

VINYL LP FILE

October 2011 Issue 7

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Editorial



It'll come as no surprise that I'm a hard core vinyl lover. All of my serious listening is done with vinyl as the source, so much so that the CD player that I do have was removed from my system more than a year ago and is currently languishing on a shelf somewhere. But even more than a vinyl lover, I'm a music lover, and it's hard to listen to vinyl when travelling and digital sources or much more convenient when used as a source of background music. So over the past few weeks I've gradually loaded much of my meagre CD collection into my computer—using lossless compression of course! Storage (even portable storage) is so copious these days that there is simply no justification for using lossy compression like that scourge of the music industry, MP3.

I don't use my digital library as a source for serious listening, but it does make an ideal source for casual listening and music on the go. I can't think of any downsides to having one's favourite music instantly available anywhere. I've been a smart phone user since before

they were called smart phones, so for a variety of reasons my portable music machine is my iPhone 4. I only mention this because it was a week ago today that Apple co-founder and CEO, Steve Jobs, passed away.

Even though there are several devices in our home with an Apple logo on them (for instance, this magazine is written and created on a 27" iMac), and I like a lot of Apple's technology, I'm not a Fanboy. The patronising, Apple know's best nature of some of their products, coupled with their refusal to embrace open standards (not to mention, iTunes' eschewal of FLAC as an audio CODEC) really grates the geek in me. However, one cannot dismiss Apple's innovations and achievements in bringing music to the masses, and Jobs was instrumental in them. Rest in peace, Steve.

On a lighter note, you may have noticed that we've updated the magazine's look a bit since birthday issue. In addition to adding a (hopefully) thought-provoking epigraph to the contents page, we've dedicated the back page

to a photograph from our publisher's humble portfolio. We've added a featured record review, and (to make it a make it a bit easier for you to navigate them) split up the record reviews into several sections: audiophile, rock, classical, and jazz.

Talking of record reviews, I'm very pleased to welcome jazz aficionado, Atane Ofiaja, to Vinylphile. Currently living in New York City, Atane is a Social Marketing Coordinator, and also writes for *Elements of Jazz* and *Stereo Times*. A hard bop jazz lover, his musical tastes also include blues, funk, soul, and R&B. Outside the musical world, Atane enjoys fine dining, photography, and watching movies on Blu-ray.

This issue has October on the cover, and it wouldn't be October without Rocky Mountain Audio Fest! This will be our second visit to RMAF in the mile high city, and I'm looking forward to renewing acquaintances, meeting new people, and of course, hearing some fine music on great gear; see you there!

Rich

Reader's System

Michel From Montreal

By Rich Teer

In this instalment of Reader's System, we visit the home of Michel, an electrical contractor and producer for Fidelio's vinyl releases. I met Michel at this year's Salon Son & Image show, when he invited me over for a listening session and chat.

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

I'm an electrical contractor. I did my studies in finance, administration, and computer systems at McGill. So basically, that's where I come from.

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

Hi-fi came later on! It was mostly the love of having the biggest stereo system on the street when I was a kid. To get the bigger system, I had to figure out a way to do it with the money I had at the time, which was a summer job. Basically, I got into trying to do things



myself, so I got into those kits and I think I built probably close to ten or eleven of them. So I started like that, one system after the other. My mother thought I was nuts! Every six months something was moving in and out, and sometimes

the rhythm was even faster than that. I always had to have more than my friends. And the biggest speakers, so I got into building speakers. I got quite good, I think, because I built a lot of pairs for a lot of people. I had basic

designs, they were all based on Philips speakers, which in those days made a lot of OEM speakers. I went along with that, and they usually send you spec sheets. I looked at them and thought “OK, there’s the centre and I have to

One of my cousins still has a pair, the 8” model—I go by the woofer size. There was an 8” model, a 4”, and a dome tweeter. He still has them today, and he still prefers them to the speakers that he bought a long time ago which were the

“Yeah, you still have them?” He’s 57 now and he was probably 20 when I built them for him. He looked at me and said, “I have to have the 12” woofer re-coned!”. He still has them, still uses them.



align the motors of the speakers to make sure the sound comes out nice”. Actually, they were pretty good. They weren’t bad: I had a big demand for them. I built about a dozen pairs or so.

HPM 100 from Pioneer. I have another cousin who called me last week. He said, “You know those speakers?”.

So that’s how I got into all that. And then along came music, and honestly, music came afterwards. Then I started liking music and I was mostly into prog rock at that time. I wasn’t the type to listen

to... basic things. The Rolling Stones were never my bag, I was more of a Pink Floyd type of guy, or Genesis. I started listening to those guys and I said, "They're making something different from Black Sabbath, just having two or three chords and going at it, they came out with something. And it got me into listening to classical music.

So it started with the gear and music came in later.

You obviously have quite a collection, so roughly how many records do you have?

Records? Well, I have some more elsewhere that are in boxes, but I probably have a couple of thousand records. As for CDs, all I have are those. [Points]

Well, you have to put your drinks on something!

[Laughs] Actually, I do use CDs, when I sit down and read or do something else.

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

I have many. Prog rock would be one of them, mostly the old ones like Genesis, Pink Floyd, or Peter Gabriel. That I love. Then, into classical, I'm more into the symphonic type. I love symphonic but I'm getting more into instrumentals

like violins, piano. Actually, the more I'm enlarging my collection, my wife is really into voices. It's her favourite instrument.

What sort of composers do you like?

