

# VINYL LP FILE

The digizine for discerning music lovers



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# Editorial



**A**re you a music lover or an audiophile? This question is often posed with the implication that the two are mutually exclusive, but I don't they need be. But let's back up for a minute and define what we mean by "music lover" and "audiophile".

For the purposes of this discussion, we'll define an audiophile to be someone for whom high sound quality is very important, at least in theory: there are many audiophiles who aspire to very good (read expensive) high-end equipment but are without the means to purchase it, so they must settle for equipment that is more affordable but has one or more sonic flaws. This doesn't matter, it's the aspiration that's important (rather like the car enthusiast who covets a Ferrari yet drives around in a Mazda 3). For the audiophile, the pursuit of audio excellence is probably a never ending journey.

A music lover, on the other hand, is someone for whom the music is tantamount: they are just as happy listening to their favourite music on a cheap MP3 as anything else, and are

probably blissfully unaware of high-end audio. For the music lover, the music itself is the journey.

There will always be extremes in both camps (for example, audiophiles who have a \$250,000 system on which to listen to their three perfectly recorded records, or music lovers who aren't at all interested in high quality sound reproduction), but I think that given the opportunity, most people would be a hybrid, i.e., someone who loves music but actively seeks to maximise their pleasure from it by investing in a high quality audio system.

I think the challenge facing the industry today is how to reach this potentially huge market. I'd assert that most people who might be interested in investing in a high-end audio system aren't even aware of the high-end. For them, brands like Bose and Bang & Olufsen represent the pinnacle of home audio reproduction, which is unfortunate because although they may be fine "lifestyle" products, the products made by those companies hardly qualify as high-end (despite their high price tags!).

As an industry, we need to educate people on the benefits of high-end audio, preferably by exposing them to a well set up system with their own music. Of course, not everyone will be interested, but I think that if we can make high-end audio more accessible to the masses, the industry as a whole would be much better off.

I have no idea how to address this on an industry-wide basis, but we can all do something individually: invite more friends over—especially music lovers—for a social listening session. Play them their favourite pieces of music on your system so that they can hear what's possible. Of course, it's unrealistic to expect to convert everyone like this, and not everyone—even once they've heard the results—will want to spend a big pile of money on an audio system. In other words, not everyone is able to invest tens of thousands of dollars in their audio system, but good sound can be had for a lot less than that, which is of course where the need for an experienced, helpful dealer comes in. But that's another essay!

As I write this, Christmas is almost upon us once again. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very merry Christmas, and a prosperous, healthy, and happy New Year!

*Rich*

# Reader's System

## Vinyl Valhalla!

By Rich Teer

This issue's Reader's System is something really special. It was a few months in the organising, but it was well worth the wait! In November I visited the music room of Mike from North Bend. He's the general manager of an automobile dealership, and has a wonderful music room!

If you'd like your system to be featured in our Reader's System series, just send us an email. In the meantime, here's the transcript of the chat I had with Mike before we settled down for an all-too-short listening session with a couple of his friends.

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

Well, I've been married 36 years, I have two grown children, my daughter's married but no grand kids. I'm 59 years old and have lived in the Seattle area since 1955, so I'm kind of a native although I was originally from Minnesota. I'm a general manager at a large automobile dealership with 130 employees. I work six days per week, so my audio hobby



is a stress relief. I don't have time for a sailboat or a summer home 'cause I'm working all the time. I can do this every night and I've come to really enjoy the social part of the hobby. So that's kinda the background that brought me to this. I find it to be a lot of fun, and I relate to the people that I meet through the hobby: it seems that they have similar value to me—except for these two guys

of course! [Laughs] So basically, I have fun with it and it enriches my life.

**Where did you get your love of hi fi and music?**

I grew up in the 1960s, I love 1960s' rock big time. I listened to the radio. I bought a stereo tape deck when I was in high school and recorded off the radio, and

took that real seriously. When I was at the university I had various hi-fis. When I first got married I had the Bose 901s, the McIntosh, and various turntables. Then the kids came along, I probably took 15 years off with that, eventually sold all my records and just listened to some CDs. I had a boat when the kids were growing up, and family was the focus and really, the music was there but not with any great focus.

Then, in 1994, after the kids had finished high school and moved out, that's when I kinda got back into it and I bought some used Watt Puppies. My brother in law really introduced me to it when I heard a CAL Audio DAC and I heard how much better it was than my Pioneer CD player, which I thought was great. That kinda kicked me off, so I still blame it all on him!

**Sounds like a reasonable excuse!**

Yes, exactly! [Laughs]

**Roughly how many records do you have?**

A little over 10,000, probably. I also have about 3,000 CDs, about 1,000 SACDs, and probably 60 or 70 10.5" 15 IPS quarter-inch master dubs, and maybe



another 100 prerecorded 7.5" reels, so I'm pretty heavily into tape and getting more so as time goes by.

**What's your favourite genre of music and what are some of your favourite records?**

My favourite genre of music lately, as the system has matured, is the one I know least about, and that's classical. But that's only been true in the last year or so. As the system has really matured, the classical music seems to speak to me the most. [Hands me a record] Right now I'd say that's probably my favourite record. It's a Hungarian pressing of a cello and a double bass, and it's absolutely intoxicating.

**Are you familiar with the Starker boxed set? I'm only asking because I recently got it.**

Yes, I have the boxed set of that. That's really good, I have a number of string quartets that are just wonderful. I don't really know much about the music, you know, but it just seems to... I love a lot of jazz, and I have some great pop and rock, and really, I don't know if I have a particular favourite. Probably some Ella Fitzgerald and Miles, and Ben Webster. I name my network Webster after Ben Webster, so he's probably my favourite jazz player all around.

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

Well, in the last three or four months, I'd say I'm about 70% vinyl, but I'd say formerly I was probably 30% vinyl. It's just a maturing, it's just come of age, you know, a bunch of stuff has fallen into place. So I'm really now mostly vinyl, whereas I used to be probably 50% or 60% digital, I'm now 20%, maybe 10% digital.

**Ah, so you've seen the light?**

Right. Now, I have a server upstairs, as well as all this stuff here, so I have 2,000 or 2,500 high res files on the server. So, I mean, that's pretty good. Last night I was tired, I wasn't in the mood for even getting out of the chair, so I just played digital, you know, a lot of Red Book off the server, and it was great. So once in a while, I'm a little spent, and the digital's so easy, and it still sounds great and my system has matured recently.

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

Wow, how far do you want me to get into this, 'cause there's a lot!

**Well, as much as you feel like sharing.**

OK, I'll try to do this quickly! Since I got back into the high-end, in 1994, I'll step through and I'll try to do it quickly. OK, I started out with used Watt Puppies 3.2 and I had an ARC D400 Mk 2 solid state amp. I think I might have had a Levinson preamp and Levinson digital,

and I had a VPI TNT Mk 2 with, I think, a Benz Glider cartridge and an Audio something or other phono stage. So that's where I started.

Then I went to Watt Puppy 5.1s, I got the Levinson 335 amp, then from there I got the Levinson 32, which was the big preamp. I went to the Levinson 33H and the Watt Puppy 6s, and then I got the big Levinson 33 amps. So this is about 1999. I switched from the TNT to the Basis 2500, got a Graham 1.5tc arm, the Koetsu Rosewood Signature Platinum, and then I got an Aesthetix lo phono stage. The lo was probably a water mark item for me, because I think my whole brain changed. At the time it was phenomenal, so then I decided that the whole Levinson/Wilson program was wrong, after spending a little time with the lo.

I went pretty high end this time, based just off a review, I got a pair of Kharma Exquisite 1Ds, which at the time was very expensive. I got really lucky: I got hooked into a new distributor when he was first acquiring the line, so I got a very, very good buy on it. I searched around for a tube amp to go with them, and I ended up with the Tenor OTL, which is a 70 W output transformerless tube amp and I absolutely loved it. It was a passive integrated amp, which was when I dumped my Levinson preamp 'cause the Tenor was dramatically better without a preamp, without the Levinson. So then I went to the Placette

passive preamp because I loved the way it worked. At about that time I was very happy with the Kharma and Tenor, just in love with it really. I still love that sound.

I was able to acquire a Rockport System II Sirius, which had been a dream turntable of mine, and prior to that I had got into a Clearaudio Insider Gold cartridge, which I liked better than the Rosewood in many ways.

