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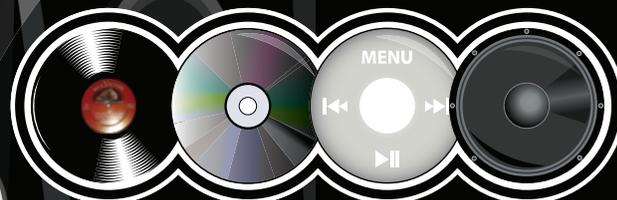
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VINYLPHILE October 2010 2

Contents

Features

5 Editorial

6 Annie's Audio Adventures

Annie has the envious task of babysitting a friend's \$30,000 Marantz audio system for a while. How does she cope?

By Annie St. Jean

30 Final Words

30 Advertisers Index



Equipment Reviews

- 9** **Marantz TT-15S1**
Are you in the market for a \$2,000 or so integrated turntable? If so, our review of Marantz's offering will be useful.
By Rich Teer
- 14** **Origin Live Ultra DC Motor Kit**
Looking for a way to upgrade your turntable without buying a new one? This motor upgrade kit could be just what the doctor ordered!
By Brian Bloom
- 18** **Allnic Audio Labs H-3000**
Allnic's top-of-the-line tube phono stage sends shivers down our spine. Will your reaction be the same?
By Rich Teer

Record Reviews

- 23** **Record Reviews**
Our regular look at new issues and some older records you might be interested in.
By Vinylphile staff



Editorial

One of the great parts of this hobby of ours is introducing friends and acquaintances to it. A few months ago a friend visited our home, the first visit in quite some time. The conversation somehow turned to music, so I invited him into my music room to play a couple of records. He politely obliged, but I could tell he was just humouring me. His curiosity was piqued when he saw my MartinLogan Spires, but he also volunteered that he doubted that he'd any difference between my high-end rig and his modestly priced (but hardly bargain basement) set up. So I asked him what his favourite record was, and luckily I had a copy. I sat him in the sweet spot, dimmed the lights, and turned up the volume.

One could almost hear his jaw hit the floor as the track started playing. When the track finished and the lights were turned back up, he had this huge grin on his face and exclaimed, "Now I get it!". Needless to say, what was supposed to be just a couple of tracks turned into several hours, and my friend had a new-found appreciation for music and high-end audio.

We're pleased to present an article by Brian Bloom, a long term audiophile who has contributed to Audiophile Audition from more than ten years. Welcome, Brian!

Eagle-eyed readers may have noticed that we've made a few typographical changes starting with this issue, mostly to increase the amount of white space. We've increased the amount of space between lines and columns of text, and we've also increased the amount of space around text-wrapped photos. Finally, we've changed a font or two for greater consistency within the mag. We hope that these changes improves Vinylphile's legibility; as always, we welcome your feedback!

As we put this issue together, our thoughts turn towards Denver, Colorado, and the seventh annual Rocky Mountain Audio Fest. We'll be there to cover the show; it's the first time we've been to the Audio Fest, so we're really looking forward to it. We're always interested in meeting our readers, so if you see us there, feel free to say hi. We don't bite—much!

Rich



Annie's Audio Adventures

Marantz 101

By Annie St. Jean



Here's how lucky I am: a good friend of ours, who got tired of hearing my hubby and I talk endlessly about great sound, speakers, cables and systems, came over a few weeks ago. Unfortunately for him, he has long run out of arguments against us, and we have made him listen to so many great pieces of music, that, in a way, he has seen the light, or as I would prefer to say, heard the note! What's that got to do with my luck, you wonder? Well, guess who is "stuck" baby sitting his system while he finishes renovating his house? Yeah! You guessed it: ME!!!! Oh yeah! Guess what his system is? Yes, you guessed it again (which proves that you do read the titles!): a beautiful, majestic, grey with a slight hint of pinkish sunset, Marantz! Officially, they're called the Reference Line SA-7 S1 SA-CD player, SC-7S2 preamp, and MA-9S2 power amps.

The one word that can summarise what the Marantz system does, is MORE. More of everything: more highs, more mids, more bass, more clarity, more musicality, more stage depth. Warning: you will notice very quickly if your recording is of poor quality! I know some of you are anxious about me reviewing some analogue stuff, so I

promise to you I will try to convince our friend to cough up more cash to buy the turntable! In the meantime, I have a CD player, a preamp and a pair of amps to play with our Pioneer EX-3 speakers (of which he also got himself a pair!) By the way, make sure you turn the system on and off in the proper order or you might blow your speakers... Come on, give me some credit! Of course I didn't blow up our speakers! I phoned my fairy godfather before I turned anything on because my hubby was away! When the cat's away, the mice are at play, right?

Personally, I don't think the Marantz would be perfect for beginner audiophiles... but then again, if you have over \$30,000.00 to play with, chances are you have already experienced great systems! If not, make sure you have a high end store dealer who is honest, reliable and patient, and who will let you try the system at home, so you can hear what it sounds like in your room. Also, I strongly suggest playing around with cables, because they do make a big difference. I've noticed that the wrong cables with this Marantz could really make it sound too bright in our room. Don't get me wrong: I'm not suggesting you should muffle the sound, only that you need to pair the right cables with this system. After all, you wouldn't pair up a great cheese with a cheap wine, would you?

So, how does it sound? Awesome! I've been listening to Sarah McLachlan's *Freedom Sessions* CD over and over! That CD, for those who may not know, is extremely well recorded! The stage sound of the Marantz has that ability to

bring out everything, from the breathing, to the fingers sliding on the strings of the guitar, to the clarity of the piano. If you listen at a high enough level, say around -32, you can even hear the sound of the piano board when Sarah presses the pedals! The depth of the stage is incredible! You really feel like you're in the middle of it all, that you are at a concert! An added bonus of the Marantz CD player, is the fact that you can choose between 3 different filters at the click of a button. That way, you can play even more with the sound. You can manipulate it so it has more or less echo and space between each note.

When you feel like testing out the bass, PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE listen to the version of *Ice* on that *Freedom Sessions*! According to the CD booklet, Sarah was trying her "first attempt to control an electric guitar plugged into an amp turned to 10." She goes on to say that "Often mistakes are the best way to learn how not to do it." I say, "Thank you, Sarah!" Personally, I really enjoy the "tension" the guitar adds to this version of a usually mellow, poetic song. I still love the original version too, don't worry! I'm not sure what number the amp's bass was turned to, but is certainly wasn't on 1! Now, you know I'm a girl, and that I have absolutely no interest whatsoever, in a muddy bass that just makes BOOM, BOOM, BOOM noises that you hear coming from some cars! I do, however, like to have the grounding that a solid, honest, clear and powerful bass has to offer. My kind of bass: try (again, I know), The Fairfield Four *These Bones*. My hair is thick and long again, but that song still made the small hair on the back of my neck rise!

You want to try something with more instruments? Listen to Sting's *Don't Stand So Close to Me*, from his *All This Time* CD. Want to have fun with some djembe drums? Try *Elsewhere*, from Sarah McLachlan's *Freedom Sessions*. Well, try the whole CD, if you want my opinion! Of course, I can't do any listening session without Chris Botti! I cried when I heard *Ave Maria*, from his *Italia* CD for the first time (I know, lame, but it's actually true!) Honestly, I don't think anything could sound bad on that Marantz, unless it is badly recorded. I don't want to make any enemies, but there's one kind of music I would NOT listen to on this, or any other system, for that matter! Those who know me know what that is! But as you know, you have to listen to it yourself, with your own favourite music to be able to compare what you hear from one system to the next. So grab your own favourite CDs, and have fun listening! I'm bugging my hubby to build me another stand so I can have our Chord next to our friend's Marantz to go back and forth! By the way, clear maple is a great colour match for the Marantz! Did I mention that I also like the fact that the lights on the Marantz are quite dim, so they don't distract you when you're listening with your eyes open at night. The display on the CD player can even be turned off!

