

Rickie Lee Jones

Warner Brothers Records (33-RPM 180g LP)

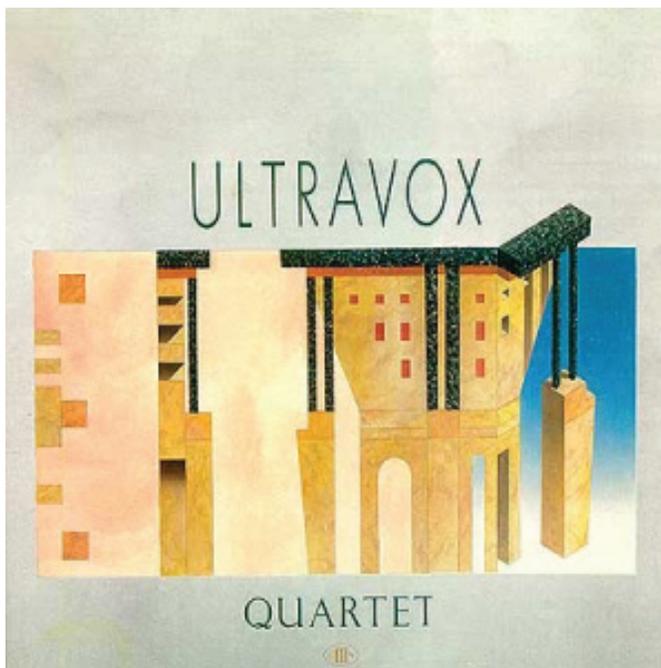
RHI1 306108

One of the staples of some of the audio gear reviews I used to read—written, if my memory serves me, by the one and only Ken Kessler—in the early 1980s (when my interest in high-end audio first started) was the track *Easy Money*, from Rickie Lee Jones' eponymous debut LP. Curiosity piqued, I bought a copy—and loved it. Now, about three decades later, Warner has reissued a remastered version of this venerable old classic.

The music is as great as ever, my favourite tracks including *Chuck E.'s in Love*, *Young Blood*, the previously mentioned *Easy Money*, and *The Last Chance Texaco*. Some audiophiles are (rightly) chastised for listening to sonic spectaculars whose musical selections are, shall we say, somewhat wanting. Fortunately that isn't the case here: as well as having great music (although granted, musical tastes are personal), the sound quality doesn't disappoint. Bass is deep and well-defined, and the treble is clean. Cymbals don't sound

splashy, which is always a good sign! Left-to-right imaging is good, but the sound is relatively two-dimensional.

Comparing the reissue to my original copy, sibilants are slightly more pronounced on the latter, and the bass is a touch warmer on the former. So yes, the reissue is an improvement—albeit a relatively small one—over the original pressing. Another advantage of the reissue is that features better packaging, using thicker cardboard for the outer sleeve. Based on this (and the great music and sound quality), recommending *Rickie Lee Jones* is a no-brainer! **Rich Teer**



Ultravox

Quartet

Chrysalis Records (33-RPM LP)

CDL 1394

Released in 1982, *Quartet* was the third album from UK new wave/synthpop group Ultravox's "Midge Ure" years, succeeding *Vienna* and *Rage in Eden*. The other band members from this era (which is often referred to as "the classic line-up") were Warren Cann on drums, Chris Cross on bass, and Billie Currie on keyboards and violin.

Side one kicks off with the upbeat *Reap the Wild Wind*, and ends with the sermon-like *Hymn*. Reminiscent of *Vienna*'s title track, the haunting *Visions in Blue* is the first track on side two. Side two also contains what is arguably the album's weakest track, *We Came to Dance*, but ends with two great numbers: *Cut and Run* and *The Song (We Go)*. The frenzied drum solo from the latter was later featured in Ultravox's Monument tour, at the end of *The Voice*.

With warm, driving bass and pounding drums, the sound quality on this record is surprisingly good. It has great dynamics, clean treble, and a wide sound stage.

The latter isn't as wide as the best studio recordings, but is a big improvement over some rock recordings which are so middle-centric that they almost sound like they were recorded in mono!

