

# VINYL LP WHILE

June 2011 Issue 6

The digizine for discerning music lovers



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# Contents

## Features

**5**    **Editorial**

**6**    **Dealer Spotlight**

We visit Montreal's Coup de Foudre Audio Video, a high-end showroom with a surprise bonus!

*By Rich Teer*

**16**    **Annie's Audio Adventures**

Annie has a listen to High Resolution Technologies' iStreamer, an affordable external DAC for your iDevice.

*By Annie St. Jean*

**33**    **Final Words**

**33**    **Advertisers Index**

# Equipment Reviews

- 18** **Nordost Norse Series Bi-Wire Jumpers**  
Looking for an affordable alternative to bi-wiring with expensive speaker cables? Nordost might have the answer.  
*By Rich Teer*
- 21** **The Complete Guide to High-End Audio**  
The latest edition of Robert Harley's seminal work is a worthwhile upgrade.  
*By Rich Teer*

# Record Reviews

- 24** **Record Reviews**  
Our regular look at records old and new.  
*By Vinylphile staff*



16

# Editorial



**H**appy birthday to us! It's hard to believe that a year has already passed since the publication of our first issue, yet here we are! In the past twelve months we've listened to some really great gear and even more great records. We've even been to a few audio shows where I've had the pleasure of meeting some of you. Somewhat related to that, we've had the opportunity to listen to some great music from independent artists, and give them some exposure which I hope has helped them sell a few records.

Next year we plan to do more of the same: more equipment reviews, more interviews, and of course more record reviews. Another thing that will remain the same is our dedication to stereo high-end (but not necessarily high-priced) audio. As much as we love movies and the convenience of digital streaming, we're more than happy to leave the reviewing of home theatre and multi-channel audio equipment to our friends in other publications.

Talking of the mag's contents, here's your chance to help shape what

Vinylphile looks like. What do you like, and what do you dislike? Send us an email with your thoughts, or follow us on Twitter!

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank every one of you for reading Vinylphile; our friends and colleagues in the industry for their help and encouragement; and last, but by no means least, our advertisers (without whom bills couldn't be paid!).

And now for something completely different: as we put this issue to bed, The Home Entertainment Show in Newport is about to start. We had intended to attend, but life has its way of interrupting the best plans at times! Hopefully next year we'll be there, so until then, enjoy the show!

*Rich*

# Dealer Spotlight

## Coup de Foudre Audio Video

By Rich Teer

Earlier this year I was in Montreal for the Salon Son & Image (SSI) show. While I was there I had the opportunity to meet with a few of high-end audio store owners and audiophiles not in the audio industry. One of the dealers I visited was Coup de Foudre Audio Video, just a few blocks from the hotel in which the SSI show was held.

The store has the usual show room floor and dedicated demonstration suites (three of the latter), but what makes Coup de Foudre possibly unique—and

especially interesting to a gear head like me—is that the store is also home to a well-equipped multitrack recording studio owned by much-in-demand audio engineer (and Coup de Foudre co-owner) Graeme Humfrey! Packed with a large mixing console, 24-track 2” tape decks, and loads of ancillary processors, the studio was like an Aladdin’s cave for me.

Jennifer and Graeme are two of the most laid back and unassuming high-end store owners I can think of. There’s

not a trace of the snobbery that in some stores can sometimes make potential clients of entry-level gear feel unworthy. (People who know me know that I appreciate a great deal of informality; these guys are right up my alley!) But don’t let their appearance and easy-going nature fool you: these guys are serious about providing the best high-end audio experience for their customers, and they know their stuff.



After listening to some music in one of their dedicated audio rooms and a tour of their impressive facility, I sat down for a chat with Coup de Foudre's co-owner and store manager, Jennifer Cytrynbaum.

receptionist and at the time Graeme was the high-end manager. The Audio Centre on Sherbrook Street was one of the longest-standing, most respected shops in town, and at that time he had just received Wilson [Audio] and he had

he came out and said, "Would you help me move these speakers?". He looked at me sort of sarcastically because I was a receptionist, and I helped him move these 300 pound pair of speakers without breaking a sweat. I think that was his "She's not a wimp" moment, and was the first part of our relationship.



The mixing console and some of the outboard processors in Coup de Foudre's studio.

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

My background is not actually from the world of music, although I am a musician and guitar player. I'm a self-taught, punk rock, power chord player, and I'm a fan of music and have been for ever. My industry history is not technical by any means or from the world of hi-fi at all. I started in this business back in 1995, working at the Audio Centre. I started there as a

a high-end room of which he often kept the door locked. There was a volume of calls for the high-end department and I kept having to run from the reception to Graeme's room to knock on the door and handle his clients while he was demoing. One night he was having a private event for Wilson speakers, and we were alone in the store. It was closing time, I was closing for cash, and he was preparing for this evening demo. There was a 300 pound pair of speakers that needed to be moved and

The second part of the relationship was him allowing me into the high-end room. He would say things like, "This room is not for little girls," and would close the door in my face. But because I was handling all of his important clients, I stepped in to the role of the assistant to the high-end. When Audio Centre left Sherbrook Street and expanded into Cavendish, where they had a much larger floor space, I parlayed myself into the position of assistant to the high-end in the true sense of the word, where I was not only negotiating with Graeme's clients, but I was also dealing with the high-end suppliers at that point, helping to bring gear in, and making sure that gear was sent in a timely fashion to his clients, and following up with birthday gifts and little stuffed teddy bears to keep them placated between waits for gear. So I've been a part of this business for a while.

### **Where did you get your love of hi-fi?**

My brothers! When I was a kid, I had two older brothers who were really heavily into vinyl and they had hundreds of albums. I'm five or six years younger than them, so I would sneak in and listen

to the 1960s and 1970s rock music. They had guitars, they were fanatic listeners, and they would test me on my knowledge of the albums. So might show me an album cover and I needed to know who the artist was. They might play a piece of a song and insist that I know who the band was, and these would give me privileges, to be able to sit in the room and listen to them. I remember them locking themselves in the basement, listening to Steely Dan when that album came out, for about three weeks straight, analysing every section of the tunes. Tons of Jimmy Hendrix and The Doors, so in the 1970s, coming up in this I had an appreciation for not just the music of the time, but also the gear. I was not allowed to touch the arm on the turntable, so this is a bit of a vengeance here, where now I have my crazy sound systems where, if my brother comes in, I say to him, "You can't touch that!", the way he used to say to me when I was a kid, and now I have my own vinyl shop where I can pick the albums that are things I've been fond of my whole life, in 180g or 200g. Even now, with my love of punk rock, I think I've got a 200g Ramones album, Buzzcocks, and it says right across the album somewhere in here in these racks, "Do not touch, do not open". They're my personal albums, so I guess I've always been a fan of the music and the gear.

**Revenge is best served cold when it comes to brothers, right?**

[Laughs] Yes it is!