So, did I enjoy the Marantz? Absolutely! But remember the warning: you have to listen to it in your room and experiment with cables, or I think your brain might get tired after a while trying to listen to so much sound. And do NOT turn the amps on first, or you risk blowing your speakers! I promise that if ever my forever beloved Churchill speakers

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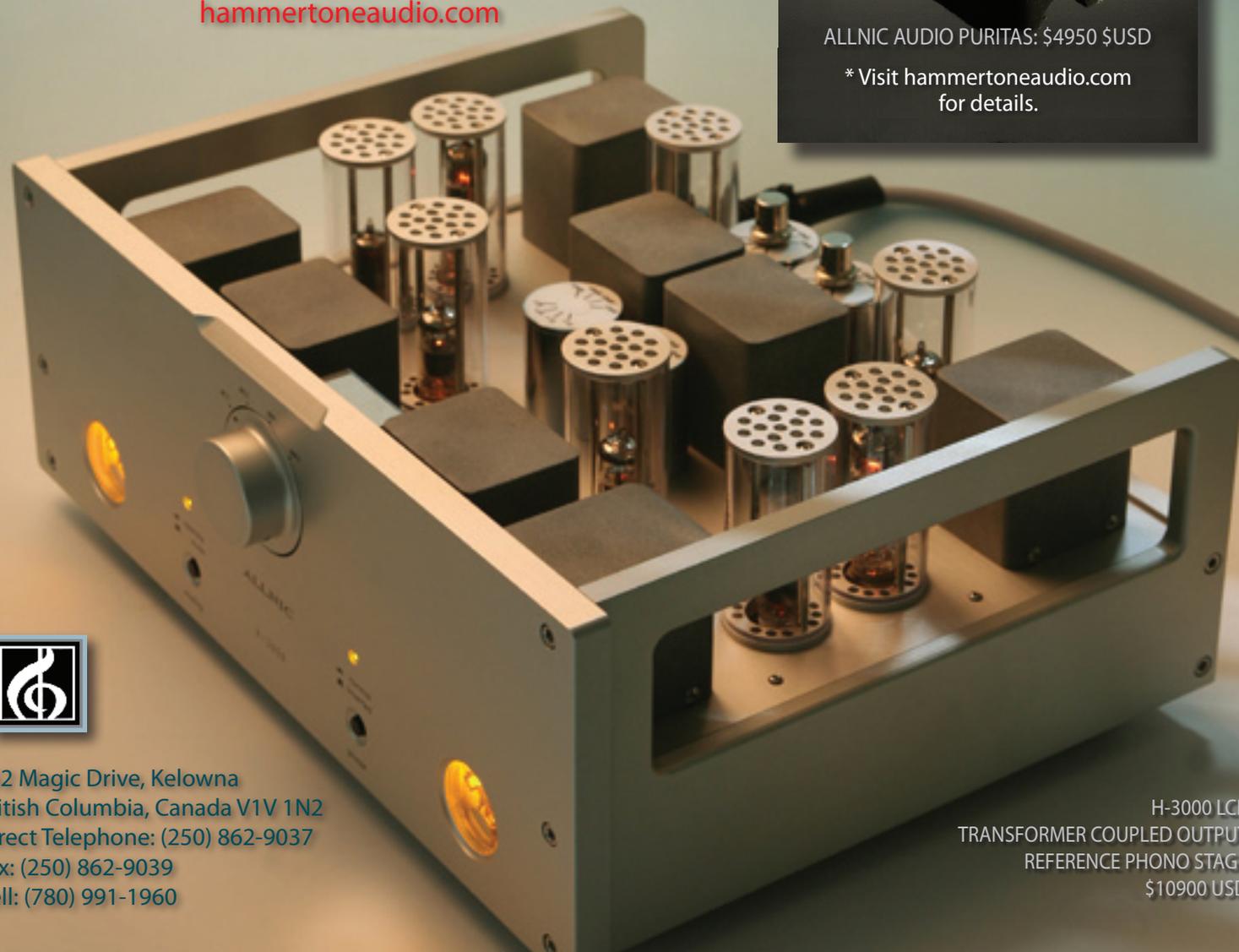
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come my way again, I will definitely try the Marantz with them! I have a feeling that the warmth of those speakers would balance out the clarity of the Marantz beautifully! One can always dream!

What's the best news? Well, I've learned that fortunately, in AudioLand, it is possible and acceptable, to be in love with more than one system at the time! Thank heaven for that!

I have to go: more music to listen to!

Product Details

SA-7S1 SA-CD player
Price \$6000

SC-7S2 preamp
Price \$6500

MA-9S2 monoblocks
Price \$6000 each

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Marantz TT-15S1

Integrated Turntable

By Rich Teer



Part of the fun of being a vinyl lover is that we can mix and match the components that make up our source, especially as one looks at higher priced gear. Not only do we get to pick what turntable we want to use, we can also choose which arm and cartridge to use. Some combinations work better than others, and not everyone likes to play around trying different things, so an equally valid approach is that of the integrated turntable. Integrated turntables include an arm, and quite often (up to a certain price point), a cartridge.

An advantage of buying an integrated turntable—especially to vinyl newbies—is that much of the guess work has

been removed: the manufacturer has presumably chosen an arm and cartridge that have good synergy with the turntable and each other. One example of such an integrated turntable is the Marantz TT-15S1, which was released back in 2006. Unlike the digital world, where a four year old product would probably be consigned to the scrap heap for being past its “best before” date, analogue products tend to have a longer shelf life (for example, the venerable SME Series V tonearm was released in 1986, yet it is still widely regarded as being one of the best available).

What we have for review here, then, is a mid-priced integrated turntable and cartridge.

Technical Description

A joint development between Marantz by Clearaudio (and manufactured by the latter for Marantz in Germany), the TT-15S1 could be likened to a Clearaudio Emotion on steroids. It features a 20 mm thick satin white acrylic plinth, which is supported by three large polished aluminum feet. With the exception of felt pads on the bottom of its feet, the TT-15S1 has no suspension so it should be placed on a fairly well isolated platform, especially on suspended wooden floors.

The plinth has a hole in the back left corner, through which the shaft of the standalone AC synchronous motor

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appears. When placed correctly the motor doesn't touch the plinth, reducing transmitted vibrations. The motor has a captive AC lead and a power switch (speed selection is performed manually by moving the silicone drive belt from one pulley wheel to the other).

The main bearing is made from hardened and polished steel in a sintered bronze housing, upon which the 28 mm thick acrylic platter is placed. Users may optionally place a felt mat on top of the platter, in which case the height of the tonearm must be set appropriately using the supplied spacer.

Talking of which, the TT-15S1's tonearm is a variant of the Clearaudio Satisfy, with an anodised aluminum arm tube. It features handmade Swiss vertical and lateral bearings made from sapphire, Clearaudio Direct Wire for an unbroken signal path from the cartridge pins to the phono stage, and an elegant magnetic anti-skate control.