If you can find a copy of this record in good condition, I'd say it's worth a try if you're not familiar with Ultravox; and if you are familiar with Ultravox, it's arguable that this record is a must-buy! Recommended, then, for the great music and sound. **Rich Teer**



Sky

Sky

Ariola Records (33-RPM LP)

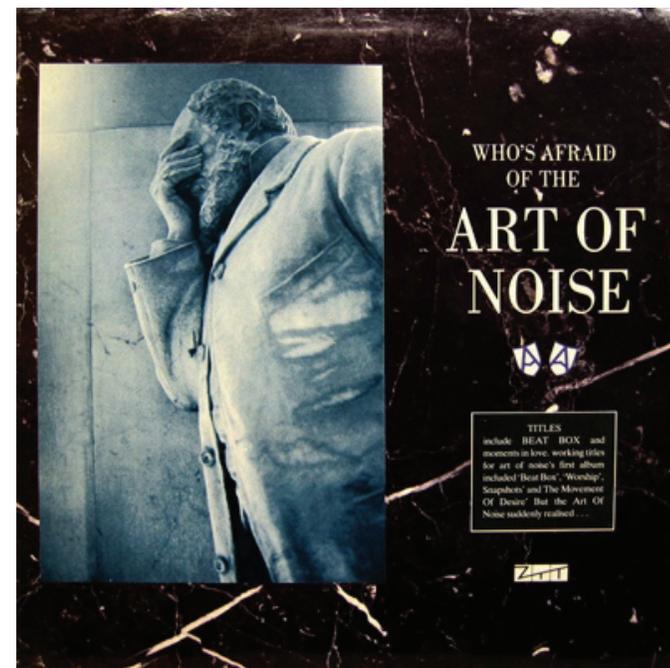
200 589-320

Sky was a British instrumental group in the late 1970s and the 1980s made up from a collection of session musicians. (After a brief comeback, they finally disbanded in 1995.) For their eponymously-titled debut LP, Sky consisted of John Williams and Kevin Peek on guitars, Herbie Flowers on bass, Tristan Fry on drums and percussion, and Francis Monkman on keyboards. Side one consists of three original compositions and two covers, and side two consists of just one twenty-minute original composition called *Where Opposites Meet*. (I have vague memories of my favourite track on side one, *Danza*, being played on TV in the UK before certain kids shows.)

Much as I love this record, the sound quality leaves a bit to be desired. It's not awful, but to my ears it does sound a bit muted and muffled, lacking sparkle. Fortunately, the sound isn't so bad as to detract from the music. The soundstage is acceptably wide (if a little two dimensional), and the dynamics are fine (as are the bass and treble, my

previous comment about the lack of sparkle notwithstanding).

So do I recommend this record? Musically, an emphatic yes; sonically, a somewhat reserved yes. The sound quality is more than acceptable, but if it's an audiophile spectacular you're looking for, look elsewhere. **Rich Teer**



The Art of Noise

Who's Afraid of the Art of Noise

ZTT Records (33-RPM LP)

ZTTIQ2

The Art of Noise were a foursome (whose members were Anne Dudley, Trevor Horn, J. J. Jeczalik, and Gary Langan) in the 1980s who relied more or less completely on sampled sounds to make their music, and made particularly heavy use of the Fairlight CMI. *Who's Afraid* was The Art of Noise's first LP, although it was preceded by an EP called *Into Battle*.

Their music really must be sampled (if you pardon the pun!) to appreciate it. It consists of surprisingly likeable tunes, made up from various samples: snatches of conversation, rulers being twanged, a car trying to start, fingers being clicked, and so on. Samples of real instruments even make an appearance! Two tracks, *Close (to the Edit)* and *Moments in Love*, were released as singles, and various versions (or, as they are known in The Art of Noise parlance, diversions) of a track called *Beat Box* appear on numerous records. *Beat Box Diversion Two* shrunk to become *Close (to the Edit)*, and

Moments in Love is one of The Art of Noise's less frantic, more melodic tunes.

There's not much to say about the sound quality: the sound quality is good enough, with great dynamics. It's not an audiophile spectacular, but I've heard records that sound a lot worse. I'd describe it as an above average commercial recording. But you don't listen to The Art of Noise for the audiophile sound quality: you listen to them for the great, fun music. If that sounds like your cup of tea, grab a copy of *Who's Afraid of the Art of Noise* next time you see it! **Rich Teer**

Final Words

Well, that's about it for this, the premiere issue of Vinylphile. I'd like to thank everyone who helped and encouraged me while I was working on this project behind the scenes, the contributors, the advertisers (without whom food on the table would be pretty scarce!), and most importantly, you, for reading. I hope this issue had something for everyone; if not, please let us know!

Coming up in issue 2, we'll be reviewing more gear, featuring another reader's system, and will (of course!) have loads more record reviews. If you haven't already done so, please feel free to join our low-volume announcement mailing list and/or follow us on Twitter (links on our web site, www.vinylphilemag.com).

Thanks again for reading, and see you next time!

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