I definitely like Beethoven, the guy's a total genius. You can't beat his symphonies! I like Mozart who can compose a symphony overnight and you listen to it and you're "My God". I love Rimsky-Korsakov. Like everyone else, it's also a question of mood. I can be four or five nights without listening to classical, listening to rock and jazz.

I love voices, also, like Diana Krall. I listen to a lot of Oscar [Peterson], Dave Brubeck, that's more my style of jazz.

Talking of voices, are you familiar with Ladysmith Black Mambazo?

No, you got me there!

They're a black a cappella group. If you're familiar with Paul Simon's *Graceland*, they're the guys that accompanied him on tracks like *Homeless*.

Ah! I like voices. Actually, last weekend we went to three girls. Beautiful voices but they sang old songs like *Mr. Sandman*, but they sing a cappella, with one piano and beautiful voices. So Fidelio is looking into doing a recording, and vinyl will probably be included right from the start. We might not do the

vinyl the same way we did for Buzz [Brass], in the sense that we're really aiming at the audiophile market with a very specific product. Something more accessible to more people.

It would be interesting if you could do an analogue recording in parallel with the digital one, so that the vinyl is untarnished by digital stuff.

If you want, we can talk about that later, analogue vs digital recording. Yeah, analogue recording is beautiful but it's very complicated to do these days, and the end result—not to be mean to analogue—is not that superior to the digital. Digital sometimes gives us more possibilities.

Provided it's done right.

Either way has to be done right! If you do it with two microphones, Sharps, Neumanns, whatever, then we put it into a vacuum tube amp and tube preamp, then it is converted into PCM and stored on an SSD drive. From there, we can go any which way we want. We did the test. You heard Buzz, Holst's *The Planets*, on the table over there. Buzz is done from the SSD file. It was recorded with two Sharps, only two Sharp microphones, in a church. Actually, the church was selected for what was to be played. That's one of the qualities of Rene [Laflamme]. Before he does something, he asks where am I going to do it for what you want to play?

I think we'll have a surprise with the new OSM; they're building a new concert hall in Montreal and there will be an organ in there and we're planning on recording it. But to come back to analogue vs digital, Buzz comes from a digital recording. It was transferred to DSD which is the SACD format, but from there we brought it back to a multi-bit state, and the result we got out of that is like, "OK, we sort of brought the analogue into it", and we're getting something that is really beautiful. So I figure, you can't throw away one technology because you're stuck into it. I think combining them both is the best way to do it.

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

Well, vinyl is about 90% of my listening, sometimes it's 100%! CD is very rare. So it's mostly vinyl.

We touched on this earlier, but what was your first system, and how has it evolved over the years?

My first system? I paid \$110 for it, at a pawn shop downtown! [Laughs] From there on it just kept rolling, up to all the Dynacos that went through. Finally, I sort of settled at one point, I had a



Dynaco ST400, I had speakers with 12" woofers, two mids and two tweeters. The woofer was completely sealed off. At that point, I sort of slowed down and I kept that system for quite a long time, probably 12 to 15 years. Then one day I couldn't resist any more so I bought the Mirage that you see there. I bought

the Bryston, my wife bought me a Linn Sondek for Christmas, that replaced my Rabco ST7. It was a long time before I started buying CDs. I started buying CDs because I was stuck. I kept that for a while, almost 20 years. Then the kids left so I got back into it. That was the first time I walked into Filtronique. I had a budget; the guy said "What's

your budget?". I was looking for an amp and a preamp, so I said \$10,000. It started there; I got back into it. In the last five or six years things went pretty fast. I came home with a very nice system, but the voice didn't quite do it. I got the Audio Research LS17 with the VS110. I also had the LP12

which we had upgraded as we went along. After that I got the Reference 3, the Reference 110, then the '110 got traded for two 210s. The speakers didn't make it, so we got the Sonus Fabers. These are the best I've ever heard.

Neat! So, what's next on your equipment list? A Reference 5, maybe?

Well, no! I tried my luck this weekend. I have something going on, and there's a deal that was made to me, I can't tell you the numbers, for a Reference Anniversary.

Oh!

I've never heard the thing, nobody I know has heard them. The ones that Filtronique sold—three or four, I think—were sold by Rene, but they came in directly to the customers. No store buys them as a demo! So I read the article in *The Absolute Sound*, but I met one of Rene's customers, Doug, yesterday. He lives in Niagara Falls but buys his stuff in Montreal. He had the Reference 3, then he went to the Reference 5, and he bought the Reference 40. He was at the show this weekend and I met him yesterday. I said to him, "If you see my wife, tell her great it is!". So yeah, the Reference 40 is on my list, but I only have four weeks to think about it.

And then maybe a Reference 2 Phono?

Nope! I'm sticking with my Nagra VPS.

Just out of curiosity, have you compared the two? What's the difference?

Honestly, no. For that I'm relying on Rene. He told me it is probably the best, but at some point if the difference is small for this much money... You have to be logical at some point in something emotional. The Reference 40 is part emotional, but from what I've heard from people that have it, from Doug, and from what Rene tells me after installing it, it's day and night. Even from the Reference 5!

Equipment List

Power source Hydra and Shunyata power cables.

Analogue source SME Model 10 turntable with SME Series V tonearm.

Cartridges Lyra Titan i.

Phono stage Nagara VPS, with the VFS vibration plate under it.

Digital sources DCD 1 CD player and DCS Elgar DAC.

Preamp Audio Research Reference 3.

Power amps Audio Research Reference 210.