Finally, the TT-15S1 comes packaged with a Clearaudio Virtuoso Wood MM cartridge (the top-but-one entry in Clearaudio's MM cartridge line up), and a Souther



Engineering plastic record clamp (the Souther Clever Clamp).

One of my pet peeves with most modern turntables is that they don't include a dust cover—even a soft vinyl one—and the TT-15S1 is no exception. I appreciate that dust covers can have a deleterious effect on sound quality, but in my opinion there's no excuse for turntable manufacturers not including a removable dust cover, especially at this price level.

Setup and Listening

My review sample came preassembled, but reading the manual suggests that assembly is fairly straightforward and should only take a few minutes. Of course, adjusting everything so that it is just right will take a bit longer! Using the supplied counterweight as a shim, setting the arm's height is easily and accurately done. Adjusting the tracking weight is easy too, but I found the accuracy of the counterweight's markings to be somewhat lacking. It's accurate enough to get the VTF in the right ballpark, but I highly recommend the use of a digital stylus force gauge to accurately set the tracking weight.

After checking all adjustments and setting the VTF to the recommended 2.2 g, I placed the TT-15S1 on my Target turntable stand and played it for a couple of dozen hours before starting my serious evaluation. I reviewed the whole ensemble (TT-15S1 turntable, Satisfy arm, and Virtuoso Wood cartridge) as a unit because that's how most purchasers will experience it.

Most of my auditioning was performed without the optional mat.

Once set up, the TT-15S1 is easy to use. Just select the correct motor pulley for the desired speed, place the record and clamp on the platter, turn on the motor, place the arm over the desired part of the record, and lower the cueing lever. The latter is damped so that one can't accidentally lower the cartridge too quickly, thus avoiding potentially damaging it. One operational quirk I should mention, though, is that I found it beneficial to give the platter a little spin just before turning on the motor, especially when playing 45s. There was a fair bit of juddering due to the silicone belt slipping when I started the motor at 45 RPM, although everything settled down within a second or so. Nothing serious, then, but something to be aware of.

The first record I played was Mike Oldfield's wonderful *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001]. Many background details were easily discerned, but a thin aural haze prevented me from listening into the record as much as I can on my (admittedly much more costly) reference front end. Surface noises (hiss, ticks, and pops) were slightly exaggerated, resulting in a background that wasn't as silent as it could be.

Bass was fine for the most part, although it's a little bit light in the lower regions, especially when large dynamics are called for. For example, the bass drum in the CSO's rendition of Prokofiev's *Lt. Kije* [Classic Records/RCA Victor LSC-2150] lacks a bit of weight and doesn't move as much air as it should:

at realistic sound levels you should be able to feel the drum in your chest more than I experienced. I admit, though, that this might be an unrealistic expectation from a front end that's on the right side of \$2,000. Another example of the bass lacking some weight is the foot stomping in Ladysmith Black Mambazo's *Who Were You Talking to* from their 1987 album, *Shaka Zulu* [WEA 925-582-1].

The midrange was well reproduced, male and female voices faring very well, although sibilants were slightly exaggerated (*Rain, Rain, Beautiful Rain* from *Shaka Zulu* is a good example of this).

The treble is light and airy, with some slight softening at the top end. This softening can be heard in the celeste on the second movement (*Romance*) of *Lt. Kije*, and the triangle and sleigh bells in *Troika* (the fourth movement). Offsetting this small deficiency is the portrayal of the air around such instruments: you really get a sense of the acoustic space in which the instruments are playing.

Talking of acoustic spaces, I must mention how well the TT-15S1 images. It does a great job in the retrieval of ambient clues with respect to the space in which the recording took place. The soundstage isn't vast (it is narrower than the best I've heard, but still projects an image outside the speakers' boundaries), but the imaging within it is superb. The aforementioned tracks from *Shaka Zulu* illustrate this admirably: one can clearly hear the individual singers, stretched out in an arc. Another, perhaps better, example (because it is a more difficult test) is

that of the “Nasal Choir” humming bits (the “Nasal Chorus”) in *Tubular Bells* (at about the same time as the honky tonk piano): what usually comes across as a semi-congealed mass of humming is revealed as several distinct individuals, each humming in their own location. By this I mean that although one could hear the individuals humming and drawing breath previously, it sounded as though they were all in the same position.

Recorded details are reproduced fairly well, except when things start getting busy. When a lot is going on (say, for example, towards the end of side one of *Tubular Bells*), a bit of congestion sets in and some details become harder to discern.

The preceding paragraphs describe what I heard using the turntable sans mat. I’ve never been a big fan of felt mats, especially in areas prone to static. However, being thorough in this review demanded that I at least try the included mat. By placing the stylus on a still record and tapping various parts of the plinth and the stand’s top plate, I was able to determine (or otherwise) the efficacy of the mat. After repeating this experiment several times, I can confidently state that the mat does have a positive effect on damping the sound of tapping. Score one for the mat, but what about actually playing a record?

Using the mat necessitates raising the arm (using the supplied shim), to compensate in the change of VTA due to the mat’s thickness. It is therefore possible that I had set up the arm very slightly differently, but I did notice a small, but worthwhile improvement

when using the mat. Most notably, backgrounds were a bit blacker (i.e., the surface noise is less pronounced), and a subtle sheen or haze that was previously present was now absent (or at least much reduced).

Verdict

The Marantz TT-15S1 is closely related to the Clearaudio Emotion, so one can easily argue that it comes from a somewhat distinguished pedigree. Fortunately for potential purchasers, with sound quality that is pretty good overall (especially when the mat is used) and build quality that is also good, the TT-15S1 lives up to its pedigree. If looks and decor are important to you, the TT-15S1’s striking white acrylic finish will be a refreshing change from the usual black. All things considered, if you’re looking for an integrated turntable at or around this price point, the Marantz TT-15S1 is well worth considering, and certainly worth an audition.

Specifications

Description Belt drive, unsuspended integrated turntable.

Speeds 33.3 and 45 RPM $\pm 0.2\%$.

Signal to noise ratio 80 dB.

Dimensions (hwd) 110 mm x 440 mm x 350 mm (excluding tonearm).

Weight 8.9 kg (including tonearm and motor).

Serial number of unit reviewed MZ000538000600.

Price \$1499.

Warranty Five years non-transferable (30 days on cartridge and stylus).

Marantz America

100 Corporate Drive

Mahwah, NJ 07430-2041

USA

(201) 762-6500

www.marantz.com

Associated Equipment

Analogue source Forsell Air Reference Mk 2 turntable and arm.

Phono cartridge Lyra Parnassus.

Phono stage Allnic Audio Labs H-3000.

Preamps Allnic Audio Labs L-3000, Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2.

Power amplifiers Allnic Audio Labs M-3000s, PrimaLuna ProLogue Sevens.

Speakers MartinLogan Spire.

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; Acoustech carbon fibre brush; Last record and stylus cleaning products; The Cartridge Man tracking force gauge.

Origin Live Ultra DC Motor Kit

With Upgraded Transformer and Motor

Text and Photos By Brian Bloom

The Origin Live Ultra is an upgraded power supply motor kit available for many turntables, including the Linn Sondek LP12 (the turntable I used to modify during this review). The kit uses a DC motor and offers two speed settings: a must for those who wish to have 33.3 and 45 RPM on the fly. A list of the turntables that can be modified is on Origin Live's web site, www.turntable-power-supply.com/list-of-decks.htm.