But then when I got into the Rockport, I accidentally stumbled onto a van den Hul Colibri, and that just smoked everything I'd ever heard, so I became a real Colibri fanatic. Also at that time, I was given a couple of phono stages to try, one of which was the lo Signature with two power supplies, and also a Lamm LP2. It turned out, I didn't expect to, that I preferred the Lamm to the big lo. It just seemed that it was better over all. And then, about a year later, I was

presented the opportunity to upgrade my Rockport to the System III Sirius, and that was a pretty big deal. So I sold the [System] two and got the [System] three. And I was happy, but I was in a different home, where I'd taken my room as far as I could take it. So I was either gonna add on to my house, make a bigger room, because I had a 12' by 18' room. It was great in many ways, but it was also limited in many ways. So I decided instead not to invest in my



neighbourhood and add to my home, so that's when I decided to change homes to find a better room. And I ended up here.

### And what a room!

Well, it's always been "what a room", but it hasn't really always worked. It's been six years of learning, for me, here. First of all, the Kharmas that I had, which I loved, were just not adequate to generate bass in this room, although in retrospect now, because I've since modified the room in some ways, probably the Kharmas could have been OK if

I would have done the modifications back then, but I didn't really understand it. When I got into this room, it was beyond my level of perceptions, or my level of maturity as a listener. So I had to grow a lot before I recognised some inadequacies in the room. So I got rid of the Kharmas and got Von Schweikerts, which were great speakers.

I loved the Kharmas, there's nothing wrong with Kharmas, but I needed more bass. It turned out later that there were some room issues that were causing that problem, but I don't believe at this point that the Kharmas would have been able to get the job done, although now, six years later, I've basically solved that problem of being overly damped in the



bass in the room. I've also found that I can get the linearity in the bass with the Von Schweikerts and my Evolutions, plus I can get much deeper, more full bass.

So, anyway, I went to the Von Schweikert VR-9SEs, loved them, they're great. I had 'em for almost for two years and

had no intention of getting rid of them, then a friend from Hong Kong that had visited me was looking for that model and it was going to take eight months for him to get them, and he wondered if mine were for sale. So I sold him mine even though I was planning to because I had some bigger ones, the VR-11s, in mind. So I ordered some VR-11s and

even got some VR-7s to use as demos while the VR-11s were being built, but it turned out that they never built them. So I ended up actually buying the Evolutions, it wasn't really something I had an agenda to do, it's just how things worked out.

So that was the speaker side of things. When I went from the Kharmas to the Von Schweikerts, I eventually switched to the darTZeel from the Tenor. I felt like the darTZeel was kinda like music: it didn't sound like tubes and it didn't sound like solid state, but it had the linearity of solid state and it also had a breath of life, plus it also had super low noise of course.

So I really liked, after the Tenor tubes, the darTZeel did not make me think of solid state and yet it did the things the Tenor did even better, so I switched that amplifier. That was seven years ago, and I still have the darTZeel. So I've had the same speakers for about five years and the same amplifiers for about seven years now. About a year after I got the darTZeel, I replaced my passive preamp with the darTZeel preamp, and I still have that.

On the digital side, I had the EMM Labs for a long time, then about four years ago I switched to the Playback Designs.

In terms of turntables, ever since I had the Kharmas I had the Rockport System II Sirius and then about a year later, in 2002, I got the System III Sirius, which I still have. So that was my turntable. I went with the Lamm phono stage back in 2003. I had that for three years until I got the darTZeel. Then three years ago I added a couple more turntables: a vintage Garrard 301 with a Steve Dobbins plinth and then I had a Technics SP10 Mk 2 then an SP10 Mk 3,

again with a Steve Dobbins plinth and Reed arms. Then I had a Tri-Planar arm and a number of different cartridges. Since I had my Basis turntable with the Koetsu Rosewood Signature Platinum, I had a Clearaudio Insider Gold, and then I got into the van den Hul Colibris. I eventually owned seven different Colibris over about a seven year period. I usually had two or three at a time, and



they were my favourite cartridges. What happened was that I had one that was really, really nice, and they're a very edgy cartridge. It's a cartridge that is very minimalist. It's like a Formula 1 car: they're very minimalist, there's no body really. The one I had was an XC, which has a copper winding and polycarbonate body. I had one that was very natural

sounding, I used it on my Rockport and I had it for five years. Then about three years ago, I was cleaning the top of my Rockport and snagged it on the rag and wiped it out.

### Ouch!

I had it repaired and I bought three or four more, but I couldn't find another

one that was as well behaved as that one. So about two years ago I sold my last Colibri, and now I have the Ortofon A90—I have two of those—and I have a Lyra Olympos SL, which is the low output version. The Olympos is on the Rockport and the A90s are on The Beat turntable, which is a new turntable that supplanted the SP10 Mk 3

in my system. The Beat is a Steve Dobbins built turntable, and I have a Miyajima Premium Be mono cartridge on the Garrard.

Something that's happened this year is that I've got a couple of Talea arms from Joel Durrant. He's a local gentleman, and those arms I consider to be probably

the best pivoted arms I've ever heard. I also have two Reed arms, which are very, very good—maybe the second best pivoted arms I've heard. So I have a total of five arms.

I also have a Allnic H-3000 phono stage, the newer version with the bigger trannies, and I'm very, very impressed with that. I've not yet determined which phono stage I like better: the Allnic or the darTZeel. I probably lean towards the darTZeel, but I've not yet answered that question in my mind completely so I use both.

Three years ago I also got into reel to reel tape. Tape is my best source: as good as my turntables are, the tape's better. I have a Studer A-820 and an Ampex ATR-102. I also have some custom output electronics called the Cello. It's actually made by a person called Charles King, so I call it a King Cello. It's actually a phono stage as well as output electronics for the tape decks.

So that's the evolution of my system. The other thing I will mention is that my room has evolved dramatically in the last year. It took me five years to determine that my room was over damped, so this year I did three major things to the room. I took out some huge bass traps that were in sides of the front of my room. They were actually 15 feet long and 10 feet tall. I took out those and added something called Quiet Rock, which is actually a very substantial panel which

gives you a room boundary. I also removed quite a bit of bass trapping in my ceiling, and the third thing I did was adding an Equi=Tech wall cabinet. I have a 10 kW balanced isolation transformer. So those three things, taking the ceiling traps out, taking the front traps out, and adding the wall panel made a huge difference in the performance of my room.

So that's basically the whole picture. I didn't go into the tweak things; let's call them minor so I didn't go into those.

**It sounds like you've had quite a journey! What's next on your equipment wish list?**

Honestly, and I really mean this, I would say that I have nothing on my equipment wish list at all right now. There are two things that could happen next year, but they're things that if they don't happen, that's fine. One of them is that there are some darTZeel monoblocks which are amazingly expensive and if I got them I'd basically be selling one turntable and some other things to be able to do that. So that could happen, I might decide to do that: switch from the stereo amp to the monoblocks. It really wouldn't change the essence of the system in any way, and the stereo amp really is amazing, but it would just give the system more horsepower. You know, there's nothing like headroom!

The other thing is that's there's an MMSeven, which is a step beyond these

speakers. It's a two tower arrangement, basically the same speaker but times two. So those two things are possibilities, but the parts don't really exist. I mean, I've had the monoblocks in my room—I had the prototypes in my room a year ago—and they're amazing, and the MMSevens have not yet been built. It's just a concept.

So those are the only two things. I am completely... I'm where I wanted to be. Three years ago I bought reel to reel machines and I also bought turntables, and it's taken me three years to get them to where I wanted them to be. I finally reached that point just recently. Six years ago I built the room; after six years the room is finally doing what I wanted it to. So the things that I really wanted to accomplish, gear wise and system wise, I'm there. Though I will say this: it's been painful to spend all this time on the gear. Even though last year I bought a collection of 2,500 classical LPs, and I've got 12,000 LPs and 4,000 CDs and a hard drive full of high res, honestly I want to get away from the gear and I want focus on getting the best pressings of certain disks, find more new music, so I really just wanna get my brain off of gear—even the room—and just enjoy the music. How I built up my collection was that even though I was a gear head, I spent an awful lot of time acquiring music, and that was really what gave me great pleasure and the last six years with the room, I've not been able to put the money or the time into that like I'd like and so the joy of

the hobby hasn't been quite what it had been. In some ways. The room now, finally, is very satisfying and so I'll say that the pain has been worth it to get to where I am performance wise, but I want to get that in the music too, 'cause that's really the fun.

## Equipment List

**Power source** Equi=Tech 10WQ Wall Panel System with dedicated double grounding rod. There is a separate service panel for lights, HVAC and 'dirty outlets' independent of the Equi=Tech panel. The Equi=Tech supplies 13 lines to the listening room using #10 gauge Romex, each of which is terminated with Oyaide R-1 receptacles and WCP-Z outlet covers.