Speakers Sonus Faber Amati Anniversario.

Cables Crystal, Shunyata, and Siltech. AC: Shunyata.

Annie's Audio Adventures

Annie Goes Analogue

By Annie St. Jean

Chapter One: In the Beginning

When I was young, I used to listen to my parents' records of ABBA, Barbra Streisand, Cat Stevens, and anything else they had in English, so I could read the words and learn the language at the same time. My parents didn't speak English, and I lived in a town of 4,000 people in the middle of nowhere, Québec.

So I was already considered weird for wanting to learn English at a young age... and in a place that spoke French, more French, and even more French.

And unfortunately, not everyone even liked English, or anything different from poutines and sugar maple pies, for that matter! Now I've been in British Columbia teaching French for ... a long time ... and loving it! It makes me feel too old if I start counting the years! Funny how dots end up connecting, as you get older, isn't it?!

Why am I reminiscing about that time, you ask, and what does it have to do with my review? Well, as you may have guessed from the title, it's because I am listening to a record at the moment! Not on my parents' cheap turntable, obviously, and definitely not in my little town of now less than 3,000 people who still don't



bother learning English much. No. I'm in my living room, still baby sitting our friends' Marantz system (yay for me!!!), and listening to the Rega RP-1. And I can't help feeling a little nostalgic when I hear

the little crackling sounds that records sometimes make! Note to self: Get a good quality brush!

Remember how Hubby went to the Montréal Audio show a while back and I didn't? Well, let me tell you: a little guilt can be a good thing! He brought me back the record of

Holst's *The Planets*, and Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*. Great records to start from, since I already own the CDs and I practically know them by heart! One thing I love about classical music, is that the musicians are usually set up in a specific way. The record makes it really easy to pick out where everyone is!

Even Hubby can point out where the trumpets are in relation to the French horns and trombones! I can't help it, I LOVE the warmth! Love the depth, the richness, and feeling like I'm attending a concert! I also think it's kind of cool how heavy the record is, and how there

are only two songs on each side! Sorry, I'm new to this, OK! My first record was Styx's *Theatre Paradise*, with a colour theatre on one side, and a run down one on the other. (Don't forget: I was on a solo mission to learn English!) The coolest thing about it, apart the fact that it's eighties music, of course, was the then new laser drawing on it! I guess I'm dating myself even without counting dates!

Chapter Two: Danger Sets In

My only problem with analogue is that I am absolutely TERRIFIED of the turntable! I'm afraid I will wreck everything! I'm afraid I'll scratch the record with the needle, sorry I mean stylus, that I'll leave fingerprints on the record, that I'll unbalance the arm, that my younger daughter will jump on the floor and make the record jump, that the dog's hair will find its way there, ... you name it! Just looking at Rich putting records on at his home makes me hold my breath! I feel like I'm watching some sacred tea ceremony and I'm the bull in the china shop! Still, I tried to conquer my fear and change the record while Hubby was out, but it didn't work: I'm petrified! Is there a 12 step program for "Wreck-the-record-phobia"??? Don't worry, the equipment is all operator-friendly, I'm the one with the fear! Hey, guess what? This pressing of *Kind of Blue* is actually blue! Guess you already knew that! Very cool, if you ask me! Let's wait for Hubby, just in case!

Chapter Three: The Lesson

So Rich came to my rescue, and brought along his tube amps (yay for me!!!). He showed me how to balance the arm, how to align everything, and how to clean the record properly. AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER, we're ready to do some listening! (I must be a slow learner!) I was still too terrified to drop the arm onto the record, which made everyone laugh! Well, *Kind of Blue* sounds even better, but we notice that the record Hubby brought back of *The Planets* has a defect on it and is very grainy, so it'll have to wait!

Then, we (well, Hubby and Rich, that is!) hooked up the turntable to Rich's tube amps! I'm in heaven! The guys bring up an interesting question: can sound be too mellow? I don't know! It's 11:30 at night and I'm tired, so I'm not a good judge right now! Sounds like curling up next to a fire with your favourite blanket to me, so I can't get too much of that, personally! I must admit that I might have to beg Rich to come back with his amps and do more testing on this one!

Chapter Four: To Be Continued

Well, here's what I want to do next: buy more records and do more listening! That might take a while, however, as school is just about to start, and I have a ton of work to do before the first class!

Conclusion: The Verdict

I know that for those of you who are avid analogue listeners, the entry level

Rega might be below what you're used to, but I find listening to it very relaxing! I don't think you can get listener's fatigue while listening to this stuff! Just in case you don't know, there are a few more Rega turntables to choose from. Can I say something totally not related to sound? The red one looks great, and I think the guys will really like it in their living room because it is a very "Ferrari" red! I also like the white one, and I think it would look totally awesome with the white JM Labs speakers (I haven't listened to them together, so do your homework first), and a couple white Barcelona chairs! The verdict: I love, love, love that sound! I already said how accurate the classical is, and I find the jazz also very smooth, warm, involving, and deep... and this is just an entry-level turntable! Forget shoes, man! I'm saving my money for analogue!