Origin Live Options

There are three levels of kit offered with options. There are two motor options, two controller options, and an upgraded transformer. All kits come with extra small parts needed to fit the motor to the LP12 and a strobe disc to help set speed.

The Standard kit has basic components in the switch box, the DC100 motor and a standard wall-wart transformer. It sells for £339. The only dealer in the United States is Audio Revelation in Carlsbad, California and the web site has pricing for the Advanced and Ultra kit. The Advanced kit (\$550) comes with better circuitry while the



Ultra kit (\$850) has a black box (instead of silver) and features further circuit upgrades and parts that are claimed to reduce electrical noise, response time, and improve current delivery. The improved DC200 motor adds \$220 and the upgraded transformer adds \$250.

LP12 Power Supply Options

There have been (and still are) quite a few different power supply options available for the LP12. The most common today are the Linn Lingo—which now sells for more than \$1,800—and the \$1,700 Naim Armageddon (which only does 33.3 RPM) Many

reviews claim the Origin Live offers the best performance of these three, so it is the one I requested. Aside from my desire to add 45 RPM capability, I was interested to see how much (if any) sonic improvement the upgrade would bring. The Origin Live web site offers many reasons why a motor upgrade is a benefit.

Testing Methodology

Before starting the installation of the Origin Live components I spent some time listening to the turntable with the fitted Valhalla power supply. I used my Dell laptop and Tascam sound card/mixer to record several tracks for later comparison with the modified power supply.

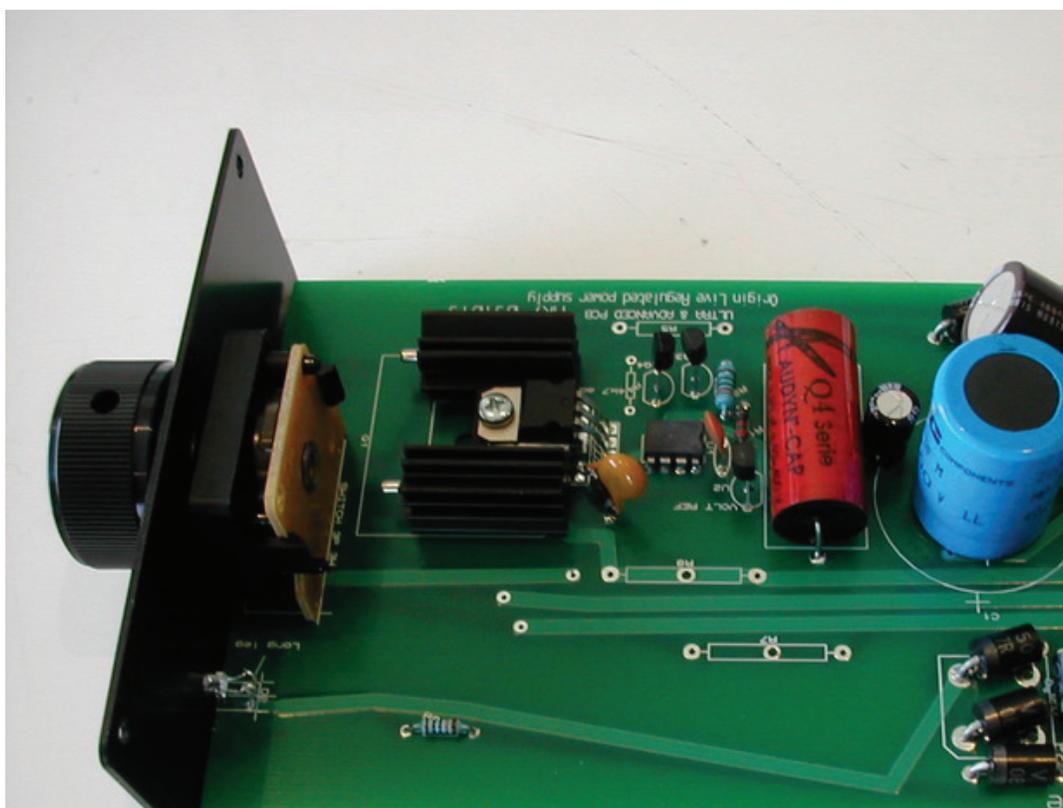
The tracks I used were: *Carry On My Wayward Son* by Kansas; *Sirius/Eye in the Sky* by The Alan Parsons Project; *What I Am* by Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians; *How Deep Is Your Love* from the Saturday Night Fever soundtrack; *Tell Everybody I Know* by Keb Mo; and *Body and Soul* performed by Richie Cole at the Village Vanguard.

After the supply was broken in for three days (constant playing) and then speed adjusted, I re-recorded the same songs. Later I burned them to CD for comparison. I performed casual

listening with the modified turntable as well.

Installation

As with any construction project it is a good idea to read through the entire manual for the kit before beginning. The Origin Live was no exception. The turntable had been unplugged for a couple of days (45 minutes is



recommended), so I carefully removed the bottom cover and removed the old cord, the Valhalla board, and disconnected the motor. I almost ran into trouble with the small Allen screws that hold the motor in place, but used a small wrench from the underside and avoided stripping the screws.

It is crucial not to damage at least one of these screws as the kit requires

you to re-use one with the new motor installation. There are special instructions for the LP12 that start on page six (which you'd know if you read through the whole instructions before starting like I did). It is possible to leave the Valhalla supply in place if you like, but the manual suggested better performance would be achieved by removing it. Lastly, I took out the power supply switch. As this leaves a hole in the top of the metal plate, the kit comes with a metallic-looking label that can be affixed to the top and hide the hole the original power switch removal leaves. I removed the belt guard as well as it is not needed.

The manual recommends attaching the motor with a single screw for the best sound quality and adjusting the distance from the pulley centre to platter centre to 127 - 129 mm. I didn't hear any excessive noise although a friend clearly heard the motor running when standing close. I didn't

have any vibration issues, although the manual covers ways to reduce this—even adjusting the screws on the motor itself.

I was not able to get correct speed with positioning alone (the turntable ran too fast), so I adjusted the speed on the back of the control box. I used my trusty KAB strobe disc and strobe to adjust speed. Once adjusted, the

speed was almost exactly at 33.3. How easy is that?!

Just in case of trouble, the manual includes a complete section on troubleshooting to help get you up and running. All in all, I'd say that anyone handy with setting up a turntable could install this kit.

Listening and Other Impressions

There is no doubt that turning the knob on the controller is an incredibly easy way to turn the unit on and changing speed was as simple as turning one more click on the box. One drawback of an external supply is simply the extra real estate needed. Instead of a single box (the turntable), now I had three: the turntable, a transformer box with about four feet of cord, and a separate controller that connected to about three feet of cord coming off the motor. I suppose if space were really tight you could lie the controller on its side and hide the transformer away somewhere. By the way, the controller has small cork feet while the transformer has rubber feet (for those who care about such details).

I wasn't exactly sure what to expect (sonically) and from the way people usually talk about "tweaks" like this I always approach them with a grain of salt. If your system all of sudden sounds twice as good after tweaking then there was probably something wrong with your system to begin with (or you have an inclination towards exaggeration).

With the Origin Live there was definitely a difference with the first listening. I wouldn't describe it as huge or earth-shattering, but it was there. The turntable now started up rather quickly and with authority—something that should impress the audiophile crowd. The original Linn switch never had a solid feel to it while the one on the Ultra controller was quite the opposite.