**So how did you start Coup de Foudre?**

When Graeme left Audio Centre he went back to recording and I managed a music school for a couple of years. I was the headmistress of a private music school running 300 students, dozens of teachers. We were off in our own corners doing our own thing, and at some point we got a call from a shop in New York and Graeme was going to be picked out to work in a store in Manhattan. We began the process of negotiations for that, which fell apart at the eleventh hour due to an immigration issue. I'm an American citizen and I was in the deal. The two of us would go, he was going to work in Manhattan, we were looking for a place in Brooklyn, and the idea folded. When we left the Audio Centre business we sort of thought, "OK, we've kind of burned our interest in being a part of the commercial world of hi-fi," which was becoming corrupt. There were a lot of big box stores, the politics weren't great, and we had a real specialised interest in what we were doing. That high-end room and the high-end department was its own entity, and it didn't really fit into the world of what was happening in the Montreal hi-fi scene. Things had become stagnant, we were frustrated...

When the deal fell through in New York, Graeme and I sort of looked at each

other and said, "Well, why don't we just do this for ourselves?", and within 72 hours we put in a couple of phone calls to old associates in the US and in Canada, and the Vegas show [CES] was coming up. We decided maybe a week before that show that we were going to Vegas and that we were going to open up our own store. We had no appointments booked with any of our suppliers, we had no advance warning to anybody that we were going to be there, and through the chain of our network of connections, within about five days we were booked solid with all the top brands in the country. We were booked in to see Avalon, DeVore, and a bunch of other brands. We made a list of 20 of the brands we wanted to see, it's still in a notebook that I have now, and we just walked through the show and checked every one of them off. We had a store in theory before we had a physical location, and our first hi-fi show. People were caught completely off guard that we were back in the business, so when we walked into Las Vegas, all heads turned. They said, "Holy shit, Graeme is back. Jennifer and Graeme as a team, Graeme being the musician, the talent, the engineer, the ears, the industry sales guy, paired with Jennifer's business sense, this is gonna be a major wave in Montreal. Things are going to happen now that haven't happened in the past." So there was a lot of ripple effect in there. We did the hi-fi show here in town before having a store! We confirmed with our suppliers

that we were going to do the first show without a showroom. Avalon Acoustics sent us a pair of Eidolon Diamonds in the dead of winter. It was just prior to spring, there was a snow storm, Graeme and I drove in our car to pick up the speakers at the airport, we brought them into the house to break them in and invited friends to come and listen. We broke them in in our living room. Nordost were sending us cables, there was all kinds of support prior to getting to the show, and the day of the show the room was empty except for the speakers and a few little things that we had, and all of our suppliers showed with gear. Within about two hours the room was stocked! I've got pictures of that first show, we had a banner in the window, we had no address, our logo wasn't even complete, and all of our suppliers came and showed us massive support, everybody showed up.

**Isn't it amazing when people do that and help you out?**

Oh yeah! It was absurd; in this building the second floor was our listening room while the construction

was going on. We had clients come in, listen, and purchase loudspeakers from us before we ever had a showroom! So yeah, it was pretty good. Magic.



**DaVore Fidelity speaker.**

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

It's absolutely imperative. In fact, it's not just the relationships with the manufacturers, but the understanding of the entire production and distribution process, because if I'm here representing a product to my client who has a relationship with me, I need to be able to back it 100% with my own loyalty to the brand, and if there's something wrong with the distribution chain where there is some corruption or there is some engineer that's been fired from the production line or there is a change in the distribution process where my geography is not protected, or the product is somehow in flux, then I can't adequately represent the product to my client and so because Graeme knows the history of the industry so well and he's been in it for so long, before we ever start a relationship with a manufacturer we are aware of the designers behind the

product, who is shipping it, who else in North America has the product so that

the brand has proper representation world wide, so that everyone stands in the same position when comes to the representation of the product because anything that someone else does with a product that I have on my floor ultimately effects how my clients feel about their purchase. In the high-end, it is absolutely necessary to understand who is behind the product that you're representing and not just the distributors but the manufacturers themselves, and even the designers behind the product.

From a political standpoint, there are issues that we have personally about how manufacturers represent their product at a certain price. So, if a product is mass manufactured and the philosophy of the company is to make more profits than it is to make great music, then I am uninterested in participating in a business relationship with them. The priority has to be the music above all else, or the film in the case of a video product., and that no expense is spared to the design and construction of a high quality product that I can back. Even from the entry-level products that I carry that may have a retail value of \$1,000, I need to know that I can call a telephone number and have a human being respond to my requests about a small home theatre amplifier because whoever is coming in to this store is spending their hard-earned money on my word that the product is worth something, so it needs to have either intrinsic value in terms of

the construction of the item, component parts, or quality of construction or quality of design. If not, then I'm a liar, and my \$1,000 product represents my \$100,000 product. I cannot have those two items inside my store and not have a relationship between them either by quality or by philosophy. And so the smaller products still need to reflect that overall idea that the music comes first and that a small DAC inside of a small CD player needs to be a good DAC, and that the chassis cannot just contain a circuit board with a bunch of chips. It needs to contain component parts that have value, and have value over time so that when you leave here, the thing that you just bought maintains its value over time either by pleasure because you enjoy it so much over a period of years, or because in the marketplace it is respected as an item that contains some sort of quality of design or construction. That is hugely important to me.

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

In the hi-fi world that we're in, a lot of people are in an evolution of systems, so even if you're a college kid that's buying your first system and you come in looking for a serious piece of hi-fi because you're a fan, I know that in ten years that client will be developing into a home, into a wife, into a family, and if they remain in this geography and they

are my client, I want to be able to cater to them through their whole musical evolution. They'll go from a CD player or little music serve to a basic turntable to a bigger turntable to a bigger pair of speakers to a... So a large portion of our business is in the trade in, trade up, used business. It's important to us that clients feel that they can have a relationship with us that spans their whole desire in the world of music, and yeah, we do a lot of that.

**I guess not many people come in and say "I've not got a system, here's a \$500,000 cheque". They usually tend to work their way up the audio ladder as they become more interested.**

Yeah, I would say about 30%. Oftentimes people will be ten years into their old system, and the value of it after ten years, while sentimental, is not necessarily marketable. So they have that great amp that they've loved for ever but I can't take it back on trade-in towards something new, or they're just ready to pass it along to their son, or it's going into the basement or into the country house, or somewhere else, and they want a brand new system from scratch that's based on something different to what they've been doing in the past.

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

Noooo. I think that the people that have... Look, Montreal is niche market, and the products that we sell are considered luxury goods, despite the fact that we have some items that are entry level and in a restricted budget range. In the last 18 months, I've noticed that the people who have been spending on systems under the \$5,000 mark have stopped spending

on those systems, and the people that are in that protected range, those that have disposable income and that have always had disposable income continue to spend in the \$10,000 and above category. So although it has slowed down considerably, like most people between 20% and 30%, we're seeing an increase in those clients in upwards of \$10,000 range, and they're

still buying big turntables, big amplifiers. They're investing in quality pieces that they know will last them a lifetime.