Product Details

Rega RP1 turntable

Price (CAD) \$450 (includes arm and cartridge)

Plurison

313 Marion Road

Le Gardeur, QC J5Z 4W8

Canada

(866) 271-5689

www.plurison.com

Cambridge Audio Azur 640P

Phono Stage

By Rich Teer



One of the things that puts off newcomers to vinyl is the need for a phono stage. Not only must one spend at least several hundred dollars on a turntable (I discount those sub-\$200 turntables, which, in my (admittedly limited) experience should be ignored if one wants a taste of what vinyl can really deliver), but a similar sum must also be spent on a phono stage. In days of old, this wasn't an issue because all integrated amps and preamps came with built-in phono stages. But that isn't so any more, and the phono stages that do come with

most more affordable integrated amps, preamps, and even receivers, shouldn't be regarded as anything more than a "get you going" facility so as to fill a check box.

Make no mistake: once you get into vinyl, sooner or later you're going to want a separate phono stage. Not only will a separate phono stage help you get the most out of your records, it will also enable more flexibility in your choice of preamp or integrated amp because you will no longer be limited to those with built-in phono stages. Although a

really good phono stage can set you back more than \$1,000 (sometimes much more!), there are more affordable options. One such option is the Azur 640P, from Britain's Cambridge Audio.

Although they were formed in 1968, Cambridge Audio first appeared on my audio radar in 1986 or so when they launched the world's first two-box CD player, the CD1, for the then-princely sum of £1,500. Before I got out of CD, the CD1 was a player I lusted after—although not as much as I lusted after a Goldmund Reference! (Yes, for a year

or two way back then, a Marantz CD 73 CD player was my primary music source. I hasten to add that I sold it and most of my CDs to pay the deposit for my first high-end turntable, a story I may relate in these pages one day...)

Since those days, Cambridge Audio has changed hands and now manufactures a variety of audio electronics at several price points. Two of those products are the Azur 540P and 640P phono stages; it is the latter that is the subject of this review.

Technical Description

The Azur 640P is a compact solid state phono stage. It features two pairs of gold-plated RCA input sockets (one for MM cartridges, the other for MC cartridges), and a pair of gold-plated output RCA sockets. There's also a subsonic rumble filter (which may be turned on or off very easily).

In addition to the input and output sockets, the back panel houses

the rumble filter and input selection switches, a grounding post, and a socket for the 12 VAC power supply. The transformer for the latter is, unfortunately, one of those wall warts, but on the positive side it does help keep the 640P's cost down. The 640P is intended to be permanently powered, so there is no main power switch.

The front panel, which is made from a 3 mm thick sheet of aluminum, is available in either a silver or black anodised finish. It houses the blue LED power indicator.

The 640P's smaller brother, the 540P, comes in a package the same size as its bigger brother but omits the MC set of input sockets, the rumble filter, and the input selector switch. The 640P also uses "more exotic amplification circuitry" for better sound quality.

It's Pretty on the Inside Too

Inside the 640P's case is a neatly laid out circuit board. On the right side of

the circuit board is the power supply, which contains the rectification and first stage of regulation. The power supply is shielded from the rest of the components by an L shaped piece of metal which also doubles as the voltage regulators' heat sink.

On the left side of the board, as far away from the potentially noisy power supply as possible, are the MC and MM gain stages. Impressively, each is independently implemented, and the input stages are individually shielded.

Each stage of the amplifier has its own local power supply regulation capacitors, and a relay mutes the output for about 15 seconds after power up to help prevent heart-attack inducing thumps from the speakers.

All in all, pretty impressive. In fact the only criticism I feel justified in making (considering the P640's very reasonable price) is that the RCA sockets are a bit too close to each other, making it hard



to use upmarket cables with larger RCA plugs (the WBT plugs on my Nordost Frey interconnects barely fit). Of course, such expensive interconnects are unlikely to be used with the P640 in real life, but this is something of which potential purchasers should be aware.

Setup and Listening

For best performance, Cambridge Audio recommend leaving the 640P powered on at all times (unless one is going away for an extended period). I followed this advice, so the 640P was powered for nearly the entire review period. After dozens of hours of informal listening, I started my formal evaluation. At all times I used the MC input, with the rumble filter turned off.

Given the 640P's reasonable price, I had my reservations about its potential sound quality. I'm very pleased to report that my fears were unfounded; "remarkably good!" say my listening notes. Yes, the frequency extremes are a bit soft, and details are obscured by a haze, but the essence of the music is there. When listening to a record like Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001], you can tell that there are more details waiting to be dug out of the groove—and are sometimes

offered a tantalising glimpse of them—but ultimately they are lost in the mire.

Moving on to specifics, the bass is warm without being overly so. An example of this is the bass line in *Tubular Bell's* finale. With only a little muddiness, it is easy to follow. It's not quite as clear as it could be, but comes very close. No, the 640P's bass won't give your woofers (or subwoofers) a workout (especially in the bottom octave or two), but within its limitations, it is quite



good. The extension limitation I mentioned just now shouldn't be judged too harshly; in the context of most front ends the 640P is likely to be used with, they're not serious at all.

Moving up the frequency spectrum to the midrange, voices (perhaps one of the most important instruments) are well reproduced. Male voices, like those of South African a cappella group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, aren't tinged with any chestiness (here I'm specifically thinking of the track *Rain, Rain, Beautiful Rain* from *Shaka Zulu*

[WEA 925 582-1]). Just as important, of course, are female voices. Dusty Springfield singing *The Look of Love* on the *Casino Royale* soundtrack [Colgems COSO 5005-45] is just wonderful.

The frequencies most affected by the veiling were the higher ones, for example, the tinkling bells near the beginning of *Tubular Bells*, or the celeste in the second movement of *Lt. Kije* [Classic Records/RCA Victor LSC-2150]. When everything is right, the sound made by the hammer when it hits the metal plates is clearly audible. With the 640P, not so much, and the bloom surrounding the instrument is diminished.