After auditioning the CD I made and going back and forth numerous times, I'd say the biggest differences were the sense of space and dynamics (both micro and macro). With the Kansas cut the sound was meatier and easy to listen to longer. I'm not sure what distortions were eliminated and won't try to guess, I'm just reporting what I heard. With the Keb Mo cut the voice came across more powerful and richer (the same as the "meatier" difference on the Kansas). The focus was improved (a speed accuracy improvement perhaps?) With the Brickell cut the layering of sound was better and vocals were slightly improved. The Bee Gees cut had better focus and rhythm, pace and dynamics seemed better. The other difference was lower background noise, this being one of the expected changes due to the better motor.

Conclusion

It's easy to be skeptical about modifications to equipment. Usually the added cost just isn't worth the price and it is better to upgrade to a newer, better piece of gear. However,

some audiophiles have an attachment to a particular item (much like an old sweater). The LP12 is one of those components with a strong following, even after so many years. If you really love your turntable but want to improve its performance and you've already upgraded other components in the system and replaced the cartridge (for instance), then a power supply upgrade might just be in order.

So, did the Origin Live Ultra offer a huge improvement in sound? No. I'd say it was somewhere between a 5 - 10% change overall. Even though the difference wasn't bigger, the small difference was clearly significant on some cuts. While direct comparison was required to hear the difference with some music, tracks one and five just plain sounded more musically satisfying.

If the Advanced kit offers an improvement similar to the Ultra, then it could very well be an outstanding value. As there is a 30-day money back guarantee, there is really nothing to lose. You just might find you breathe new life into an older component and improve system performance. Check it out!

Specifications

Description Turntable motor upgrade kit.

Speeds 33.3 and 45 RPM.

Drift < 0.1% at 33.3 RPM, ref 3150 Hz.

Wow and flutter < 0.06% DIN peak.

Serial number of unit reviewed 100111.

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info@avunleashed.com (250) 392-7340

Price (GBP) From £339 (£879 as tested).

Warranty Two years non-transferable.

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Sedley.

Integrated amplifier Krell
S-300i.

Speakers Bowers & Wilkins
CM9.

Cables Interconnects:
Audioquest Diamondback.
Speaker: Audioquest Rocket
44.

Accessories Tascam US-
122 Mk II sound card/mixer;
Dell Studio 1537 laptop.

Allnic Audio Labs H-3000

Phono Stage

By Rich Teer

Allnic Audio Labs is a Korean company that specialises in high-end audio components. In addition to cartridges, power amplifiers, line stages, integrated amplifiers, and MC step-up transformers, Allnic also has a range of phono stages. We reviewed their entry level H-1200 in Issue 1, so when Hammertone Audio's Dave Beetles (Allnic's North American distributor) offered me the opportunity to review the top of the range H-3000, I leapt at it! (As I write this, a new model has just been announced above the H-3000. Dubbed the H-3000V, it is the same as the H-3000 except that it features improved permalloy (nickel-iron alloy) output transformers and has variable, multiple curve LCR equalisation—hence the V in the model designation.)

Technical Description

The H-3000 is a dual-chassis, fully transformer coupled, tube phono stage which uses LCR filters for RIAA equalisation; one chassis contains the phono stage itself, and the other contains the tube regulated power supply. It features four pairs of single-ended inputs (two each for MC and

MM cartridges), a pair of single-ended outputs, and a pair of balanced outputs. The H-3000's two gain stages use balanced circuitry operating in pure Class A throughout, tube regulation, and zero negative feedback.

the external power supply is attached. (I should point out at this juncture that the socket and its accompanying plug on the umbilical power cable are beautiful pieces of engineering overkill. Seeing this sort of attention to detail



The back panel contains all signal input and output sockets, a pair of small toggle switches (one for each channel) to select between the balanced or single-ended outputs, and a substantial multi-pin socket to which the umbilical cord from

on something like a power connector really gives one a sense that this is one serious piece of kit.) All sockets are, as one would expect on gear at this level, gold plated.



On the front panel we find a pair of pushbutton switches (each with its own amber LED indicator), a pair of illuminated current meters, and a large knurled input selector which is machined from solid aluminum. The left button is the mute/operate switch, and the right one selects between normal and inverted phase operation. The two meters (one for each channel) indicate the current supply to the gain tubes, which should be between the meters' two parallel lines during normal operation. As its name suggests, the input selector enables the user to select between the four (two MC and two MM) inputs. The front faceplate, which is available in either a natural or anodised black finish, is made from a 16 mm thick sheet of machined aluminum, and features Allnic's trademark notch in its top edge.

Towards the rear of the top of the chassis is a pair of small transformers (one per

channel) each with a rotary selector switch, and a small rotary switch. The switches on the former enable the user to select the gain of the MC step up transformers (gains of 22 dB, 26 dB, 28 dB, and 32 dB are selectable); the latter selects the MC secondary load resistor, the available values being 10 k Ω , 20 k Ω , 30 k Ω , and 47 k Ω (the load resistor is set to 47K for the MM inputs). There is a table in the H-3000's excellent manual which gives advice on which load impedance and gain setting to use depending on your cartridge's internal impedance.

At the other end of the aforementioned umbilical cable is the external power supply, which is housed in its own shielded chassis to keep mains nasties as far away as possible from the delicate phono signals. The back panel of this chassis contains the captive end of the umbilical power cable and an

IEC mains socket. Although a suitable AC cable is supplied with the H-3000, the use of an IEC socket means that one may experiment with different AC cables (I used the stock cable for my auditioning).

The front panel of the power supply contains the main power switch and an amber LED power indicator. The power supply's front panel is also available in either a natural or anodised black finish, is made from an 9.5 mm thick sheet of machined aluminum, and features the Allnic notch.

On the bottom of both chassis are four large rubber isolating feet.

Inside, high quality components are used, and all tubes are mounted in Allnic's patented "Absorb Gel tube damper" tube sockets. These substantially reduce microphonics

by isolating the tubes from chassis-borne vibrations. Little rubber rings around each signal tube further reduce microphonics.

Setup and Listening

Before you even take it out of its box, the first thing that strikes you about the H-3000 is its heft: this thing weighs almost 16 kg—more than many power amps! Packed in a separate box, the power supply, weighing in at just over 8 kg, is not insubstantial either. Much of the H-3000's considerable weight can be attributed to the eight permalloy-cored transformers adorning the chassis. Because of their relatively large size and weight, I highly recommend placing the H-3000 and its power supply on a sturdy shelf.

After carefully removing the packing material from around the tubes in the main chassis and installing the large 5AR4 tube in the power supply, I placed the H-3000 on the bottom shelf of my Target turntable stand and the power supply on a similar, custom made stand. My Lyra Parnassus reference cartridge has an internal impedance of $2\ \Omega$, so with reference to Table 1 in the manual I set the secondary load resistance to $10\ \text{k}\Omega$ and the gain to 32 dB. I played the H-3000 for several dozen hours before beginning my critical evaluation. Most of the time I used the H-3000's matching line stage, the L-3000 (as good as it is, I didn't feel that my ARC SP-9 Mk 2 was a suitable match for a \$12,000 phono stage!).