### **What are the benefits of buying from Coup de Foudre?**

Having a team as dedicated as we do here in this store, with the type of history that we have both from a sound



engineering standpoint with the studio, with the musicians, with qualified consultants that we have here, that would probably be the largest benefit. It's having a relationship with people you trust, understand what it is that we do, and help to satisfy your desires. That's our single most important goal. Aside from the fact that we have the world's finest brands, we are probably on of the top five in North America that's able to offer Wilson Audio, Avalon Acoustics, Shindo and Spectral and VTL in the same store, and have qualified the people to be able to help you experience that precious music or film I think is probably the greatest benefit that we have, and we show it to everybody. If you're coming in to buy a \$300 system, we'll still play you a \$300,000 system to say, "This is why we do this. This is the ultimate experience of being there for the moment of the creation of this sound experience, of transporting you to that day when Miles Davis and his band recorded that sound you get shivers as if you're in the best seat on the house."

### **So what are some of the brands that you represent?**

In the entry-level we do Cambridge, Arcam, JM Labs (the Focal series). Moving up from there we have VTL, Audio Physics, DeVore, Leben, Shindo, Clearaudio, Benz, Brinkmann in turntables. We do Wilson and Avalon in the high-end loudspeakers, Transparent cables, Cardas cables, Audiotorium 23

cables to go with the Shindo stuff. We are fans of the Nordost power cables, we do MIT to go with the Spectral. Actually, Spectral is our most recent addition, and in Canada we are the only Spectral dealer, and according to Rick Fryer, who is an extremely devoted engineer, we will be the only ones in Canada. It's been years since he's been in this marketplace, and certainly one of the most exclusive brands on the planet. Because he is an engineer and lover of music more than anything else, he gets to pick and choose where he puts his product, and how many pieces he builds in any given year, and so we are immensely flattered to be able to offer them.

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

I would say that it's about 50/50. The returning clients are serious buyers. They are in a portion of our business which is the stabilising factor and continuing growth for them, to satisfy their needs, and the new client coming in is someone who's heard from someone else that we are serious at what we do and that we can be counted on to take care of their needs, including a pipeline that is from designers and architects, and general contractors who work closely in people's homes and when people are trusting you in their home to develop a sound experience for their living you need to have a certain

amount of confidence. So it's important that word of mouth referrals and the associates—other people in industries that deal in people's homes—are able to say with some confidence, "Coup de Foudre will be able to help you realise your dream, your project." Even in a small sense, like speakers mounted in your kitchen ceiling, so that when you're preparing your dinner you can enjoy your music. That's wonderful for us.

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

We have a serious split in our clientele right now. I would say that a good 30% of our clients are listening to analogue sources, and the other portion who are moving away from CD and the whole frustrating experience of that medium are now moving towards media servers. Computers with mass storage, external drives, silent chassis, networking systems, wifi, transportable systems that make it easy for them to listen to a volume of music at an instant touch. So it's a split, but I think that oftentimes you'll have both in the same listening experience. You'll have the people that understand that they want their volume of music with it be in FLAC, AAC, or MP3, or whatever compressed format it is to be stored on hard drive to be able to access it anywhere, anytime, is wonderful. But to have a serious listening experience you

need to have your turntable. So while they're cooking their dinner they'll be listening to a playlist, and when they sit down with their cognac at the end of the meal, they want to hear their turntable. They want to sit down and drop the stylus and listen to an entire side of an album, rather than the schizophrenic experience of "next track, next track, next track", and they can truly relax at that point, and really listen to the music. That's another experience altogether, and usually we recommend the two in conjunction. We will say to people, "If you have your albums, hang on to them. Don't sell that collection that belongs to your brother, cousin, uncle, grandmother.

Keep those albums because there will be a time when you are ready to sit down and listen to and appreciate music in this way, and when you are, we'll be here to help you with the first used turntable at \$600 where you can listen to those scratchy 1980s albums that you've managed to hold on to, and

build yourself up to the point where every garage sale you pass you're pulling over to the side of the road to pick up that new piece of vinyl or hunting through the 'Net for that 180g pressing, Japanese pressing David Bowie, whatever it is you want to sit down and listen to, because there is no way to compare those two experiences".



We've listened to the top CD player, next to a similar price point turntable, and because of the way sound is, which is an organic wave form, your brain automatically responds to the naturalness, the micro frequencies and harmonics that exist in an analogue source, that impact emotionally

and psychologically in a completely different way. There is no disputing that fact, so even the best digital sources—and we're listening to EMM Labs, you know, Ed Meitner's XDS1, one of the top CD players on the planet at this moment—and it still cannot reproduce that thing which is an analogue sound wave, which your body feels, which your emotions respond to in ways that

are so subtle that it slays the digital domain. Unfortunately, it is what it is, and even in our studio, where we have a very sophisticated digital suite for mixing tunes, we take the digital, transfer it to tape in order to accomplish the type of dimension and weight and interest in the

sound before we put it back into digital to send it off to the mastering suite. And it is a massive difference, right from the types of transformers that are used in the analogue outboard part of the musical process, anybody who knows anything about music in general or the production of sound knows that

you cannot accomplish in zeros and ones, or squared off digital music, what a sound wave does. It's just physically impossible.

**Very eloquently put! I think for our readers, you're preaching to the choir, but it needs to be said. You host several after-hours events every year. What impact do they have on your business, especially from new customers?**

Oh man, we do all kinds of things! I've even shown wedding photographs in our theatre, at a private party of 20 people after a wedding party because they wanted to see them on a projector. I host studios that want to listen to their master tapes for the first time and need a high res system to detect defects in their master recordings. I host movie parties; on Halloween I have friends in here for a Scary Movie marathon, and we have popcorn and my socks are tucked into the chair at the end of the night. We host events with manufactures, parties of every type: video launches, album launches, and so on. How these things affect my client base in general: having the kind of space that I can receive people in great numbers and offer a venue of this type is great. Not all stores have this, but the grassroots, hands on, fact to face, casual, social contact with clients—even if it is around a tube amp, or around a musical event—is vastly important to the type of confidence and comfort that I feel in my marketplace. People come to us to hear the latest,

newest, most interesting. They share their experiences with us, and that affects a lot of things. As far as am I concerned, that's the finest way to market in your neighbourhood.

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

We listen, above all else. People send us stuff all the time, they want to be in the store and there are good brands out there that are recognised, that are a license to print money, and we have refused some of those because they just don't sound or look right. Aside from the listening process, by group agreement, we all listed, we all share our opinions about the system. It's not a hierarchy here where if Graeme says "It's good" we all say "Yes, Graeme, it's good". If someone in the team says it's not good and here's why, we have an open discussion and we listen to other people's opinions about what we should be listening to on the team. But basically, if it doesn't sound right, we can't have it. If it doesn't look right we can't sell it because we cannot lie. We're sort of built that way, and honesty is a good strength but may be shooting us in the foot from a business perspective.

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

There's no specific individual demo that I can cite, but some of my favourite demos usually involve someone who is discovering sound for the first time

where after 30 minutes of an explanation of what 5.1 is, or what two channel stereo really is all about, when I start up the system, whatever the system is, and the speakers begin to image and they say, "It's sounds like the singer is right there", and they point between the speakers, and they'll say things like, "Is it just that pair playing in the room?", it gives me a true sense of joy that what I am doing is somehow correct. Or the ability for a good film demo to completely evaporate the separation between the viewer and the picture and sound in front of them, and their defences are down and they're invited into that experience, it is grand: one of the grandest experiences.