Sound staging and imaging are fine: very respectable considering the price point. When listening to the Nasal Choir on *Tubular Bells*, I could hear several individual noses, rather than one great big one. Similarly with the arc of singers on *Shaka Zulu*. In both cases, the individual sound sources were identifiable if I listened intently enough. Yes, on a more accomplished phono stage the individual positions would be more readily apparent, but that fact that they're audible at all impresses me. The sound stage itself was smaller than it should be, especially in the stage depth department, but it's doubtful whether

the sort of front end the 640P would likely be paired with would throw a huge sound stage anyway!

In addition to a correct tonal balance, one of the things that helps me suspend disbelief when I'm listening to music at home is appropriately wide dynamic contrasts. If the timbres and positioning of the instruments are accurate but the dynamics aren't realistic, much of the illusion is (for me) lost, and I am reminded that I am "just" listening to a home stereo, rather than being at a live event. In this respect, the 640P does a passable (but not stellar) job. The foot stomps in *Who Were You Talking To* (from *Shaka Zulu*) don't have the heft they ought to, nor is the room's reverberation. Similarly, the drum thwacks in *Lt. Kije's* third movement aren't as startling as they should be.

Verdict

The 640P is a good sounding, versatile phono stage. It has more than acceptable build quality, and features that would not be out of place on more exotic phono stages. The fact that it is compatible with MC cartridges (unusual for phono stages at this price point) is a big bonus, although in all fairness I should point out that the 640P's MC gain is only just sufficient for very low output MCs like my Parnassus; higher output MCs that are more likely to be paired with the 640P will be fine.

Before I heard the 640P I was under the impression that all phono stages in this

price range were hopelessly flawed, but I'm pleased to be proven wrong. The 640P not only surpassed my expectations, it did so by a wide margin. If you're in the market for a budget-conscious phono stage, the Azur 640P should be on your "must audition" list. Very highly recommended, if we gave awards for exceptional products, the 640P would be a strong contender. Perhaps we should start doing so...

Specifications

Description Solid state phono stage.
Frequency response 20 Hz to 50,000 Hz \pm 0.3 dB.
Crosstalk >69 dB @ 20,000 Hz (MC), >83 dB (MM).
Gain 55 dB (MC), 39 dB (MM).
Distortion <0.002% THD (20 Hz to 20,000 Hz MC), <0.005% (MM).
Input impedance 100 Ω (MC), 47k Ω (MM).
Input capacitance 220 pF.
Phono equalisation RIAA.
Sensitivity 0.5 mV (MC), 3.35 mV (MM).
Signal to noise ratio >72 db (MC), >86 dB (MM).
Dimensions (hwd) 46 mm x 215 mm x 133 mm.
Weight 900 g (excluding PSU).
Finishes Silver and black anodised aluminum.
Serial number of unit reviewed YN C2195 0912 0010.
Price \$220.
Warranty Three years non-transferable.

Plurison

313 Marion Road
Le Gardeur, QC J5Z 4W8
Canada
(866) 271-5689
www.plurison.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 Seven.
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 stylus tracking force gauge; Spin Clean Record Washer Mk II.

Dual CS 455-1

Automatic Turntable

By Rich Teer

I'm not sure I'm the right person to be writing this review. You see, I have this aversion to inanimate objects thinking for me: I prefer to drive cars with a manual transmission, detest computer software that thinks it knows what I want to do better than I, and I'm not

a fan of automatic turntables. In my opinion, the mechanical challenges in turntable design are hard enough to get right at the best of times, without the added complications automatic operation brings to the, uh, table. So I was a little hesitant

when Audioscape Canada's Allan Feldstein offered me the chance to review the CS 455-1, Dual's one from the top of the line automatic turntable (the top model being the CS 455-1 M, which is a more substantial variant of the CS 455-1 and comes in a choice of finishes including gloss black and genuine walnut veneer). But I recognise that not everyone is as much of a Luddite as I am when it comes to automatic



turntables, so I decided to give it a spin.

As a brand, Dual have been around for ages, starting in the early 1900s. Although their heyday was in the 1970s, they went bankrupt in 1982. After a bit of reshuffling, Dual (perhaps befitting its name) emerged as a beast with a dual identity: a company called Alfred Fehrenbacher GmbH has the rights for the Dual name for the marketing and sales of turntables, and another company called Karstadt AG has the rights for all other uses of the Dual name.

Dual currently have five turntables in their line up, from the entry level CS 415

up to the previously mentioned CS 455-1 M.

Technical Details

The CS 455-1 is a suspended subchassis, fully automatic, belt-driven integrated turntable. The plinth is made from wood, and it comes complete with a detachable acrylic lid (other turntable manufacturers take note!). The turntable is powered by an external wall wart power supply, and it comes fitted with an Ortofon OMB 10 moving magnet cartridge.

Three speeds are supported:

the usual 33 and 45 RPM, as well as 78 RPM (although the stylus must be changed before playing your 78s).

The platter is made from vibration damped aluminum, and is designed to be used with the supplied antistatic felt mat. The CS 455-1 doesn't use the more typical AC synchronous motor; a DC one is used instead.

The integrated tone arm has a metal arm tube, a detachable headshell to facilitate easier cartridge replacement, an adjustable counterweight, and dials to set the tracking weight



(VTF) and bias (anti-skate). There's also a cueing lever to manually raise and lower the arm, the latter being damped. (The cueing lever works somewhat counter-intuitively, in that pushing it away from you lowers the cartridge rather than raising it; a minor point to be sure, and one to which one easily adapts.)