In addition to a wide frequency response, one of the most important sound quality attributes to me is neutrality: to me, if the character of the sound wanders too far away from neutral it begins to call attention to itself, destroying any illusion of a live event taking place (rather than a reproduction thereof). Fortunately, the H-3000 has neutrality in spades. I can't say for sure whether it is the absolute last word in neutrality, but it gets very close.

Bass is deep and tuneful, without being overblown. Take, for example, the part in South African a cappella group Ladysmith Black Mambazo's *Who Were You Talking to* (from their 1987 album, *Shaka Zulu* [WEA 925 582-1]), where they stomp their feet. In addition to the sound of eight or so pairs of feet stomping on the ground, the resulting reverberant sound wave from the hall can challenge the bass clarity of lesser phono stages. Not so with the H-3000, where one can not only clearly distinguish each of the stomping feet but feel the air from the sound wave.

Another example of the H-3000's bass control and authority is the bass drum in the first and third movements (*Kije's Birth* and *Kije's Wedding* respectively) from Fritz Reiner's reading of Prokofiev's *Lt. Kije* [Classic Records/RCA Victor LSC-2150]. With the right system—and the H-3000 is part of that system—the drums' explosive concussion is wonderful to behold (not to mention, somewhat startling for other household members!).

The H-3000 fares well with the all-important midrange too. Male voices, like those of Ladysmith Black Mambazo in *Rain, Rain, Beautiful Rain* and *Who Were You Talking to* (both on the previously cited *Shaka Zulu*), are very well reproduced, as are their various trills and other vocal effects. Likewise, female vocals are beautifully rendered.

The H-3000's treble is light, airy, and sweet. I hear no brightness nor any dullness; as a result, the bells and piano from opening minutes of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001] are just right. The air around glockenspiel and bells emphasizes the sense of "thereness" this recording has. Similarly, the celeste in the second movement of *Lt. Kije, Romance*, is beautiful.

Cymbals and triangles, when the recording allows, shimmer correctly. For an example of how well the H-3000 reproduces the latter, have a listen to *Rejoice in the Sun* from the Peter Schickele's OST recording of *Silent Running* [Decca DL 7-9188].

The H-3000's lack of grain and veiling ensures that low level details are preserved and that micro dynamics are passed along intact. When the material calls for it, the H-3000 accurately presents macro dynamics too: just listen to the huge dynamic swings on *The Power of the Orchestra* [Analogue Productions AAPC 2659-45]!

Somewhat related to this ability to track large dynamic contrasts is a component's ability to maintain its

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composure during complex musical passages, e.g., the finale to part one of *Tubular Bells*. With lesser phono stages, the finale can become a congealed mess; not so with the H-3000, which preserves all the details of even the busiest parts.

Earlier I talked about how wide frequency response and neutrality were important (to me) in the suspension of disbelief when listening to records. Another, equally important, aspect is that of an appropriately big sound stage and accurate imaging. Well, I'm pleased to report the H-3000 has both attributes in spades. Within the right system, the aural holography the H-3000 enables is spectacular: if the recording venue's acoustics were accurately captured, the H-3000 will reproduce them. If a realistic, three dimensional acoustic isn't presented when the H-3000 is part of your system (assuming the recording contains the right acoustic cues), look elsewhere for the culprit. With the right recording, acoustic images just float behind your speakers, in a space unconstrained by your room's physical dimensions.

As good as the system in which I used the H-3000 is, I'm not convinced I extracted every last drop of performance from it. I need to spend more time, with other ancillary equipment, to be sure. I'll write a follow up article if further discoveries warrant it.

Verdict

The H-3000 is a world class phono stage. I'm sure it has its limitations (what product doesn't?), but I'll be damned if I can pin them down. With phenomenal sound quality, very high build quality, and a superb fit 'n' finish, the H-3000 is a very impressive piece of audio equipment. If you're in the market for a phono stage at this exalted price point, an audition of the H-3000 is mandatory. Even if your wallet doesn't stretch to such eye-wateringly high price tags (and I know that not many people's do), you should listen to the H-3000 should the opportunity present itself, if only to hear what a truly great phono stage can do.

It's not for me to make value judgements, but the H-3000 earns my highest recommendation. As for me, I'm just hoping that the importer conveniently forgets where one of his phono stages is, so that I can hang on to it for a while longer...

Specifications

Description Dual chassis tube phono stage.

Frequency response ± 0.3 dB of RIAA.

Gain 74 dB at 1 kHz (MC), 44 dB at 1 kHz (MM).

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

Input impedance Up to 470 Ω (MC), 47 k Ω (MM).

Output impedance 200 Ω .

Phono equalisation RIAA.

Maximum input voltage 220 mV at 1 kHz (690 mV at 10 kHz), MM non-clipping.

Signal to noise ratio 85 dB (CCIR, 1 kHz).

Tube complement Four E810F (gain stages), two 7233 (voltage regulators), two 6485 (voltage regulators), one 5AR4 (voltage regulator in power supply).

Dimensions (hwd) 173 mm x 430 mm x 350 mm (phono stage), 118 mm x 170 mm x 275 mm (power supply).

Weight 15.7 kg (phono stage), 8.1 kg (power supply).

Finishes Natural and black anodised aluminum.

Serial number of unit reviewed 22044.

Price \$11,900.

Warranty Two years transferable (one year on tubes).

Hammertone Audio

252 Magic Drive

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Associated Equipment

Analogue source Forsell Air Reference Mk 2 turntable and arm.

Phono cartridge Lyra Parnassus.

Phono stage Allnic Audio Labs H-3000.

Preamps Allnic Audio Labs L-3000, Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2.

Power amplifiers Allnic Audio Labs M-3000s, PrimaLuna ProLogue Sevens.

Speakers MartinLogan Spire.

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; Acoustech carbon fibre brush; Last record and stylus cleaning products; The Cartridge Man tracking force gauge.

Record Reviews

By Vinylphile Staff



Black Sabbath

Paranoid

Warner Brothers (33-RPM 180g LP)

R1 78976

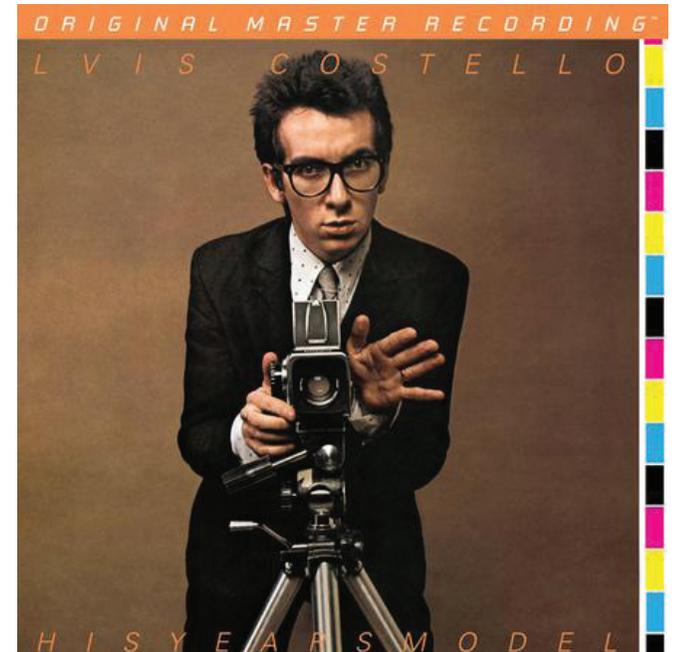
Originally released on September 18th, 1970 (coincident with yours truly's third birthday), *Paranoid* was Black Sabbath's second studio album, and their only album to top the British record charts. On this side of the Atlantic, *Paranoid* has been certified quadruple platinum by the RIAA.