Shitty demos for me are usually based on a technical failure, something that is missing, a cable that isn't there, a power cord that isn't right. One component, and because we are so exacting in the way we set up a demo, when we're scrambling to put together a demo and the rooms are full and there're people trying to get in to listen and you can't find that interconnect that you know you have to have in this system in order to make it sound how you want. Because we don't set up crappy demos with crappy anything, my heart starts to pump and I feel like I'm going to fail, like I will not be able to present the thing the way it should be presented and the panic sets in. The gear is always good, I know I can execute a good sound, but if there is even a minor missing detail in the set up of a system before I play it for

a client, it's disturbing to me. Or we're looking for a piece of demo material in our thousands of discs, and I know this client really loves this one artist and flipping through drawers looking for that piece so I can give them what it is they want hear, and I can't find it, those are the things that stop me from being able to execute. But in terms of us properly demoing a system, we usually nail it. The gear speaks for itself, we just need to be there to plug it in.

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

[Laughs] That's good! I'm not sure I should be mentioning all these brands, but I have a pair of ProAc Tablettes on a Maestro tube amp in the kitchen. I have DeVore Gibbon 8s in my living room with my Unison S2 tube amplifier. I have a custom Clearaudio turntable that was designed by Danny Lebreck here with a bamboo platter that was built from scratch for me with individual component parts of my choosing. And I have Era Sat 3 with a Sub 8 along with an Arcam Solo 2.1 theatre system with a Runco plasma television in my third room. I have a smaller Runco LCD as well, Tivoli radios, Canto, lots of little things, I have Shure extreme high-end headphones, I have a pair of Grado GS-1000s, I mean I have tons of gear and often times I'll switch stuff out, "OK I'm going to listen to this now, or I'm going

to listen to that now", but basically I'm tube analogue. Sometimes I'll plug in my iPod, sometimes I'll listen to digital files... That's pretty much it.

**Presumably you've become friends with many of your clients over the years?**

[Laughs] You know what, as a retailer, I don't really have time to maintain relationships that could be considered friendships in the true sense of the word. Friends spend time hanging out and doing things, but I suppose that my greatest friends are within this business because it's where I spend most of my time.

**What's next for Coup de Foudre?**

I guess in the month of July we'll be having another event in the store around the jazz festival, so at that time I'll be bringing in new Avalon speakers and doing the official launch of Spectral within Canada. That will be an event that I look forward to. Graeme's working on a bunch of mixing for some very great local Quebec producers, so there will be more work coming out of the studio, and I would like to evolve that part of our business into the world wide web and be able to offer high resolution recordings for purchase so that people can hear what we're doing in here, so I guess more of the same. More of the same!

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# Annie's Audio Adventures

## High Resolution Technologies iStreamer

By Annie St. Jean

Those who know me know that I will most certainly pay attention to something whose name starts with a lower case i, just in case it's from Apple. Even though the spell check is not impressed with me not capitalising the i, I like it! Having said that, the iStreamer is not made by Apple but by a company called High Resolution Technologies. They must know I'm not the only one who pays attention to the lower case i, because this product is designed for iPods, iPads and iPhones. (iSmile!)

So, what exactly is the iStreamer, you ask? Well, it's a little grayish-white device, hardly thicker than an iPhone, with rounded edges, that connects your iPhone to your sound system. No, it's not only a docking station! It's actually a DAC! (That means that it changes digital signals into analogue ones to make them sound better.) Funny thing is, it actually works beautifully! Know what else? Since it has the lower case i, it's also super easy to operate! I usually have to ask

hubby to plug in all the wires for me, for fear of blowing anything up, but I did this one all by myself, without blowing anything up! (iDid!)

Of course, hubby and I (no pun intended!) played our classic game where I close my eyes and he tries to trick me to see if I'll be able to tell



which device is being used. Since we couldn't use our testing CDs, we listened to classical music, as well as songs we know from the Internet stream. The opponents? Our Wadia 170 iTransport without a DAC, the Wadia with a DAC, and the iStreamer, all on the Marantz system (yes, we're still babysitting!!!). Granted, the Wadia plus DAC still

gives out the best sound. But to my great surprise, the iStreamer sounds way better than the Wadia without the DAC! Why such a great surprise? Well, because the Wadia usually retails around \$500 (CAD), whereas the iStreamer can be yours for around \$200.00! Sounds like a great graduation gift to me! Granted, I haven't listened to the iStreamer on a more affordable system, but I have a feeling it would sound good. Usually, components that can perform well with the big guys also perform well with the more modest ones. You just might not be able to listen to its full potential, that's all. My favourite thing to do with the iStreamer? Set it on CBC Classical, and enjoy the sound! By the way, I forgot to mention that the iStreamer also charges your iDevice as it plays! So, what's the verdict? iLike! A lot!

Happy listening!

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# Nordost Norse Series

## Bi-Wire Jumpers

By Rich Teer

It's not unusual for high-end speakers to come with two pairs of binding posts, sometimes more. If your chosen speakers are so equipped, you have a number of options when connecting them to your amp. You can use a single set of speaker cables, using the jumpers the speaker came with to connect the other set of terminals; you can use two sets of cables to bi-wire them; or you can compromise one set of cables by splitting it and have two sets of connectors on the speaker end.

Given the prices some speaker cables can command, buying another set to bi-wire your speakers might be prohibitively expensive, at least in the short term. Butchering your current cables to facilitate bi-wiring is probably also undesirable, so the only alternative is to use the supplied jumpers. The trouble is, in my experience, the factory-supplied jumpers tend to be less than optimal. Fortunately, the boffins at

Nordost have come up with a solution: the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers.

### Technical Details

Each Bi-Wire Jumper (there are four per pack, each about 20 cm in length) consists of a single 16 AWG strand of 99.99999% pure oxygen free copper (OFC), extruded over each of which is 60 microns of silver. Wrapped around the cable strand is a fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP) monofilament thread, wound in an open helix, and extruded over that is a clear FEP sleeve. FEP is very similar to PTFE (which is most well known by its DuPont brand name, Teflon), sharing its properties of low friction and chemical inertness. Each end of the jumper is terminated with either a low-mass Nordost Z plug or a gold-plated spade (the desired configuration is specified when ordering the jumpers). For this review, I

requested that each end be terminated Z plugs.

The monofilament thread acts as a spacer between the cable strand and its FEP sheath, resulting in a dielectric which is about 80% air because the FEP sleeve never touches the cable strand itself. This is advantageous because the best dielectric is none at all (i.e., a vacuum or air), but a cable constructed using such a dielectric would be unwieldy; in addition to mechanic integrity, real world cables require a degree of flexibility.

### Setup and Listening

I usually listen with my Spires bi-wired, so the first thing I had to do for this review was reacquaint myself with their sound when the factory-fitted jumpers are used. For my formal evaluation I decided to use the first two movements

of Fritz Reiner's reading of Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kije* [Classic Records/RCA Victor LSC-2150] while conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, alternating between the stock jumpers and the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers.

With the standard jumpers in place, there was a noticeable increase in grain with a commensurate decrease in resolution and air (the celeste in the second movement, *Romance*, is a good example of the latter). Also, a slightly metallic texture was added to sounds like the snare drum.