**Analogue sources** Rockport Sirius III System air bearing turntable and arm; Steve Dobbins Kodo The Beat turntable with Talea and Reed arms; Garrard 301 with a Steve Dobbins plinth, Talea and Reed arms; Studer A-820 1/4" Master recorder, Ampex ATR-102, and Technics RS-1500 tape decks.

**Cartridges** Lyra Olympos SL, Ortofon A90, Azden YM-P50VL, Miyajima Premium Mono Be.

**Phono stage** Allnic H-3000.

**Digital sources** Playback Designs MPS-5 DAC and disc player, dedicated music server.

**Preamp** darTZeel NHB-18NS.

**Power amp** darTZeel NHB-108b.

**Speakers** EvolutionAcousticsMMThree, with integral powered subwoofers.

**Cables** Phono: Nordost Valhalla. Interconnects: Transparent Audio Opus MM2, Evolution Acoustics BNC LINKs. Speaker: Transparent Audio Opus MM2. AC: Absolute Fidelity.

**Accessories** Oyaide R-1 outlet equipped MTB-6 power strip; Grand Prix Audio Monaco SE equipment racks; Wave Kinetics A10 U8 isolation footers; Combak Harmonix RF-999MT Mk 2 footers; Walker lead filled; Audio Desk Record Cleaning System record cleaning machine; Acoustic Revive RL-30 LP demagnetiser.

# Annie's Audio Adventures

## It's All in the Little Details...

By Annie St. Jean

**W**ires are to men what shoes are to women: most people don't notice them, except if they clash. But, just like shoes often make or break an outfit, wires can improve or diminish the sound of any machine. That's what I found out this weekend. Hubby and I listened to our system without the little black and grey box from a few reviews ago, and to my great surprise, I learned that the right wires can truly improve the way our favourite "testing songs" sound. True, the box being on or off still makes a big difference, but even with it off, the wires alone have a way of warming up the sound, giving the music more depth and definition. But, as with everything audio, quality is addictive! I guess it's just the same as never being able to go back to cheap shoes after wearing Birkenstocks!

As for me, I'm not one to have one pair of shoe per outfit! I prefer comfortable shoes, made from real leather, that I only get rid of when they fall apart... or

I sometimes even keep them longer so I can wear them in the garden! Having said that, I had fun playing with cables with our friend's Marantz system! I think I found a pretty perfect match: Nordost Frey cables! True, it doesn't hurt that they happen to be purple (no, I don't have purple shoes)! The cables seem to add another layer of warmth to the whole sound. We also changed our Isotek for a Furman power conditioner, and I find it to be a better match to the Marantz also. I have a feeling it might become more and more difficult to give our friend his Marantz system back!

Last week, while hanging out in our beloved local hi fi store, I met someone who was wondering how many reviews could be true. He was concerned because it seems that everything that gets reviewed has a positive review. I can't speak for anyone else out there, but for me, it seems difficult to find anything truly wrong with the equipment I'm playing with, because it's all high end! I can't stress enough the fact that

it all depends on what you like, how components and wires are paired up, and what it all sounds like in your own room.

I still prefer our Isotek with our Chord amp, however. Both power conditioners have their own characteristics, so you really have to try them with your own equipment. Maybe Santa Hubby will make another stand for me this Christmas, so I could set up our Chord and our friend's Marantz side by side and compare them in the same room. In the meantime, I'm listening to Harry Connick Jr., Colin James, Loreena McKennitt, Holly Cole, and of course Sting Christmas music! I'll keep you posted!

Happy listening!

# Rocky Mountain Audio Fest

## Show Report

By Rich Teer

For this report of the seventh annual (but my first) Rocky Mountain Audio Fest (RMAF), I thought I'd try a different approach. Instead of lots of words with a few pictures, this is a photo essay with lots of photos and few words. Because this is Vinylphile, most of the photos are related to vinyl playback.

As you can see by this photo of the marketplace, interest in vinyl is still very strong!



What follows is a roughly alphabetical photo tour of some of the stuff I saw, with my apologies to manufacturers I've neglected to mention.

Artemis Labs demonstrated their \$7,800 SA-1 turntable with the Schröder Reference TA-1 tonearm and their own cartridge.



I spent quite a lot of time in the Audio Imports room, listening to Bergmann Audio's new \$54,400 Sleipner Reference air bearing turntable and arm (shown here with a Lyra Titan *i* cartridge).



In the Burmester room was their new 100 phono stage, which starts at \$16,995.



Galibier Design had turntables in three rooms, from their entry-level Gavia-I (\$8,750) to their top-of-the-line Stelvio-II (\$27,500).

Steve Dobbins was playing his new Kodo The Beat magnetic drive turntable (\$24,000), coupling it with the Reed 3Q Laser Guided tonearm (\$6,500) and the Allnic Puritas cartridge (\$4,950).



Odyssey had their new \$2,500 tube/bipolar Kismet phono stage on static display.



Oswalds Mill Audio were using their OMA Tourmaline turntable (\$12,000) with tonearms from Thomas Schick and Schröder, and cartridges from Miyajima and Soundsmith.



Talking of new phono stages, Ron Sutherland was proudly showing off his latest phono stage, the \$2,200 20/20.



TT Weights were playing their new Gem rim drive turntable (\$6,500) and showing their \$15,900 Black Onyx turntable. The latter was only on static display because it had only recently been finished, and wasn't run in.



One of the last rooms I visited was Walker Audio's, where the \$57,000 Proscenium Black Diamond II was playing with an Air Tight PC-1 Supreme cartridge.



In the Doshi Audio room, an SME Model 20/2 turntable with a beautiful Koetsu cartridge provided the music, helped by Wilson Audio Sasha W/Ps and room treatments by Real Traps (I love the red colour of the Sashas!)



Merrill-Williams Audio's \$4,000 REAL 101 turntable.



Music Hall's \$875 MMF-5.1 turntable.



Onedof's \$150,000 turntable.



TW-Acoustic's Raven Black Night reference turntable on isolation bases from Silent Running Audio.



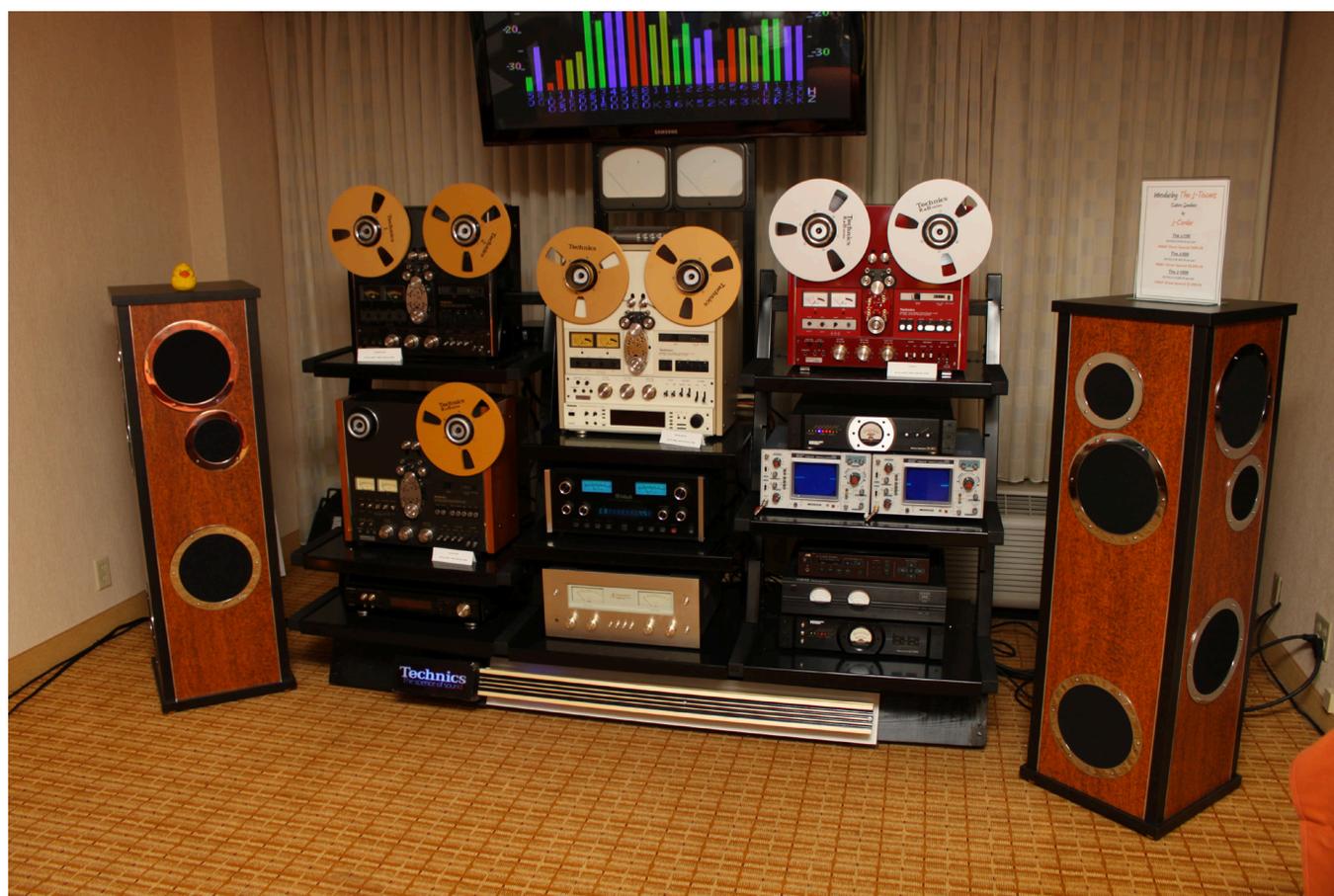
Twin Tri-Planars!