Containing just eight songs, including the titular *Paranoid* (which was literally a last-minute addition to the album: realising they were short a song, guitarist Tony Iommi played the guitar riff and the song was written in less than 30 minutes), this re-release is nicely

packaged in a heavy gatefold sleeve, using the original British artwork.

What I found quite surprising, though, is the sound quality: considering its age and in the context of a heavy metal album, the sound quality of this album very good! Bass is deep and tight, and the treble isn't splashy. The cymbals shimmer wonderfully, and the sound could teach today's producers and engineers a thing or two about not overdoing compression.

If you're a fan of the genre, I'd say this album is a must-have. If not, the great packaging and sound quality, coupled with the reasonable price, make this album worth trying if you're in an experimental mood.



Elvis Costello

This Year's Model

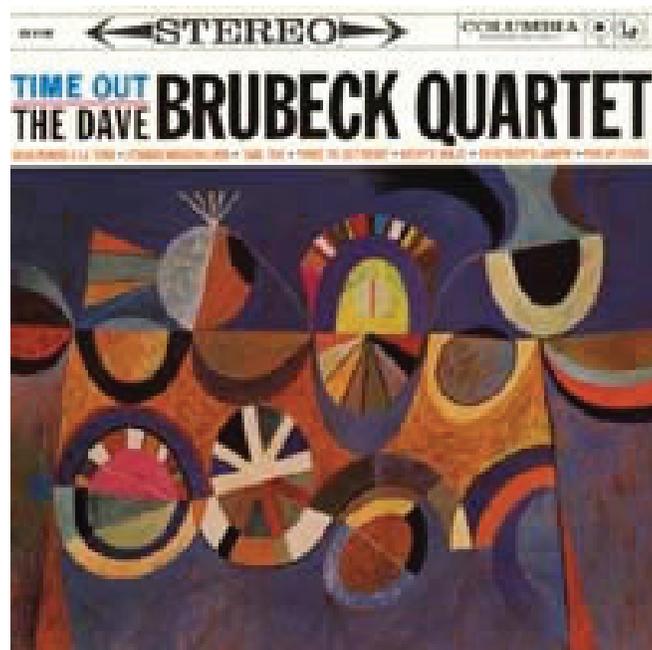
Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab/Universal
(33-RPM 180g LP)

MFSL 1-330

Originally released in 1978 and produced by Nick Lowe, *This Year's Model* is Elvis Costello's second studio album. It contains 11 tracks, including the singles *Pump it Up* and *Radio, Radio*. Interestingly, the latter wasn't on the original UK release, where it was only released as a single. In fact, as with the original US release of this album, there are two other differences between the MFSL version and the original: two tracks, (*I Don't Want to Go to Chelsea* and *Night Rally*, are missing (they were apparently deemed to be "too English"!)).

Beautifully packaged in a heavy cardboard gatefold sleeve featuring the original British artwork (with its deliberate apparently misprinted sleeve), *This Year's Model* is another great release from Mobile Fidelity. The sound quality is pretty good, although it would be fair to say that this is no audiophile spectacular. I don't have an original copy against which to compare this version, but I wouldn't be surprised if this album hasn't sounded better.

A first class pressing with silent surfaces, good sound quality, and great packaging at a fair price makes this record hard to not recommend!



The Dave Brubeck Quartet

Time Out

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

CS 8192

Is anyone even relatively new to music unfamiliar with the classic jazz track, *Take Five*, which was taken from the album *Time Out*, recorded by the Dave Brubeck Quartet in 1959? Many people, even non-fans of the genre (and I count myself amongst them, although my appreciation for jazz is slowly growing as I become more exposed to it—a perk of the job, I suppose!), know at least the famous opening bars on piano and alto sax.

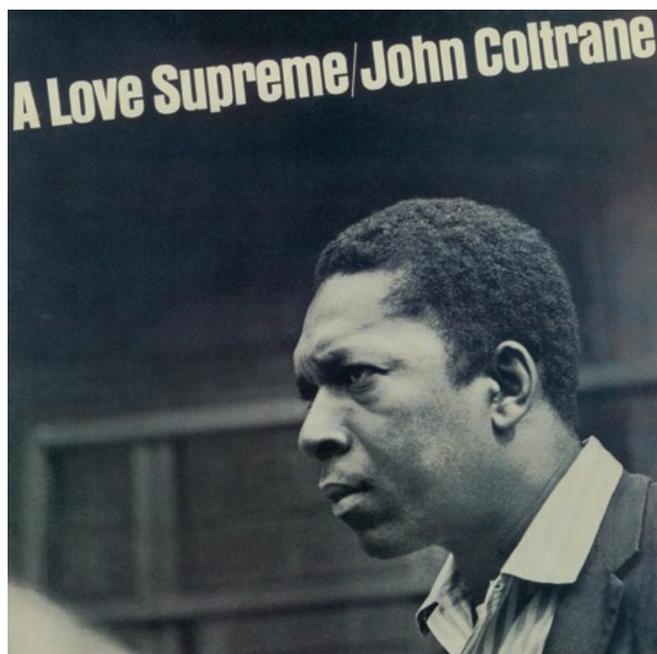
Time Out was the result of Brubeck's experimentation with exotic time signatures, the most famous track being in 5/4. Some other time signatures found on the album are 9/8 and 6/4.

Apart from a little tape hiss, the sound quality of this album is very good. The bass is deep and tuneful, and the treble is nice and clear. For example, cymbals have the right amount of ring and

shimmer to them. The acoustic space is well-captured too: Joe Morello's drum kit is stage left, but one can easily hear its sound being reflected off the right back wall.

While not up to the very high standard set by their Clarity series of records, this release from Classic Records is an improvement over some of their previous efforts: bothersome surface noise like ticks and pops are diminished and the vinyl is very flat. There was apparently supposed to be a four disc 45-RPM Clarity release of this record (a copy of which I would love to have), but to date it has yet to appear.

Time Out is, in my opinion, one of those records that ought to be in any jazz lovers collection, and in the absence of a Clarity vinyl pressing, this is most probably the version to get (I haven't heard an original pressing).



John Coltrane

A Love Supreme

Analogue Productions/Impulse! (two 45-RPM 180g LPs)

A-77

Many people more familiar with jazz than I have suggested that *A Love Supreme* is to John Coltrane as *Kind of Blue* is to Miles Davis, an assertion I don't take issue with. Originally issued in 1965 (only two years before Coltrane's untimely death) and consisting of only three tracks (the last of which is split into two parts), *A Love Supreme* was Coltrane's tenth album for Impulse!

The sound quality on this record is wonderful! Deep, tuneful bass coupled with sweet treble. Just listen to Elvin Jones' cymbal swishes on the first track, *Acknowledgement*, for an idea on how cymbals are supposed to sound. A refreshing change for the bright splashy mess that cymbals sound like in most contemporary records, unfortunately.

The dynamics and overall "you are there"-ness is no doubt aided by Kevin Gray's wonderful remastering and

Analogue Productions' great pressing, which is how all reissues should be IMHO: flat as a pancake with silent surfaces.

The heavy duty, gatefold sleeve of the packaging only adds to the value proposition of this record, so it comes warmly recommended, despite being somewhat pricey.