Replacing the factory-fitted jumpers with the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers is the aural equivalent of removing a pane glass, or giving a dirty pane a good cleaning. By this I mean that the improvements wrought by the Bi-Wire Jumpers are worthwhile, but relatively minor. Grain was audibly reduced and the metallic colouration I heard with the stock jumpers was banished.

Out of curiosity (and for completeness' sake) I reverted to my usual bi-wired configuration once I'd finished my evaluation of the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers, to see how they compared to no jumpers. I noticed a slight improvement when using the Frey speaker cable without any jumpers, but the difference was much smaller than that between the factory-fitted jumpers and the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers. I'd



heard reports of people preferring to use the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers rather than bi-wiring, so I was mildly surprised by this revelation. A quick chat with one of Nordost's technical support guys shed a little light on this: up to the performance level of Baldur or Heimdall, many users do apparently report a slight preference to using the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers. However, above that performance level (and my Freys would certainly qualify!), Nordost recommend using jumpers made of the same cable: Frey jumpers with Frey speaker cables, Valhalla jumpers with Valhalla speaker cables, and so on. I've not yet verified this with my own ears, but it sounds plausible enough.

## Verdict

Although not for everyone (people whose speakers can't be bi-wired needn't apply!), the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers can offer a worthwhile step up in sound quality over those supplied with many speakers. If you're currently skimping on your speaker cables, you should address that before buying the Norse Bi-Wire Jumpers, but if the price of the Jumpers is significantly less than the cost of a second run of your favourite speaker cable, giving them a try is, in my opinion, a no-brainer. If nothing else, they'll give you a step up in sound quality while you're saving for another set of those über cables!

## Specifications

**Description** Extruded silver over 99.99999% pure copper 16 AWG solid conductors, FEP monofilament helix and dielectric. Available with Nordost Z plugs or gold-plated copper spades.

**Price** \$149.

**Serial numbers of unit reviewed** N/A.

**Warranty** Lifetime non-transferable.

### Nordost

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USA  
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www.nordost.com

## Associated Equipment

**Analogue source** Forsell Air Reference Mk 2 turntable and arm.

**Phono cartridge** Lyra Parnassus.

**Phono stage** Allnic Audio Labs H-1200.

**Preamp** Audio Research SP-9 Mk 2.

**Power amplifiers** PrimaLuna ProLogue Sevens.

**Speakers** MartinLogan Spires.

**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 stylus tracking force gauge; Spin Clean Record Washer Mk II.

# The Complete Guide to High-End Audio

## Audio System Reference Guide

By Rich Teer

**A**udiophiles seem to be comprised of two types of people: those for whom the equipment from which their music comes are regarded as black boxes whose inner workings they have no desire to know about, and those who are a little bit more curious—not to mention, probably somewhat technically inclined—and want to know what happens behind their equipment’s gleaming facade. The former will be more inclined to “set it and forget it” (or even have someone else install it), whereas the latter like to fiddle with their gear and maybe even understand a bit of what happens under their gear’s hood (although I count myself squarely in the latter camp, I don’t think either is superior to the other). Of interest to this group of people is Robert Harley’s seminal tome, *The Complete Guide to High-End Audio*, which was recently revised into its fourth edition. A long-time veteran of the audio industry, Harley has worked as a recording engineer

and studio owner, CD mastering engineer, technical writer, and reviewer. He is currently *The Absolute Sound* magazine’s Editor-in-Chief.

Consisting of more than 500 pages, the book is neatly arranged into 16 chapters which can be logically divided into three parts: introductory material, chapters on various categories of audio components, and miscellaneous reference material (including three appendices, a glossary, and a comprehensive index).

The first three chapters contain the introductory material, covering topics as diverse as the definition of high-end audio, advice on choosing a high-end system (setting and allocating a budget, complete vs. incremental purchases, upgrading a single component, and so on), and guidance on becoming a better listener (including a description of the audiophile’s vocabulary, the pitfalls of

becoming a critical listener, and critical listening set up procedures).

The majority of the book consists of ten chapters, each dedicated to a class of audio component. Examples include: preamps; power and integrated amps; speakers; music servers; and (perhaps of most interest to Vinylphile readers) turntables, tonearms, and cartridges. Each of these chapters starts with an introduction, followed by a description of how to choose the type of equipment being discussed and what to listen for. After these more general matters, each chapter then delves into more technical detail. This technical information is optional and probably won’t interest all readers, but I found it a very valuable addition to the text.

Following the main exposition are two chapters about system setup. The first of these chapters talks about room acoustics and the importance of proper

A close-up, high-angle photograph of a speaker driver, showing the central cone and the surrounding frame. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures and metallic surfaces of the speaker components.

# The Complete Guide to High-End Audio

Fourth Edition

**Robert Harley**

Editor-in-Chief  
*The Absolute Sound*

speaker placement, and the second discusses expert tuning techniques and audio accessories.

The final chapter before the appendices is about measurements and specifications. This is beneficial material because although most audiophiles value sound quality over theoretical specifications or measured performance, being able to interpret these numbers is a useful skill to have.

The book's back matter consists of three appendices (about sound and hearing, audio and electronics basics, and digital audio basics), a glossary, and a comprehensive index.

One thing I like about this book is the accessibility and compartmentalisation of the material. With the exception of the introductory material (which everyone should read), one may read as many or as few chapters as desired. Similarly, the logical layout of the material within the chapters makes it easy for the technically disinclined to skip the more technical stuff.

*The Complete Guide to High-End Audio* is written in an accessible manner (avoiding unnecessary jargon and the like), and numerous illustrations and photographs support the prose. I do have a couple of (admittedly small) criticisms to make. The first is that the book uses ragged right margins; I prefer fully justified paragraphs, but admit this is a personal preference thing, and most people probably don't care one way or the other. Another thing that is a little more serious (if only because in my opinion it disrupts one's reading flow) is that some of the end of line hyphenation breaks come across as being awkward. For example, a sentence in the paragraph about half way down page 61 reads "Use dealer recommendations, read reviews in responsi-ble audiophile magazines, and ask friends who have high-end systems.", where the word "responsible" is broken across two lines (at the point where I hyphenated it in the quote). Not a big deal, but for me it detracts from the readability somewhat (some typographical adjustments that I won't go into here would help eliminate this).

One last criticism is that one or two printing SNAFUs seem to have crept in, resulting in small amounts of missing text. An example of this appears on page 254, at the end of the first sentence after the heading "Moving-Magnet and Moving-Coil Cartridges". The sentence should probably read "Cartridges are classified by their principle of operation:

moving-magnet or moving-coil.", but a blank space appears after "moving-magnet or". Presumably things like this will be fixed in subsequent printings.

On balance, *The Complete Guide to High-End Audio* is full of information which will be useful to just about any music-loving audiophile. The accessible writing and logical layout of the material make it an easy read, and make it easy to avoid reading the more technical content if that's what one desires. Also, because most of the chapters are self contained, one needn't read the whole book from cover to cover (although I did) if one is only interested in a subset of the material. The quality of the writing, the broad scope, and very reasonable price makes recommending *The Complete Guide to High-End Audio* a no-brainer: a copy of this book belongs on every serious audio enthusiasts' book shelf!