A pair of vinyl spinners from Simon Yorke.



Vinyl wasn't the only source of analogue ear candy. J-Corder and United Home Audio (among others) were playing serious reel to reel rigs.



# Sumiko Blue Point No. 2

## MC Cartridge

By Rich Teer

It's probably fair to say that the first component many vinyl lovers think of upgrading—especially at the more affordable end of the market—is their cartridge. Tonearms and turntables are usually sold as a pair and upgrading one without the other can be problematic. Again, I'm talking mostly about the more entry-level gear here: it is not at all uncommon for pricier turntables and tonearms to be sold separately! Low output moving coil (MC) cartridges tend to be expensive and aren't always a good match with budget-priced, MM-only phono stages. High output MCs provide a good way for audiophiles to upgrade to an MC cartridge without sacrificing compatibility with their phono stage, easing the

upgrade expense. The Sumiko Blue Point No. 2 is one such cartridge.



### Technical Description

The Blue Point No. 2 is the entry level MC cartridge in Sumiko's Oyster series of phono cartridges, and is one model above the Pearl we reviewed in Issue 2 of Vinylphile. Like the Pearl, the Blue Point No. 2 has a plastic body, an aluminum cantilever, and an elliptical diamond stylus. The packaging contains mounting hardware (aluminum nuts and bolts, with nylon washers to prevent damaging the tonearm to which the cartridge is attached), a screw driver, and a cleaning brush.

The Blue Point No. 2 is a high output MC cartridge and the recommended loading is 47 k $\Omega$ , so it can be used with a MM phono stage.

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## Setup and Listening

Installation into my Forsell Air Reference's air bearing tonearm was pretty straightforward, although the fact that the Blue Point No. 2's body wasn't tapped to accept the head shell mounting bolts made this more fiddly than it need be. Instead, one must use small nuts, screwing them onto the mounting bolts once they protrude through the cartridge's body. I used my Forsell rather than something more in keeping with a \$299 cartridge to give the Blue Point No. 2 a chance to sound its best.

After using the cartridge for a couple of dozen hours, I double checked the alignment and tracking weight (at 1.78 g, it was just a shade under the recommended 1.8 g), and started my formal evaluation.

Over all, I'd say the Blue Point No. 2 is a fairly neutral cartridge, with a laid back character. I could hear some rolling off of the extreme treble and bass, but don't consider this too serious at this price point.



Modulo the bottom end roll off I mentioned previously, the Blue Point No. 2's bass was quite reasonable. It was very similar to its little brother (the Sumiko Pearl), but without the latter's bass hump. With the bass hump absent, the Blue Point No. 2's bass is tuneful, and avoids the "one note" problem. For example, the bass guitar on Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001] isn't overblown and is easily followed.

Bass dynamics fare less well, though. 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] should be authoritative and explosive, but with the Blue Point No. 2 it wasn't. Oh, you can hear the drum, but it doesn't have right weight and dynamic contrasts. Another example of this is from 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. With the Blue Point No. 2, this stomping sounds less intense and the reverberant sound wave almost missing.

The midrange is the Blue Point No. 2's strong point. The voices of Ladysmith Black Mambazo are well reproduced (just listen to *Rain, Rain, Beautiful Rain* and *Who Were You Talking to* (both on the previously cited *Shaka Zulu*)), and instruments have the right tone colour.

The Blue Point No. 2's treble is also quite good, but is hampered by the high end rolloff I mentioned previously, and a lack of air around instruments like the glockenspiel and celeste. The bells and piano from the opening minutes of *Tubular Bells* illustrate this, as does the second movement of *Lt. Kije, Romance*.

Low level details are acceptable, but are hampered by some haze and grain which prevents all the little details that delight us audiophiles so much from shining through.

The sound stage is quite big (extending beyond the speakers in my room) and imaging is fine, although the image specificity suffers when multiple source play at the same time. With more esoteric cartridges (like my Lyra Parnassus, which is admittedly a lot more than the Blue Point No. 2!), the positions of the individual singers in Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the members of the Nasal Chorus in *Tubular Bells* can be ascertained. However, with the Blue Point No. 2, these two are presented as one homogenous mass.

## Verdict

Re-reading my comments above, one might be tempted to think that I'm slamming the Blue Point No. 2. That isn't the impression I want to convey. What I do want to convey is this: although it does have some weaknesses, the Blue Point No. 2 is quite a strong performer

when its price is factored in to the equation. It is totally unreasonable to expect a \$300 cartridge to perform as well as a \$3,000 one. In my opinion, the Blue Point No. 2 is very much worth considering if you're shopping in this price range.

## Specifications

**Description** High output moving coil cartridge.

**Frequency response** 15-35,000 Hz.

**Output voltage** 2.5 mV.

**Channel separation** 32 dB.

**Channel balance** 0.5 dB.

**Compliance** 15 (x 10<sup>-6</sup> cm/dyne).

**Stylus size** 7.6 x 17.8 micrometres.

**Recommended loading** 47 kΩ.

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

**Tracking force** 1.6-2.0 g.

**Recommended tracking force** 1.8 g.

**Weight** 6.3 g.

**Serial number of unit reviewed** Not noted.

**Price** \$299.

**Warranty** One year non-transferable.

## Sumiko

2431 Fifth Street

Berkeley, CA 94710

USA

(510) 843-4500

[www.sumikoaudio.net](http://www.sumikoaudio.net)

## 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.

# Get Better Sound

## Audio System Setup Manual

By Rich Teer

In the seemingly never ending quest to improve the sound quality of our audio systems, us audiophiles will spend thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars on new components in the pursuit of sonic perfection. We spend large sums of money on turntables, cartridges, amplifiers, speakers, and so on, but rarely do we pause to think about how to maximise the sound quality of the gear we already have. Of course, the gear is indispensable—our enjoyment from recorded music would be pretty limited without a system on which to play it!—but shouldn't we do more to make the most of what we have? Jim Smith thinks so, and his book, *Get Better Sound*, describes how to do just that.

Not necessarily intended to be read from cover to cover, *Get Better Sound* is an audio system set up reference manual, containing 202 tips in 23 chapters. The first four chapters contain basic background information, including discussions about how to become a better listener and what to look for in a musically satisfying system,

Did you know that your audio components only provide about half of your system's full performance potential? *Get Better Sound* shows you how to get the crucial other half, and how to do it without spending a fortune.

# Get Better Sound

By JIM SMITH

The Reference Set-up Manual that guarantees better sound from any home audio system!

considerations for our music rooms (which are arguably the most important component in our audio systems), and a look at the needs of a home theatre vs those for a stereo system (although the book is written primarily for stereo systems, much of the material is relevant for home theatres).

Subsequent chapters cover topics such as why it is better to have two subwoofers rather than one, the effects of room layout and acoustic treatments, tips on how to get rid of unwanted pollution on your AC lines and perform equipment comparisons, and a couple of chapters on various “thinking points”, some of which are considered to be controversial (e.g., tube vs solid state, long interconnects vs long speaker cables, and do cables make a difference).

There are two full chapters dedicated to speaker and room set up, and a separate chapter for those audiophiles using panel speakers. The book also contains two chapters on set up tools (one for free or inexpensive tools, and one for semi-pro tools), and chapters discussing various topics such as bi-amplification; that bane of musical enjoyment, compression; and basic trouble shooting. There’s also a brief chapter on tuning one’s vinyl playback rig. Finally, the book contains Smith’s reference CD list, and a comprehensive glossary.