Finally, the CS 455-1 is available with either gold or silver coloured trim for the arm tube, platter, and plinth. The review sample had the gold trim, and rather fetching it looked!

Setup and Listening

Setting up the CS 455-1 is relatively easy: within ten minutes of unpacking the turntable, I was ready to play my first record. After placing the turntable on a level surface (the integrated feet are not adjustable, alas), setting up consisted of removing the shipping locking mechanism, fitting the drive belt and platter, and finally verifying the cartridge's alignment and tracking weight. The VTF dial's calibration on my sample was a little off, reading a little light: when it was set to the recommended tracking force of 1.5 g, the actual VTF was a bit higher. I conducted my review using a VTF of 1.5 g, as measured by my Cartridge Man digital stylus force gauge.

Despite being an automatic turntable, it is possible to exert some manual control over the CS 455-1: rather than clicking the control lever into the start position

(which starts the motor and places the arm in the position usually appropriate for the selected speed—although 12" singles and 7" and 10" 33 RPM records thwart this—and lowers the stylus into the groove), simply make sure the cueing lever is in the up position and place the tonearm where you want it (the act of moving the arm away from its rest position automatically starts the platter spinning at the selected speed).

As usual, I played the turntable for about 20 hours before starting my formal evaluation, which started with Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* [Virgin Records V2001].

Initial Impressions

My initial impression of the CS 455-1 was that the sound was a bit soft, with constrained dynamics and limited frequency extremes (both top and bottom). The combination of limited dynamics and frequency response leads to a sound that has a somewhat laid back presentation ("Where's the excitement?!" is a comment that appears in my listening notes).

Transient attacks are somewhat muted. For example, Oldfield plays a nylon-stringed acoustic guitar near the beginning of Part One of *Tubular Bells*, the attack of which is barely audible in places; it's almost as if the initial few milliseconds of the guitar's sound have been edited out. Perhaps related to this is the presentation of low level details: they were hinted at but never revealed

in their full glory. Detail nuts should look elsewhere!

Left-right image placement is quite good, although image depth and specificity are somewhat lacking. The humming of the nasal choir is presented as a congealed blob, rather than as a number of distinct voices. That said, the blob was about the correct size, so it could be worse.

It Lets the Magic Out

Reading the preceding paragraphs, you would be forgiven for thinking that I hated the CS 455-1. I don't, it's merely my best description of the tradeoffs one inevitably makes when listening to entry-level equipment. Fortunately, the CS 455-1's sins are mostly those of omission rather than commission. No, the bass doesn't plumb the depths of the Mariana Trench, but what bass there is is quite tuneful. It's not overbloated, stodgy, or particularly slow.

The middle frequencies are fairly neutral, although perhaps a touch on the warm side. Polite would be a good word to describe them: not overly dull, nor offensively bright. One thing I did notice, though, was that sibilants were exaggerated a bit.

As I wrote earlier, the CS 455-1's top end isn't particularly extended (at least when used with the cartridge with which it ships). Sounds like the celeste in the second movement of Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kije* [Classic Records/

RCA Victor LSC-2150] lacked air and sparkle, and the “you are there” feeling that more expensive rigs engender was missing.

My reservations about the (lack of) extension at both frequency extremes and lack of dynamics notwithstanding, and despite its other weaknesses, the CS 455-1 is good enough to let much of a good recording’s magic out. Yes, the soundstage depth isn’t that great—but it’s also not quite pancake flat—but the music’s beauty shines through, and isn’t that what it’s all about?

I should add that my comments above describe what I hear with the stock cartridge, which is fine to get you going, but the CS 455-1 is good enough to benefit from a cartridge upgrade when funds allow. Pairing the CS 455-1 with a better quality MM cartridge, or even a high output MC one, would be an interesting experiment!

Verdict

The Dual CS 455-1 is a modestly priced integrated turntable, with reasonable build and sound quality. It doesn’t have wide dynamics and frequency response of the bigger record spinners, but that’s an unrealistic expectation at this price level, and is precisely why the latter cost more money!

If reasonable sound quality and the convenience of automatic operation are important features for you, you should definitely make the effort to audition the

CS 455-1 at your nearest dealer. But the audiophile purist in me can’t help but wonder if the extra expense that goes into the mechanics that implement the automatic operation would be better spent elsewhere. That’s a call that only you, gentle reader, can make.

Specifications

Description Belt drive, suspended subchassis, automatic integrated turntable.

Speeds 33.3, 45, and 78 RPM.

Wow and flutter ±0.07% DIN.

Signal to noise ratio 72 dB (weighted).

Dimensions (whd) 440 mm x 119 mm x 360 mm.

Weight 5.4 kg.

Finishes Black, with gold or silver coloured trim.

Serial number of unit reviewed 170380003.

Price CAD \$649.

Warranty One year non-transferable.

AudioScape Canada

65 Kingswood Drive
King City, ON L7B 1K8
Canada
(905) 833-0010
www.audioscapecanada.ca

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 amplifier PrimaLuna ProLogue Seven.

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

Furutech Destat II

Antistatic Fan

By Rich Teer



When you live in an arid area like BC's Okanagan Valley (where I live), one of the things you have to contend with, especially in winter, is static electricity. At the worst times, just walking the few paces from my listening chair to my equipment rack can build up enough of a static charge to result in a sharp crack sound coming from my speakers when I touch my preamp and the static discharges. I'm pretty sure these discharges are

innocuous enough, but they always take me aback nonetheless.