## **The Complete Guide to High-End Audio**

By Robert Harley

Acapella Publishing, 2010

xx + 529 pages, \$34.95 (paperback)

ISBN 978-0-9786493-1-9

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

# Record Reviews

By Vinylphile Staff



## Colourbox

Colourbox

4AD (33-RPM LP)

CAD508

I have my friend, Stuart, to thank for introducing me to Colourbox, back in the mid-1980s. He was very much into the Indie music scene at that time, and would often play me his latest 12" singles (songs that rarely, if ever, made it into the top 40) and albums. One such record was Colourbox's eponymously-titled debut LP (and, as it turned out, their only full-length album). I loved it and quickly added it to my collection.

The music is eclectic, spanning a number of genres. For example, the album's opening track is *Sleepwalker*, an elegiac piano solo that segues into the much faster and rocky sample fest that is *Just Give 'Em Whiskey*. The album also features a couple of covers, including *Say You*, and *You Keep Me Hanging On*.

The sound quality is, while in keeping with the genre and age, very good. I still love this record nearly 30 years after I first bought it. Get a copy today—but try to get hold of one of the first 10,000 copies, which included a free bonus EP (the first side of the bonus EP was included on the CD version of this album, but not the second). **Rich Teer**



### **The Cars**

#### *Shake it Up*

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

MFSL 1-325

Mobile Fidelity have continued their re-issue of records by The Cars with the release of *Shake it Up*. This, The Cars' fourth studio album, was originally released in 1981 and was certified double platinum in 2001. The nine tracks, including several singles, continue with The Cars' light rock/synth pop sound, and relatively light music.

Some favourite tracks are *Since You're Gone*, *Shake it Up* (a particularly upbeat track which references hair styles, dance moves, and having fun), and the album's final track, *Maybe Baby*.

The sound quality is, as one would expect, pretty good. I also no complaints about the quality of the record (flat, silent vinyl), nor the packaging (a heavy gatefold sleeve). Add this one to your

collection, especially if (like me) you're a synth pop fan! **RT**



### **Foreigner**

#### *Foreigner*

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

MFSL 1-338

1977 saw the release of the rock group Foreigner's eponymously-titled debut album, from which three singles were released: *Feels Like the First Time*; *Long, Long Way from Home*; and *Cold as Ice*.

Most of the songs have a punchy, rock feel to them, without over doing it. This isn't an album on which to look for screaming guitar solos a la AC/DC! The pace slows down a bit for the penultimate track on side two, *Fool for You Anyway*.

The production is pretty good, considering the genre and age of this recording: the bass is tight and sounds like cymbals are not splashy or overly sibilant. The dynamics are fine too: no nasty over-compression here! The

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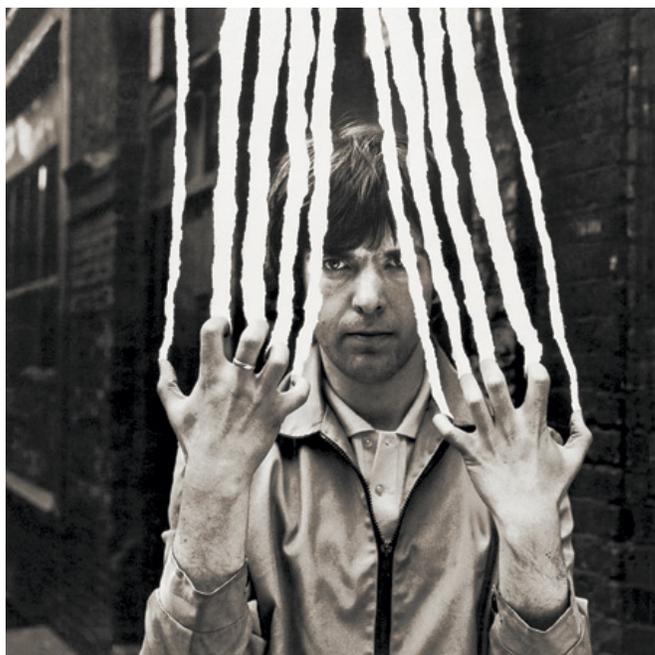
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Excellence is a habit NOT a single act.

packaging is up to MFSL's usual high standards and the pressing is flat and quiet. If you're a Foreigner fan, this should be in your collection!

RT





### **Peter Gabriel**

2

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

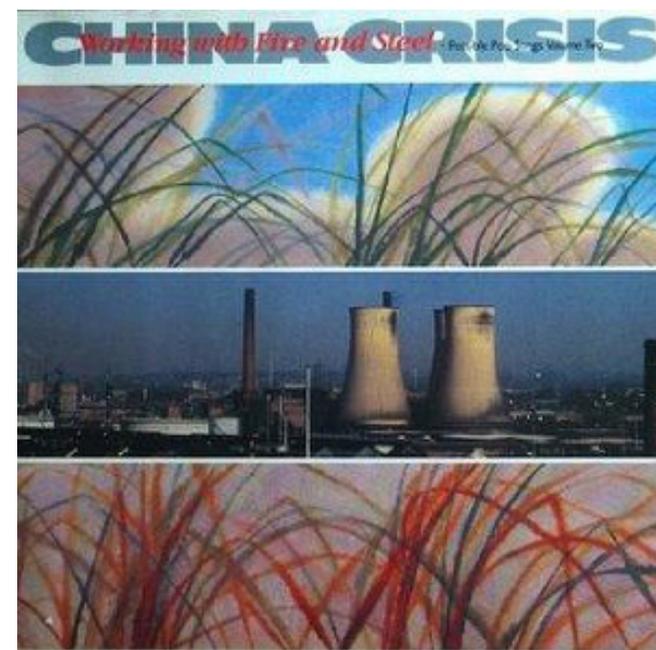
PG 2-45

Originally released in 1978, this is Peter Gabriel's second studio album, and the second (of four) to be eponymously titled. It is often referred to as *Scratch* because of the cover art.

The album features eleven tracks, including the album's only single, *DIY*, which was backed with a longer version of *Perspective*. The music is varied although (to these ears) perhaps not quite as accessible as that on Gabriel's first solo effort. Unlike the original pressing of this album, *White Shadow* (which is the last track on side one, or record two of this set) doesn't continue into the dead wax (nor does Classic Records' 33-RPM version).