Written in a light, chatty manner, Smith makes the material accessible to just about everyone. Technical mumbo jumbo and jargon are kept to a minimum, and numerous illustrations are spread throughout the book to help make the author’s point. One small criticism I would make is that I found some of the material presented in an almost random order. For example, rather than presenting them sequentially, there are seven chapters between the two chapters on set up tools.

In *Get Better Sound*, Smith distills information gleaned from his more than 35 years of system set up, tuning thousands of audio systems (including several that won accolades for “Best Sound of Show”). It’s probably true that experienced audiophiles will benefit less from this book than newcomers (I knew much of the information it contains, although I will admit that even I learned a thing or two!), but even so I think there’s something for almost every audio enthusiast in it. Given that it costs less than a new audio component—even many accessories—and especially considering Smith’s 90-day money back satisfaction guarantee, a recommendation for *Get Better Sound* is almost mandatory! To further sweeten the deal, purchasers of *Get Better Sound* receive a free subscription to Smith’s quarterly newsletter, *Quarter Notes*. (As we go to press, Smith is on the cusp of releasing a companion DVD.

We’ll try to obtain a copy for review in a later issue.)

## **Get Better Sound**

By Jim Smith

Quarter Note Press, 2008

xxii + 293 pages, \$44.50 (paperback),

\$64.50 (hardback)

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[www.getbettersound.com](http://www.getbettersound.com)

# Clearaudio Virtuoso Wood

## MM Cartridge

By Rich Teer

Imported into North America by Musical Surroundings, Clearaudio is a German specialising in analogue audio. They design and make turntables, tonearms, MM and MC cartridges, phono stages, record cleaning machines, and other accessories. It is one of their MM cartridges that we're taking a listen to in this review.

### Technical Description

The Virtuoso Wood is the top-but-one model in Clearaudio's range of MM cartridges. It has a body made from wood (hence the "Wood" in the model name), an aluminum cantilever, and an elliptical diamond stylus. The packaging contains mounting hardware (aluminum and nylon bolts), and a screw driver.

As is typical with MM cartridges, the recommended loading is 47 k $\Omega$  and its

output is high enough to be usable with any MM phono stage.



### Setup and Listening

Installing the Virtuoso Wood into my Forsell Air Reference's air bearing tonearm had good points and bad. A good point was the fact that the Virtuoso Wood has holes that are tapped to accept the mounting bolts (something I wish all cartridges manufacturers would do!). One quibble I have with the Virtuoso Wood is its connection pins: they seem to be rather thicker than usual, making attaching the delicate tonearm leads more tricky than it already is. Admittedly, this will be a one-off issue for most people, but spare a thought for habitual cartridge swappers and us reviewers!

After using the cartridge for a couple of dozen hours, I double checked the alignment and tracking weight (I used the recommended 2.2 g), and started my critical listening.

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As usual, the first record I listened to was Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001]. My first impression was that although there was some grain and grit which ultimately limited the resolution of the information that could be extracted from the record's groove, low level details were fine.

Bass reproduction is good. It has the right amount of warmth, without being over bloated or "one note", and is reasonably deep and tuneful. That said, the bass dynamics are mildly compressed, so certain sounds (like, for example, 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]) don't have quite the weight they should. Similarly, the foot stomping part in Ladysmith Black Mambazo's *Who Were You Talking to* (from their 1987 album, *Shaka Zulu* [WEA 925 582-1]) has a bit less intensity than is on the recording.

The midrange is also very satisfactory. Male voices, like those of the members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, are well reproduced (*Rain, Rain, Beautiful Rain* and *Who Were You Talking to* (both on the previously cited *Shaka Zulu*) are good examples of this). Instruments also have the right tone colour, something which (to me) is critical in an audio component. Although not completely convincing, the Virtuoso Wood's midrange reproduction does a reasonable job of transporting the listener to the recording venue.

That said, the mids do seem to be down just a touch. This is most apparent on brass instruments, like those on *Lt. Kije*, but I don't think it is a very serious shortcoming.

As for the reproduction of the higher frequencies—i.e., the treble—the Virtuoso Wood does well here too. One can hear some of the air surrounding the instruments as they play, although not all of the air is apparent: with the same test tracks, I can hear more air around instruments with my reference Parnassus, for example. Still, some air is better than none, so perhaps I'm being too harsh.

Instruments like bells and triangles don't quite have enough sparkle, but again this is a pretty minor short coming. It's not as if the Virtuoso Wood sounds like a cloth has been placed over one's

speakers; the effect I'm describing is much less insidious than that!

The sound stage presented by the Virtuoso Wood is wide and deep. Imaging within the sound stage is good, even with multiple simultaneous sources. For example, the positions of the individual singers in Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the members of the Nasal Chorus in *Tubular Bells* can be determined, albeit with a little concentration. (In other words, the information is there, but one has to go looking for it.)

Another positive attribute the Virtuoso Wood has is its ability to maintain its composure through big, complex musical passages. Weaker cartridges tend to coalesce busy passages into one congealed aural blob, making it harder—if not impossible—to hear the individual instruments in their own place.

## Verdict

I must admit that at this price point and above, I wouldn't usually consider an MM cartridge, opting instead for an MC cartridge. That being said, I think the Virtuoso Wood does an admirable job and performs well, and, being an MM cartridge, allows the potential purchaser to keep their current phono stage, which is especially important if

it is MM-only. No, it isn't perfect (what component is?), but its reasonably strong performance makes the Virtuoso Wood worthy of serious consideration if you are in the market for a cartridge at or around the \$875 price point.

## Specifications

**Description** Moving magnet cartridge.

**Frequency response** 20-20,000 Hz.

**Output voltage** 3.6 mV.

**Channel separation** > 30 dB.

**Channel balance** ≤ 0.2 dB.

**Compliance** 15 (x 10<sup>-6</sup> cm/dyne).

**Stylus size** 5 x 80 micrometres.

**Recommended loading** 47 kΩ.

**Tracking force** 2.0-2.5 g.

**Recommended tracking force** 2.2 g.

**Weight** 10.0 g.

**Serial number of unit reviewed** Not noted.

**Price** \$875.

**Warranty** Two years non-transferable.

## Musical Surroundings

5662 Shattuck Avenue

Oakland, CA 94609

USA

(510) 547-5006

[www.musicalsurrroundings.com](http://www.musicalsurrroundings.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.

# Music Hall Mat

## Cork Turntable Mat

By Rich Teer

I don't mind admitting it: I am an audio sceptic, albeit an open-minded one. By this I mean that although I'm not prepared to accept at face value many of the audio theories and products that have been espoused by various manufacturers, I am more than willing to give them a fair chance. Such has been my approach to topics such as different interconnect and speaker cables, speaker bi-wiring, and isolation devices. In all of these cases I'd read about the claimed improvements they could bring, but was sceptical that they would work or would be audible in my system (which in those days was pretty humble!).

But the cost of trying them out

was well within my very limited means, so try them I did and in every case I heard a difference. The fact that these differences were repeatable, coupled with my expectation that they wouldn't work, rules out any placebo effect.

Because I've heard the differences with my own ears, such concepts are no longer a contentious issue with me. Of course, there are many other tweaks and ideas out there in audio land that I haven't yet tried, so when Music Hall's Leland Leard offered me the opportunity to try out one of their cork turntable mats, I couldn't refuse!

### Technical Description

With the Music Hall Mat, there's not much to describe. It is a thin (about 0.5 mm thick) cork disc, approximately the same size as a record. Around the circumference of the cork disc, about 1 cm from the edge, are twelve smaller cork discs, each of which is about 1 mm thick and 13 mm in diameter. A separate cork disc, about the same size as a record label and the same thickness as the main mat, is supplied to support the centre of the record. This smaller disc is removable to facilitate use with records whose labels are thicker than usual.

The mat can be used with your turntable's clamp (if it has one), but Music Hall prefer that it be used without, so as to decouple the record from the turntable.

The mat comes in an antistatic record sleeve, which is itself packed in a sturdy corrugated cardboard box.



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## Use and Listening

Using the Music Hall Mat is simplicity itself: one just places the mat on the platter (label side up), places the smaller disc (assuming the record label's thickness doesn't prohibit it) on top, and finally puts on a record.