Worse, for us vinyl lovers, is paper record sleeves (especially if they're snug fitting ones). The action of removing the record and rubbing it against the sleeve builds up a static charge which has the unfortunate side effect of attracting dust and other airborne debris and detritus to the it. It is this crud which is the source of many of the snaps

and crackles that anti-vinyl naysayers associate with playing records.

One solution to this problem (and in fact, my preferred one) is to use anti-static sleeves. Another is to use an anti-static device; an example of the latter is the new Furutech Destat II, which replaces the original Destat.

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Technical Description

The Destat II is a compact, hand-held unit, which is made from silver plastic. On the top is an activation button, a low charge LED, and a platform for discs like DVDs, CDs, and Blu-rays. On the bottom is the main power switch (used to select between off, 10 seconds cycle time, and 20 seconds cycle time), and the battery compartment. There are also three holes into which the rubber tipped spikes screw. On the front is the socket into which the charger plugs.

The Destat II works by generating a blend of negative and positive ions, which are then “blown” out of it by the internal fan. The fan is very quiet, almost silent. Materials and fit ‘n’ finish are first rate.

In Use

Using the Destat II is very simple. Make sure the internal lithium-ion battery is fully charged, and select the desired cycle time. If you’re discharging a disc place it on the platform, and press the activation button. If, like me, you use it on records, simply hold it a

few centimetres above the record (top down) and slowly move the Destat II in a circular motion; a similar action can be used to discharge other objects.

For gadgets like the Destat II, I think there are two things that need to be examined. The first is, “does it do what the makers claim?”, and the second, “does it improve the sound quality?”. To answer the first question, I induced a static charge in an item (verified by the item attracting a piece of paper) and then passed the Destat II over it as previously described. I can confirm that in this respect the Destat II works exactly as advertised. The static charge on the item was quickly dissipated.

Although it’s still a bit early in the year for the worst static-inducing weather, I tried this test with some of my records. Most of them are stored in anti-static sleeves, but I keep a couple of older paper-sleeved records around for just this type of test. Needless to say, I was not about to risk damaging my precious regular vinyl records by rubbing them with nylon material and paper sleeves! Passing the Destat II over a static-ridden record discharged all of the latter’s static, so that part of my test was successful.

However, I have to be honest: when I played records before and after using the Destat II, I couldn’t reliably hear any change in the sound quality, no matter how hard I tried. It could be that there was insufficient static build up on my

records to make the Destat II’s effect worthwhile or that my reference system wasn’t resolving all the information adequately. Or maybe I have a tin ear or was having an “off” day! :-) I don’t know. I’m not saying that the Destat II doesn’t work; all I am saying is that at the time I tested it, in my system, I couldn’t hear a change in sound quality (better or worse).

That being said, I think it’s important to note that Furutech make no claims that the Destat II will improve sound quality, only that static will be reduced. In this respect, their claims are demonstrably accurate and true.

Verdict

Static build up on records attracts dust and other nasties to our precious records, potentially leading to their damage. As an anti-static device, there’s no doubt in my mind that the Destat II works as advertised and is an important tool in the vinyl enthusiast’s arsenal—more so if you live in a very dry climate. I’m *not* convinced there’s a direct correlation between zapping the static and any improvements in sound quality (reduced snaps and crackles notwithstanding), but I don’t think that’s important. Don’t buy the Destat II to improve the sound quality of your records: buy it to keep them pristine, preserving the (presumably) not insubstantial investment in your record collection, and ensuring that they sound their best.

Specifications

Description Static charge remover.

Dimensions (hwd) 80 mm x 127 mm x 151 mm.

Weight 295 g (including battery but excluding PSU).

Finishes Silver.

Serial number of unit reviewed N/A.

Price \$425.

Warranty One year non-transferable.

Elite AV Distribution

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Hollywood, CA 90093-0896

USA

www.eliteavdist.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.