As we've come to expect from these Clarity boxed sets, the sound quality is

as very good. The single-sided records are pancake flat with silent surfaces. Packaged in the usual Clarity style, a heavy duty box with the contents protected by bubble wrap, if you're a Peter Gabriel fan this is a record that you should try to get your hands on (these Clarity records are becoming increasingly hard to find, not to mention, more expensive). **RT**



### **China Crisis**

*Working with Fire and Steel*

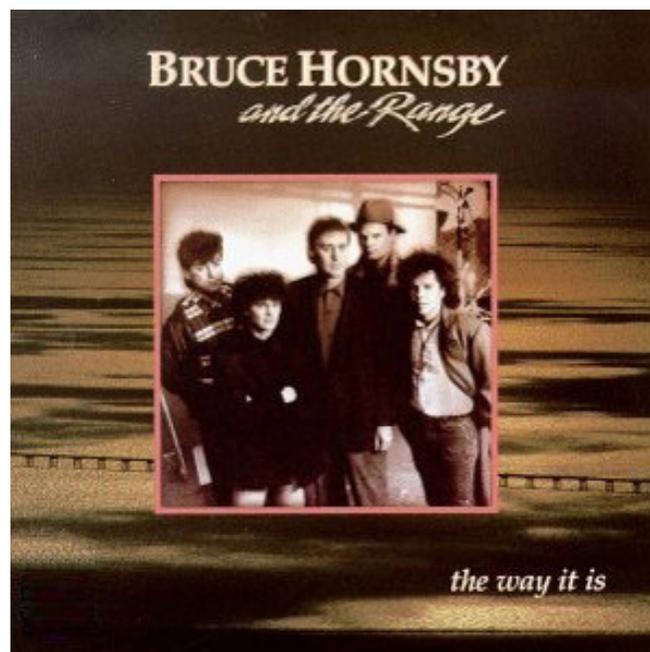
Virgin Records (33-RPM LP)

V2286

Subtitled *Possible Pop Songs Volume Two*, *Working with Fire and Steel* is the second studio album released by UK new wave group China Crisis. Originally released in 1983, *Working with Fire and Steel* consists of ten tracks including four singles. Among these singles were *Tragedy and Mystery*, the title track, and *Hanna Hanna*. The fourth single (the third to be released from the album), *Wishful Thinking*, became the group's highest charting single in the UK, and their only top 10 single in that country.

The music is somewhat light and "poppy" in nature; very accessible and easy to like. The sound quality on this album is pretty good too, with a very warm—but not over blown—bass, a sound that is perhaps somewhat typical of the era. Although the imaging is a little flat, this is definitely a record

from the time before the loudness wars sucked the dynamic range out of our music. Give it a try! **RT**



### **Bruce Hornsby and the Range**

*The Way It Is*

RCA Records (33-RPM LP)

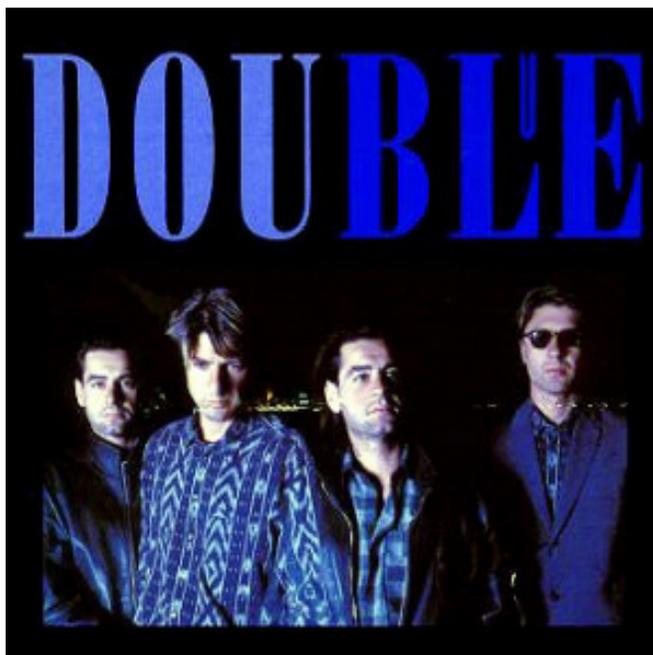
PL89901

Originally released in 1986, *The Way It Is* is Bruce Hornsby and the Range's debut album, and is probably best-known for its title track. In addition to *The Way It Is*, the album has eight other tracks, including the singles *On the Western Skyline*, *Every Little Kiss*, and *Mandolin Rain*.

Poppy in nature with Hornsby's piano being front and centre, the music is upbeat. Even the somewhat pessimistic title track ends each chorus with an exhortation to not believe them ("them" being the people who believe that things are the they are, and that they'll never change).

The sound quality is what we would expect from a well-produced pop album from the mid-1980s: good, but not excellent (given the genre, it's probably

as good as we could hope for). Re-reading that last sentence, I may sound a bit negative, but I don't mean that at all! This album is one of my not-so-guilty pleasures and I encourage you to give it a spin. **RT**



### **Double**

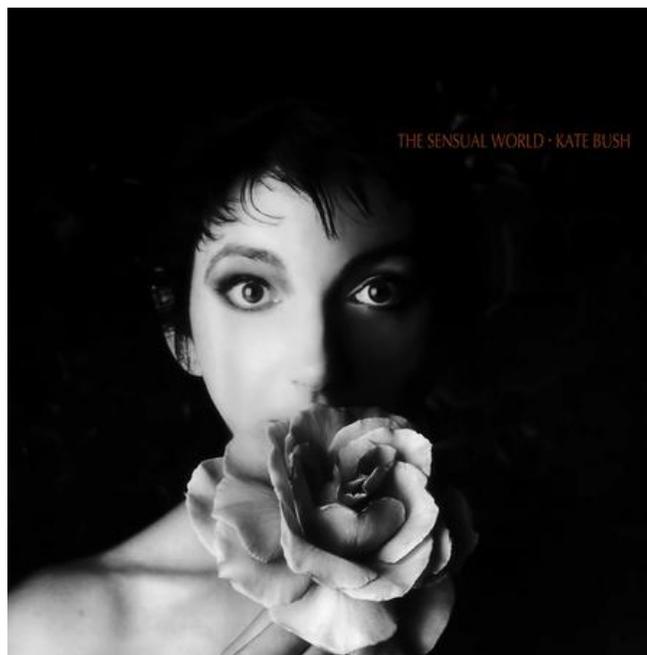
*Blue*

Polydor (33-RPM LP)

POLD 5187

With its pounding drum beat, beautiful piano, and mournful saxophone, I found Double's (pronounced "doo-BLAY") single, *The Captain of Her Heart*, irresistible when it came out in the mid-1980s, so I had to buy a copy of the album from which it came, *Blue*. *Blue* was Double's first (of only two) full length album, and contains eight tracks including two singles in addition to *The Captain of Her Heart: Your Prayer Takes Me Off* and *Tomorrow*.