I used the Marantz TT-15S1 we reviewed in Issue 3 for this test (I decided that my Forsell Air Reference would be an inappropriate match because it is designed to be used without a mat), and only had time for a relatively brief test before the Marantz had to be returned. After trying a few records, I finally settled on using disc one of Classic Records' Clarity version of the *Casino Royale* soundtrack [Colgems COSO 5005-45].

When I used the Music Hall Mat, the main thing that struck me was the improvement in the mids and highs. Specifically, they seemed a touch more prominent, and low level details were improved. I'll be honest and say that beyond that I'd be hard pressed to describe any differences—

not necessarily because there aren't any, but because I couldn't pin them down in the limited time I had to test.

The good news is that I couldn't hear any negative effects of using the mat. Apart from the improvement in low level details I mentioned previously, the TT-15S1's basic sonic signature was not adversely effected.

## Verdict

I must admit I was mildly surprised to discover that a turntable mat can have an affect on the sound, but thinking about it more it only makes sense. The platter (and anything on it) is in direct contact with the record, so it's not unreasonable that a mat would affect the sound quality. Given the mild improvement in the mids, and bearing in mind the reasonable price, I'd say this is one accessory that's worth trying!

## Specifications

**Description** Cork turntable platter mat.

**Price** \$50.

**Warranty** One year non-transferable.

### Music Hall

108 Station Road

Great Neck, NY 11023

USA

(516) 487-3663

[www.musicchallaudio.com](http://www.musicchallaudio.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.

# Record Reviews

By Vinylphile Staff



## Tubeway Army + Gary Numan

78/79

Vinyl 180 (four 33-RPM 180g LPs)

VIN180LP027

When I was a kid, my dad was a partner in a company that supplied pubs and clubs with pool tables, arcade games, and juke boxes. One of the perks I enjoyed (in addition to numerous hours playing arcade games for free: tremble at the feet of my *Gorf* prowess!) was getting free singles as they rotated off of jukeboxes. I can't remember the actual single in question, but I do remember it coming home in an unrelated picture sleeve of this zombie-looking guy with bleached white hair. Intrigued, I asked my dad for a copy of the single to which the sleeve belonged. A few days later, he brought a copy home. I listened to it and loved it. The single was, of course, *Are "Friends" Electric* by post-punk synth band Tubeway Army, fronted by Gary Numan.

I've been a fan ever since but back in those days I could rarely afford to buy LPs, so until recently most of my copies of the early Numan records were used. Vinyl 180 reissued remastered versions of Tubeway Army's *Replicas* (the album from which *Are "Friends" Electric* was taken) and Numan's first solo album, *The Pleasure Principle*. In the summer of 2010 Vinyl 180 released *78/79*, a boxed set containing these two albums plus Tubeway Army's eponymously-titled debut and disc of demos (which was released in 1984 as *The Plan*). Like the original issue, *Tubeway Army* is pressed on blue vinyl and features the original cover.

The packaging, then, is first rate. Sonically, these records are pretty good (considering their vintage and the genre), and they sound about as good as they're going to. In other words, they're not audiophile spectaculars by any stretch of the imagination, but I've heard worse. Enthusiastically recommend for it's musical content and pretty good sound quality, there's just one catch: although *Replicas* and *The Pleasure Principle* are generally available, the boxed set is a very limited edition of only 500 copies. If you're even remotely interested in this, grab a copy while you still can... **Rich Teer**



## Frank Sinatra

### *Sinatra at the Sands*

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab/Reprise Records (two 33-RPM 180g LPs)  
MFSL 2-332

Francis Albert Sinatra was born on December 12, 1915 and got his first break in 1935, although his tenure as a singer with Harry James in 1939 and then Tommy Dorsey a year or so later really brought him to the forefront of American music. Surprisingly, it wasn't until 1946 when his first album *The Voice of Sinatra* was released on Columbia Records. Even more surprising to me was, he had never released a live record, prior to the 1966 release of *Sinatra at the Sands*, some 26 years later. I never heard the original Reprise pressing of this album, so I was doubly excited to get a hold of the Mobile Fidelity re-issue.

Pressed on gorgeously quiet 180 grams of virgin vinyl, and half-speed mastered from the original analogue tapes by Rob

Loverde, this two LP set is a luxurious representation of the original release. Side one starts off in typical Vegas fashion with the obligatory introduction by the announcer and Count Basie's quick up-tempo horn section. Frank gets right into the groove with *Come Fly With Me* and completes the six-song side with the beautifully voiced *One For My Baby*. Things really shine with side two and the wonderful inclusion of *The Tea Break*, a rather lengthy monologue that is really endearing to listen to and culminates with his brilliant interpretation of *You Make Me Feel So Young*. I don't mind saying that side two is my favourite to listen to and revel in. It's that good. On side three Count Basie starts off with a jazz instrumental rendition of *All of Me* and Frank keeps the tempo low as he continues the side with *September of My Tears*. The other songs from *Get Me to the Church On Time*, *It Was A Very Good Year*, and *Don't Worry About Me* didn't really capture my attention or interest, although the finishing Count Basie instrumental of *Makin' Whoopie* was a delight for its lingering swinging and somewhat sensual appeal. The last side of this two LP set includes the beautiful *Angel Eyes* (track 2) and ends with *My Kind of Town*.

It is clear that Frank Sinatra had a great time performing these songs while at the Sands during the January/February period in 1966 these songs were taken from. I never fully appreciated the talent that singers like Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Dean Martin and others had during my coming of age to the music scene in the sixties, and I will gladly admit that I was grossly mistaken. Singers, true singers, like Frank Sinatra are a rare breed and they should not be forgotten. Maybe you haven't thought of introducing them into your repertoire just yet, but I encourage you to have a listen to this wonderful interpretation of beautifully written songs by an artist whose voice will never be duplicated. Smooth baby, smooth! **John Adrian Spijkers**



### **Massive Attack**

#### *Collected*

Virgin Records (three 33-RPM 180g LPs)

V3017

Eighteen months or so ago I was in my local friendly audio dealer, The Hifi Attic, for a social visit as much as anything. Some music was playing in the background on CD, so I didn't pay it much heed. Then I heard a familiar heart-like drum beat and piano bass chords, and it only took me a couple of seconds to recognise the music as being the main theme to TV's medical drama, *House* (a show I like and whose music I also like). I asked Lyle, the store's owner, for the name of the track and artist: it turns out the track was *Teardrop* from (in this particular instance) Massive Attack's 14-track compilation album, *Collected*. *Teardrop* was originally from Massive Attack's third album, *Mezzanine*.

I didn't think a new "pop" record would be available on vinyl, so *Collected* has

the dubious distinction of being one of only a couple of CDs I've bought in the last decade. Fast forward a year or so, and I spot *Collected*—on vinyl—on another friend's shelf, so I set about looking for a copy (I prefer to buy my records new if at all possible; although one can find some otherwise unobtainable music by buying used, I prefer not to rely on sellers' sometimes dubious rating schemes, unless I can inspect the record personally prior to purchase). A couple of months ago, I finally found a new copy and bought it.

The music's genre is trip hop, which I must admit isn't usually my cup of tea. The aforementioned *Teardrop* aside, I personally would relegate the album to the "background music" pile, but as I say in another review: it really doesn't matter what I think! All that matters is whether you like the music!

From a sound quality point of view, the album is a typical well-polished records (fortunately, without being overly compressed). The fact that the album is spread out over size sides no doubt helps here, and I am glad that Virgin chose this route rather the obvious, sound quality-limiting alternative. At the very least, this album is worth a listen.

**RT**



### **Steely Dan**

#### *Aja*

Cisco Music/Geffen Records (33-RPM 180g LP)

CLP-1006

Originally released in 1977, *Aja* is the sixth (and best selling) album released by jazz-rock band Steely Dan. In the following year, the album won the Grammy Award for the Best Engineered Non-Classical Recording. In addition to the core members of Steely Dan (Donald Fagin and Walter Becker), *Aja* features numerous session musicians including Steve Gadd, Lee Ritenour, and Wayne Shorter.