Szell/London Symphony

Handel: Water Music Suite

King Record Company/Decca Record Company (33-RPM 180g LP)

KIJC 9201

The Water Music and *The Royal Fireworks* (which is paired with the former on this record) are arguably the most famous—and most popular—works by German composer George Frideric Handel (who was born in 1685, the same year as Johann Sebastian Bach). The former was composed after King George I had requested a concert on London's River Thames; the latter was commissioned by King George II in 1749 to accompany the fireworks in London's Green Park celebrate the end of the War of the Austrian Succession. Both pieces were composed with the intent of being played outside.

This interpretation was recorded in 1961, in London's Kingsway Hall by Ken "Wilkie" Wilkinson—and what a fine recording it is! Imaging is very good, but not quite in the same "aural holography" league as recording such as Mehta's version of Holst's *The Planets*

or Reiner's rendition of Prokofiev's *Lt. Kije*.

The record itself is also very good, being flat with silent surfaces, and housed in a heavy cardboard sleeve. Recommended, this record will make a fine addition to your classical music library.



Lene Lovich

Stateless

Stiff/Epic Records (33-RPM LP)

PE 36102

Although not strictly a one-hit wonder, Lene Lovich's best known song, *Lucky Number*, was the second single to be released from her 1979 debut album, *Stateless* (the first single, Lovich's cover of *I Think We're Alone Now*, failed to chart; ironically, it was backed with an early version of *Lucky Number*). Here's an interesting little tidbit: although uncredited, Lovich and recording engineer Alain Wisniak wrote lyrics for Cerrone's *Supernature*.

New wave in style, some of the Lovich's vocals on this album remind me of Hazel O'Connor (of *Breaking Glass* fame), especially *Sleeping Beauty*.

Sound quality wise, this album isn't bad at all. Yes, it's a bit flat and the soundstage is a bit narrow (rarely, if ever, venturing beyond the edge the speakers), but I think that's to be expected from what is essentially an

ordinary commercial pop recording. I've certainly heard a lot worse!

I was fortunate enough to find a sealed NOS (new old stock) copy of this record, so it was in pristine condition with silent surfaces (the latter being a pleasant surprise!). If the genre appeals to you, give this one a try.



Peter Schickele

Silent Running

Decca Records (33-RPM LP)

DL 7-9188

One of the movies that I love and have seen numerous times is Douglas Trumbull's 1972 science fiction cult classic directorial debut, *Silent Running*, which is an eco-protest movie set in the distant future where all plant life on Earth is extinct. The only remaining specimens are in several glass-domed space craft, orbiting near Saturn. In a cost cutting measure, the crews of the ships are ordered to jettison and destroy the domes. One crew member—played by Bruce Dern—refuses to comply with the order and hijacks one of the ships, killing one of his shipmates in the process. This record is the movie's original soundtrack.

Consisting of mostly instrumental incidental music, *Silent Running* also contains two songs sung by popular folk singer, Joan Baez: *Silent Running* and (my favourite) *Rejoice in the Sun*. The album also includes the main and ending themes (the former being an

instrumental version of *Rejoice in the Sun*).

The sound quality is quite good, the trebles surprisingly so. The sweetness of, and the air around, the triangles and similar instruments is breathtaking! The imaging is fairly flat and the dynamics are a bit limited (this wasn't ever intended to be an audiophile spectacular), but the music more than makes up for it. A must-have if you're a fan of the movie!



Rickie Lee Jones

Pirates

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab/Warner Brothers Records (33-RPM 180g LP)

MFSL 1-328

Pirates is Rickie Lee Jones' 1981 followup to her successful eponymously-titled debut. Musically more ambitious than its predecessor, *Pirates* partly laments Jones' breakup with Tom Waits, opening with the poignant *We Belong Together*. Two of the tracks, *Skeleton* and *The Returns* were recorded live in the studio.

Jones is joined by such musicians as Steve Gadd (drums on the title track and *We Belong Together*), Donald Fagen (synthesizers on *Pirates*), David Sanborn (alto sax), and Sal Bernardi (vocals on *Living it Up* and *Traces of the Western Slopes*, the latter of which he co-wrote).

I don't have a copy of the original with which to compare this reissue from Mobile Fidelity, but that doesn't matter because the sound quality is great. There is, arguably, a touch of hardness

to the cymbals, but that's about it as far as sonic complaints are concerned.

Pirates is another example of reissues done right: the thick slab of vinyl is flat and has silent surfaces, and Mobile Fidelity has done another first rate job on the packaging. Highly recommended, and a no-brainer if you're a Rickie Lee Jones fan!



The Cars

The Cars

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab/Elektra (33-RPM 180g LP)

MFSL 1-274

The Cars is the eponymously-titled debut album by the late 1970s and 1980s synth rock group. It contains nine tracks, including the hit singles *Good Times Roll*, *My Best Friend's Girl*, and *Just What I Needed*. It was produced by Roy Thomas Baker and originally released in 1978, selling more than a million copies by the end of that year.

Sound quality is pretty good considering the genre. I have a copy of the original version of this album which also sounds good, so I was interested in comparing them. Fortunately, the Mobile Fidelity version more than holds its own against the original, taking the sound quality up at least a notch or two.

Mobile Fidelity have done their usual great job with the packaging, too: *The Cars* comes in a gatefold sleeve made from heavy cardboard. Also, as one would expect from a premium

product like this, the disc is as flat as a pancake and the record's surfaces are dead quiet. Recommended, then, and I can't wait to get my hands on Mobile Fidelity's other *The Cars* reissues.



Mehta/Los Angeles Philharmonic

Holst: The Planets

Decca Record Company (33-RPM 180g LP)

SXL 6529

Much like the opening notes to Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, I don't think there are many people who wouldn't recognise at least the opening notes to the first movement of British composer Gustav Holst's *The Planets, Mars, the Bringer of War*. With a powerful, exciting rhythm blasted out on tympani and brass instruments (especially the tuba and trumpets), what's not to like?!

Most of the subsequent movements aren't as rambunctious, but they're just as likeable (the solo violin in the second movement, *Venus, the Bringer of Peace*, is—to me at least—reminiscent of Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Scheherazade*).

The sound quality of this record is very good: deep, powerful bass (the 16 Hz organ note near the end of *Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age* will give your system a good workout!), sweet midranges, and airy highs. Dynamics (both micro

and macro) are well captured too. This recording also has great breadth and depth: the size of the acoustic space is very well reproduced (assuming your system is up to the task).

Pressed on thick, flat vinyl, this record has quiet surfaces (although there was a little glue or mold release agent on my copy, fortunately on the outer dead wax), and is one that is an essential part of any classical music collection. Even if you don't like classical music, it's a good evaluation tool! Enthusiastically recommended!

Final Words

So another issue is finally finished! You may have noticed that we didn't have our usual Reader's System or Dealer Spotlight features this month. Fear not, they are planned to return next time around, where, if all goes to plan, we should have a really special system for you to drool over...

In the next issue—our first Christmas Special—we hope to have more equipment and record reviews too, and perhaps one or two more treats.

As always, thanks for reading Vinylphile, and see you in a couple of months!

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<i>www.audioscapecanada.ca</i>	
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<i>www.hammertoneaudio.com</i>	
MartinLogan	21
<i>www.martinlogan.com</i>	
Rocky Mountain Audio Fest	2
<i>www.audiofest.net</i>	