Musically, some of the tracks have sort of Caribbean calypso feel to them. Others have smooth, almost jazzy, feel. The sound quality is good, but not exceptional, and some tracks exhibit pronounced sibilance (e.g., *Tomorrow*). Still, worth checking out, especially if you're a fan of *The Captain of Her Heart*. **RT**



### **Kate Bush**

*The Sensual World*

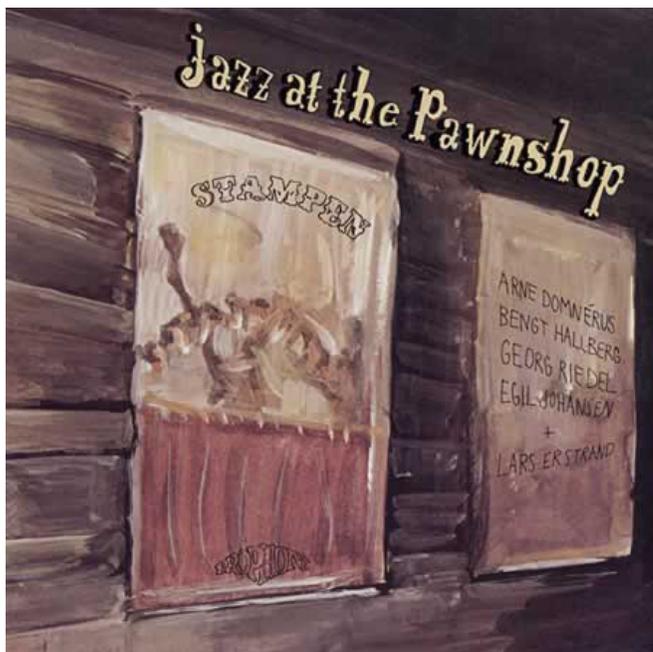
Audio Fidelity/Columbia Records (33-RPM 180g LP)

AFZLP 082

Originally released in 1989, *The Sensual World* is Kate Bush's sixth studio album, and the second to be released by Audio Fidelity (Audio Fidelity's other Kate Bush reissue is *Hounds of Love*, which we reviewed in issue 4). The album consists of ten tracks, three of which were released as singles: *The Sensual World*, *Love and Anger*, and *This Woman's Work*.

Despite selling in greater quantities, I find the music on *The Sensual World* not quite as mainstream as, for example, that on Bush's debut, *The Kick Inside*, whose tracks include the wonderfully breathtaking *Wuthering Heights*. The tracks on *The Sensual World* are more personal in nature.

*The Sensual World* was remastered by Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray, and a fine job they have done: I can't fault the sound quality. Audio Fidelity have also done a great job with the pressing, which is flat and quiet. The gatefold sleeve packaging is the icing on the cake, and I have no qualms in recommending this record. **RT**



### Arne Domnérus et al

#### *Jazz at the Pawnshop*

Proprius Records (two 33-RPM 180g LPs)

Prop 7778-79

Recorded live by Gert Palmcrantz at the Stampen Jazz Club in Stockholm, Sweden, in December 1976, *Jazz at the Pawnshop* has established itself as part of the audiophile repertoire. One listen to the twelve tracks, spread over four sides, is enough to explain why. Close your eyes and the immediateness and “you are there”-ness makes you feel like you’re sitting in the audience.

I must admit that I don’t find the music particularly accessible (although it is starting to grow on me); sure, the musicians are talented, but for the most part, the music ain’t my cup of tea (although I did enjoy the rather manic rendition of Dave Brubeck’s *Take Five*). Take this comment with a grain of salt, of course: if the music is up your alley,

you won’t care what I think about it (and nor should you)!

Nicely packaged in a double gatefold sleeve, this record is recommended as an audiophile test record, doubly so if you enjoy the music! **RT**



### Diana Krall

#### *The Look of Love*

Original Recordings Group/Verve Records (two 33-RPM 180g LPs)

ORG 004

*The Look of Love* is Diana Krall’s sixth album, and was originally released in 2001. I’d never heard of Krall (who is, incidentally, a fellow British Columbian, being born in Nanaimo on Vancouver Island) until I heard the title track (the only single released from the album) one day. I’m a fan of Dusty Springfield’s version of this track (from the original soundtrack of the 1967 movie, *Casino Royale*, which we reviewed in issue 4), so I thought I’d check out the album from which Krall’s version came.

The album—Krall’s best-selling album to date—contains ten tracks, three of which I was familiar with (albeit by different artists): *Love Letters*, *Cry Me a River*, and of course *The Look of Love* (when I saw its name in the track listing, I thought that *Dancing in the Dark* was

a cover of Bruce Springsteen's song of that name: it isn't!).

The songs have a silky, sultry feel about them, reminiscent of a Vegas lounge singer. If that's your thing, that's fine, but it's a style I'm still not quite partial to.

The sound quality is very good—in fact, the album won a Grammy Award in 2001 for the Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical category. By spreading the album over four sides, ORG have made the most of the material's quality. The vinyl is flat with silent surfaces, and the packaging—a heavy cardboard gatefold sleeve—is first rate. Cautiously recommended if you're a fan of the genre. **RT**



### **Joni Mitchell**

*Ladies of the Canyon*

Reprise Records (33-RPM 180g LP)

R1 6376

Confession time: I had no idea, until I sat down to write this review, that Joni Mitchell was a fellow Canadian! It seems that as well as being a very fine way to pass one's leisure time, being a music lover also has its educational benefits! *Ladies of the Canyon* is Joni Mitchell's third studio album, and was originally released in 1970. It contains twelve tracks, including one of her best-known compositions, *Big Yellow Taxi*.

Folk-pop in nature, much of this album is reminiscent of Simon & Garfunkel; if you like them, odds are you'll like Joni Mitchell (or at least, this record). The relatively simple arrangements and high production values make for a great-sounding record. Pressed on flat, quiet vinyl, the album's inherent good sound quality is allowed to shine.

Beautifully packaged in a heavy gatefold sleeve, the great music and sound quality earns *Ladies of the Canyon* a very firm recommendation. **RT**



### **Enya**

*Watermark*

WEA Records (33-RPM LP)

WX274 246006-1

Brought to my attention by the wonderful *Orinoco Flow*, *Watermark* is Enya's second album. It was released in 1988, and features eleven tracks, three of which were released as singles: the aforementioned *Orinoco Flow*, *Evening Falls*, and *Exile*. An extended version of the album featuring a fourth single, *Storms in Africa (Part II)*, was available for a brief period.

Although Enya doesn't consider it to be so, the beautiful ethereal music on the album is firmly in the New Age genre: this is definitely not an album to put on if you're in the mood for a bit of head banging or air guitar playing!

The sound quality is also wonderful, so dim the lights, turn up the volume, relax, and enjoy! **RT**



### **Jefferson Hamer**

*This Ragged World We Spanned*

Media Blitz Record Co. (45-RPM single)

One of the great benefits of my job is that I sometimes get exposed to music I would otherwise never have heard of, and pass the word on. A case in point is Brooklyn-based singer-guitarist Jefferson Hamer's latest single, *This Ragged World We Spanned*. Backed with *Barbara Ellen*, the two tracks consist of Hamer's acoustic solo, accompanied only by his guitar. Somewhat reminiscent (to me at least) of Neil Young, the music is folksy in nature: I like it!

*This Ragged World We Spanned* is an analogue recording, which earns Hamer further kudos in my book. The 7" single is a limited edition of 500 copies, so grab a copy while you can and support independent musicians! **RT**

# Final Words

Another issue--our first birthday--of Vinylphile has finally been put to bed! Next time around we'll have more gear and more record review for you to read. We'll also be making some tweaks here and there with the mag's look and layout, and we welcome your feedback.

As always, I want to thank you all for reading Vinylphile, and your continued support. See you next time, but until then...

Happy listening!

## Advertisers Index

Audioscape Canada.....	26
<i>www.audioscapecanada.ca</i>	
Hammertone Audio .....	2
<i>www.hammertoneaudio.com</i>	
THE Show.....	17
<i>www.theshownewport.com</i>	