I must admit that I bought this album purely on its reputation for having great sound quality—a reputation that is well earned, and, given that Fagin and Becker are renown for their almost obsessive perfectionism, not surprising. I don't know how it compares to the original, but the sound quality on Cisco's version is fantastic! Musically, the album is still

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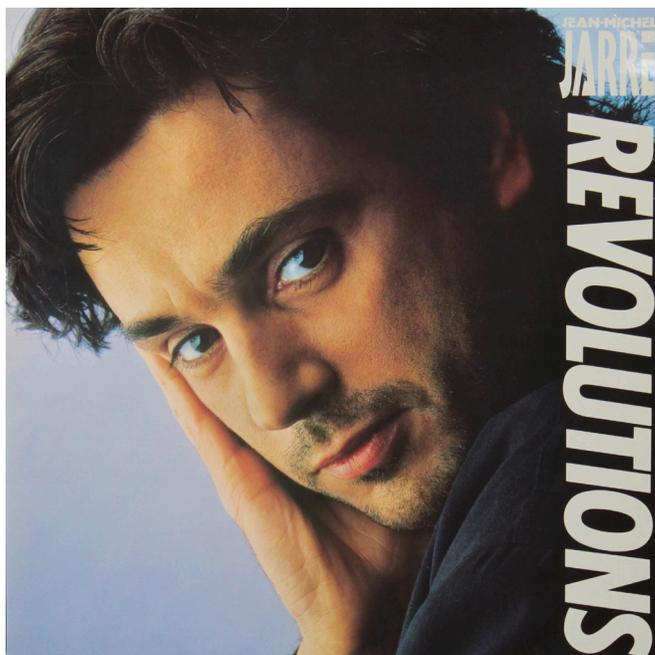
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growing on me, although I recognised the opening song on side 2, *Peg*, once it started playing.

Given that the sound quality and packaging are first rate, a recommendation is almost mandatory, especially if jazz fusion is a genre that you like or are interested in exploring. **RT**



**Jean-Michel Jarre**

*Revolutions*

Polydor (33-RPM LP)

837 098-1

*Revolutions* is French synthesist Jean-Michel Jarre's sixth studio album, and was originally released in 1988. To coincide with the launch of the album, Jarre put on a concert in London's Royal Victoria Docks, called *Destination Docklands*. I was fortunate enough to be one of the approximately 100,000 people in attendance at that concert, and it was fantastic!

With a slightly more "industrial" feel than his previous albums, *Revolutions* is a blend genres including electronica, light guitar pop (e.g., the track featuring The Shadows' Hank Marvin on guitar, *London Kid*), and ethnic electro jazz. The first side consists of a four part piece called *Industrial Revolution*, and the aforementioned *London Kid*. Some of the sound effects on this side (especially one that sounds like a steam

engine) will give your bass system a good workout!

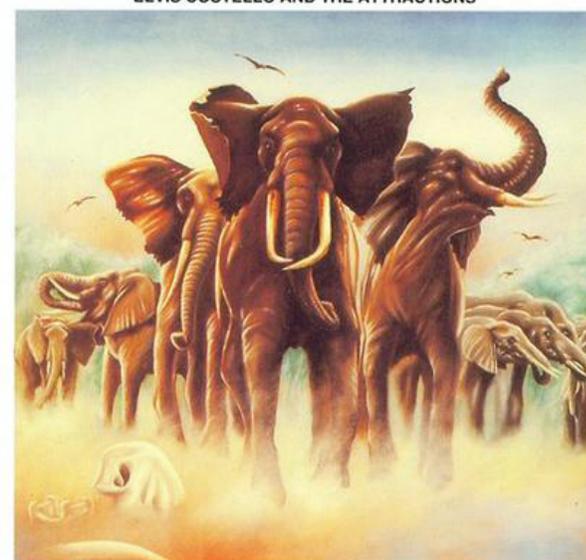
The second side consists of five tracks, including *September*, a tribute to Dulcie September, a South African dedicated to the fight against apartheid who was assassinated in Paris on March 29, 1988.

The sound quality is very good and the music is great. Highly recommended!

**RT**

ORIGINAL MASTER RECORDING™

ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE ATTRACTIONS



*Armed Forces*

**Elvis Costello and the Attractions**

*Armed Forces*

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

MFSL 1-331

Produced by Nick Lowe and originally released in 1979, *Armed Forces* is Elvis Costello's third album, and the first on which The Attractions got a credit on the cover. There are twelve tracks on the record, including the two singles, *Accidents Will Happen* and *Oliver's Army*. The American track list is used, substituting Nick Lowe's (*What's So Funny 'Bout*) *Peace, Love, and Understanding for Sunday's Best* (which is a shame because the latter is nice, somewhat quirky, track whose melody reminds me a bit of *Waltzinblack* by The Stranglers).

Mobile Fidelity have done their usual bang-up job on this release: the sound quality is about as good as it's going to get (it's an appreciable step up from my original version of *Armed Forces*,

on Radar Records), and the packaging is first rate (heavy cardboard gatefold sleeve, etc.).

The good sound quality, silent surfaces, and great packaging make this a mandatory purchase for Elvis Costello fans, and well worth a listen if you're not. **RT**



### **Burt Bacharach**

#### *Casino Royale*

Classic Records/Colgems (four single-sided 45-RPM 200g LPs)

COSO 5005-45

Not to be confused with the 2006 movie starring Daniel Craig, the 1966 version of *Casino Royale* (of which this album is the original soundtrack) was a comedic spoof starring Peter Sellers, Ursula Andress (who played opposite Sean Connery in the first James Bond movie, *Dr. No*), and David Niven. Although it would have been many years ago, I know I've seen at least some of the movie because when I started reading about the soundtrack in audiophile circles many moons ago, I could remember some of the music.

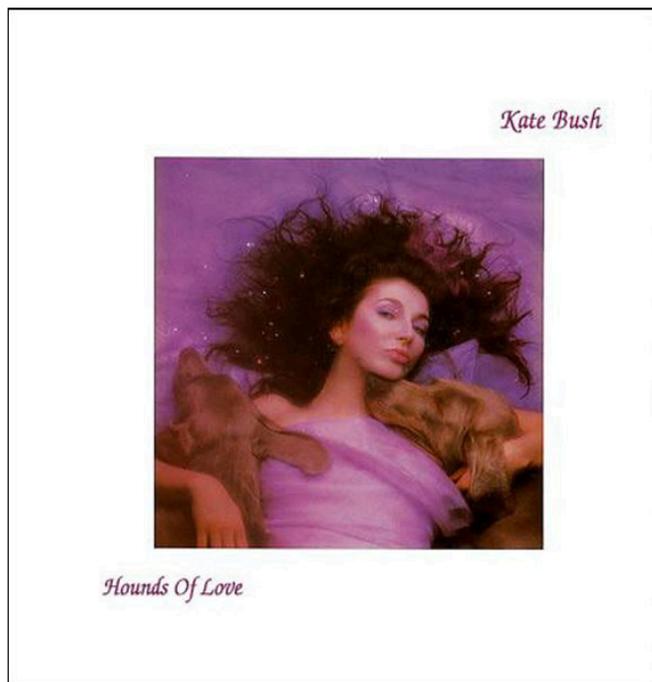
The soundtrack grew in its notoriety because it was enthusiastically recommended by *The Absolute Sound's* Harry Pearson for its great sound quality, especially Dusty Springfield's *The Look of Love*. As a result, the price

rose beyond my means. Much more recently, Classic Records released *The Look of Love* as a double sided 12" single, cut at 33-RPM on one side and 45-RPM on the other. I bought that and liked it, so when I saw that the whole soundtrack was available on Classic's Clarity vinyl, I grabbed a copy.

The album's reputation for great sound quality is well-deserved. When listening to *The Look of Love*, it's hard not to believe that Dusty Springfield isn't right there in the room, giving the listener a private performance! The other tracks on the record are also very likeable.

With these Clarity releases, Classic seems to have shaken their quality control issue of the past. All four records in my set were as flat as a pancake with silent surfaces. The packaging is first class too, with the four records housed in a sturdy cardboard box, protected by bubble wrap.

Very highly recommended, but beware: since Classic's purchase by Acoustic Sounds, the price of this set (and other Classic titles) has risen dramatically. **RT**



### Kate Bush

*Hounds of Love*

Audio Fidelity/EMI Records (33-RPM 180g LP)

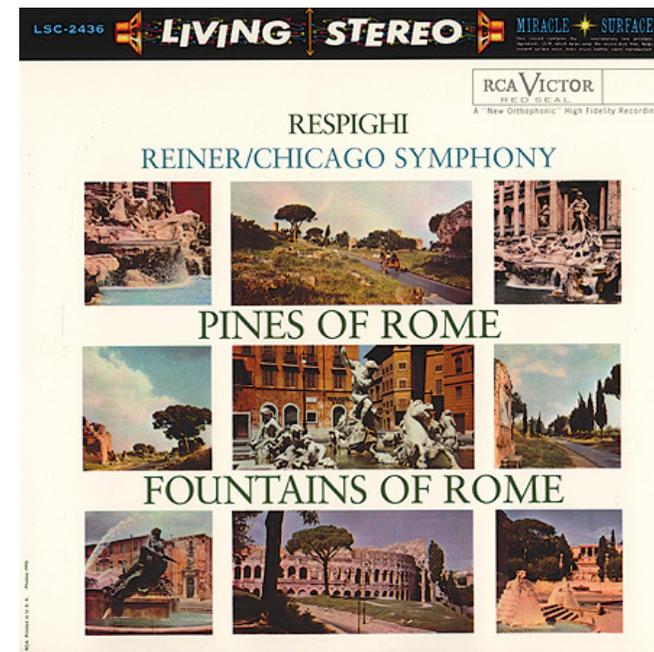
AFZLP-087

Catherine “Kate” Bush was born on July 30, 1958 and her parents and siblings were each involved in some kind of artistic endeavour, which makes it no surprise that she followed in their footsteps. She released her first album, *The Kick Inside*, in 1978, at the still very tender age of 19, and became an immediate hit in her native England. Headstrong, and possessed with the desire to keep control of her own destiny, she set up her own publishing and management company after her displeasure of the marketing techniques used for her follow-up album *Lionheart*. She released two more albums (*Never for Ever* and *The Dreaming*) after *Lionheart*, both of which she produced on her own.

Recorded in her private recording studio, *Hounds of Love* was released in 1985 and contains the hit songs *Cloudbusting* and *Running Up That Hill*. It is to date her most successful album worldwide. As a huge fan of Ms. Bush, I have the general release pressing of this LP bought on day one, but this remastered version (on a purplish marbled-coloured disc of excellently pressed vinyl) is a joy to behold and listen to. It is super quiet with not an anomaly to be heard, and the dynamic range is as good as anything I have heard. Kate’s voice spans many octaves within the voicing spectrum, and not once did I hear a dilution of her vocal range. The midrange is clear and precise (a key measurement for me), and there was relatively no roll-off on the upper end. It also presented a quick and accurate tempo within the lower frequencies. No muddiness here.

It’s a shame that we have only had the pleasure of seeing her release three more albums in the last 25 years (*The Sensual World*, *Red Shoes*, and *Aerial*), but it comes as no surprise, to me, for someone as dedicated and committed to producing material on her own terms.

**JAS**



**Fritz Reiner/Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

*Respighi: Pines of Rome*

Classic Records/RCA Victor (33-RPM 200g LP)

LSC-2436

This record actually contains two separate pieces of music—symphonic poems—written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Italian composer, Ottorino Respighi: *Pines of Rome* and *Fountains of Rome*. These two pieces, in addition to *Roman Festivals*, make up the “Roman Trilogy”.

*Pines of Rome* consists of four movements, each of which depicts the titular trees in different Roman locations at different times of the day. Similarly, each of *Fountains of Rome*’s four movements depicts a different Roman fountain at a different time of day.

Produced by Richard Mohr and originally recorded in 1960, the sound quality of Bernie Grundman’s remastering is wonderful. The organ, with some

sections using the 16' and 32' pitch, will certainly give your system a great bass workout! But this record isn't just an audiophile spectacular: the music is engaging and likeable too.

A flat, thick pressing, with quiet surfaces and great sound quality and packaging make this record an easy recommendation. **RT**



### **Chicago**

*Chicago*

Rhino Entertainment (two 33-RPM 180g LPs)

R1 76172

Although its title might suggest that it is an eponymously-titled debut album, *Chicago* is actually the group's second album, hence it is sometimes referred to as *Chicago II*. It was originally released on Columbia Records in 1970 and consists of 23 tracks, including the singles *Make Me Smile*, *Colour My World*, and my personal favourite track on the album, *25 or 6 to 4*.

The sound quality is surprisingly good: not an audiophile spectacular, but pretty good for a commercial recording of this vintage. As a side note, Columbia was very interested in quadraphonic records at the time, so *Chicago* was available in this format.

The style of music on this album is jazz fusion, a genre I'm still only beginning

to appreciate. So apart from the aforementioned *25 or 6 to 4* and one or two other tracks, I find the music a little bit inaccessible (although given its RIAA Platinum certification, I may well be in the minority here!). But for most people what I think of the music doesn't matter: you either like or you don't. Recommended from a purely sonic point of view, this is one of the few records in my collection with which I have musical reservations... **RT**



### **Alison Krauss + Union Station**

#### *Live*

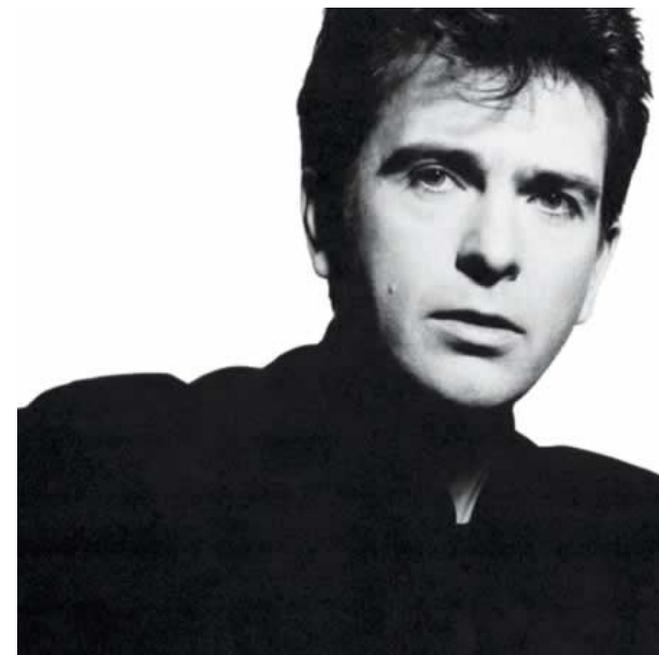
Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab/Rounder Records (three 33-RPM 180g LPs)  
MFSL 3-281

One of the great things about music is the great diversity of genres. Of course, not everyone likes every style, but sometimes a bit of experimentation outside of one's normal comfort zone can yield great dividends. A case in point for me is *Live*, Alison Krauss and Union Station's eleventh (and first live) album, originally released in 2002. I'd heard good thing about the Mobile Fidelity version of this record, so when I saw it on a recent birthday record buying trip, I decided to give it a try.

I had no idea what the musical style was, so it gave me pause when I opened the package and realised it was bluegrass. But I thought nothing ventured nothing gained, and played the first record. And you know what? I liked it! The other two records in the set are just as good.

Consisting of 25 songs spread over the three discs, the sound quality is very good (most of the tracks were recorded live at the Louisville Palace in April 2002). As we've come to expect with Mobile Fidelity, the packaging is first rate: the three records are presented in a nicely printed cardboard box, and a detailed program guide printed on heavy glossy paper completes the set.

For great music and sound quality, *Live* is an easy recommendation! **RT**



### **Peter Gabriel**

#### *So*

Classic Records/Real World Records (four single-sided 45-RPM 200g LPs)  
PG 7-45

Originally released in 1986, *So* is Peter Gabriel's fifth studio album, and the first to officially have a title (all of his previous studio albums were simply titled *Peter Gabriel*). The album is most famous for the single, *Sledgehammer*, which was Gabriel's biggest North American hit (it ties with that distinction in his native UK with *Games Without Frontiers*, from his third studio album).

One of the advantages of being released in this four-sided format is that all of the tracks that Gabriel had intended to put on the album are present, in their intended order. The original vinyl release was absent the duet with Laurie Anderson, *This is the Picture (Excellent Birds)*, and *In Your Eyes* was moved from the end of side two to the beginning of that side.

The sound quality is as good as one would expect, and is a clear step up from my original Canadian pressing. Pressed on Classic Records' Clarity vinyl, the single-sided records are flat with silent surfaces. The music is great too, and the bass solo near the end of the duet with Kate Bush, *Don't Give Up*, is a good test of a system's bass resolving capability.

Packaged in the usual Clarity style, a heavy duty box with the contents protected by bubble wrap, this is another record that you should try to get your hands on. Doubly so if you're a Peter Gabriel fan! **RT**

# Back Page

**A**nd so we come to the end of another issue of Vinylphile, and the end of another year. My humblest, deepest thanks for reading and sharing the journey so far with us. Hang on to your hats 'cause we're only just getting started!

If you haven't already done so, why not join our low-traffic mailing list, or follow us on Twitter? The mailing list is used only for magazine announcements and your email address will not be shared with anyone.

In future issues of Vinylphile we'll have reviews of the Simaudio Moon 310LP and NAD PP 3i phono stages, the Spin-Clearn record washer, Nordost Norse Links, and of course more vinyl record reviews.

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