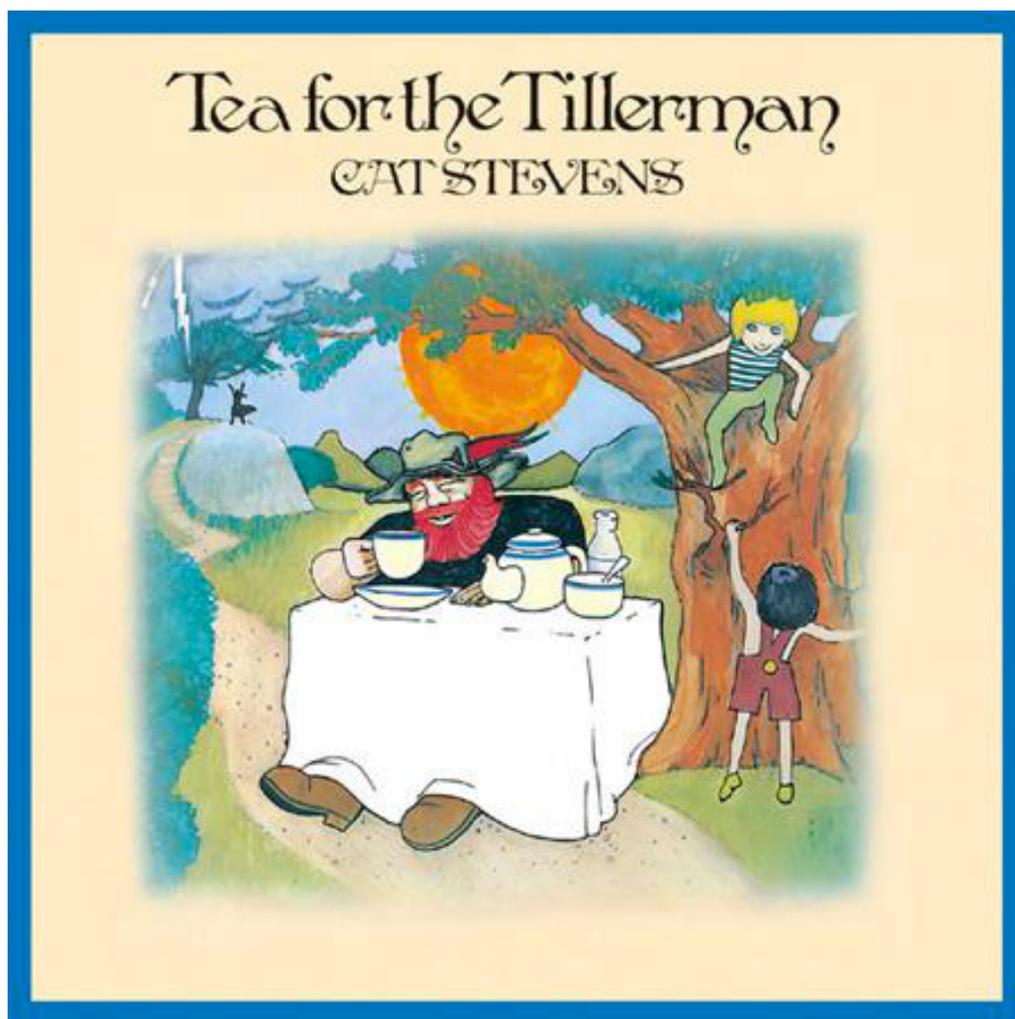
Power amplifier PrimaLuna ProLogue Seven.

Speakers MartinLogan Spire.

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Featured Record Review



Cat Stevens

Tea for the Tillerman

Analogue Productions/Island Records (33-RPM 200g LP)
APP 9135

It's not every day that a new record pressing plant opens, especially one that specifically caters to the needs of vinyl-loving audiophiles. So when word got out that Acoustic Sounds' head honcho, Chad Kassem, was starting a new venture called Quality Record Pressings (QRP) doing just that, vinyl lovers started salivating at the thought of the records that would be pressed there. Kassem was determined that Cat Stevens' *Tea for the Tillerman* would be QRP's first release, so the hunt was on to find a copy of the original analogue master tapes.

They were finally found and sent to Sterling Sound to cut the masters. Sterling Sound is where the original British Island Records and US A&M Records records were cut by Lee Hulko, and amazingly, Hulko's original mastering notes were located. George Marino, Sterling's Senior Mastering Engineer, performed the mastering duties this time around, after which the masters were shipped to QRP's new state of the art facility where they were plated and pressed by Gary Salstrom and Mark Huggett respectively.

For this first important release, even the packaging received the deluxe treatment: Analogue Productions decided to use a facsimile of the original Island Records gatefold jacket (complete with the glossy outside paper and textured inside paper), eschewing the non-gatefold US version. This attention to detail was even applied to the record label, where the original pink Island label was used. If you're interested in more details of this important release's story, you should check out this video published by QRP on YouTube, which contains some fascinating behind-the-scenes footage.

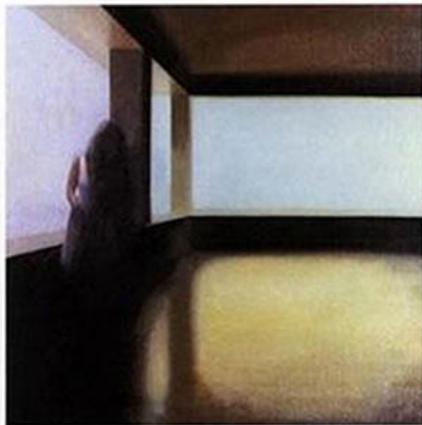
All this effort would have been for nothing if the sound quality of the finished product wasn't up to snuff. From the very first few seconds of the opening track on side one, *Where do the Children Play?*, it was clear to me that QRP have done a fantastic job of this release, one of which they can be proud. The sound quality is much better than my early (but not, I think, original) Island pressing. Not only is the bass more deep and full, the treble is more airy and extended. And the detail! Little details, like the sound of the plectrum hitting the guitar's nylon strings just before you hear the sound of the string itself, are present in abundance. There're certainly more low level details on this version than on my Island version.

The sound can get perhaps a touch strident on the loudest passages, but these are very few and far between and I think the better option (the other being to lower overall levels, potentially masking some of the dynamics and low level details that make this record so wonderful). Talking of dynamics, one thing occurred to me while I was listening to *Tea for the Tillerman*: it was mastered at 33 RPM, rather than 45 RPM. When I asked Chad Kassem about a 45 RPM version, he didn't rule out the possibility, but stated that any 45-RPM release would "probably be a few years away".

The record is flat and its surfaces dead quiet; with its very high sound quality, great music, and impeccable packaging, *Tea for the Tillerman*—QRP's first title—is a must-have, and earns my highest recommendation! **Rich Teer**

Audiophile Record Reviews

DIRE STRAITS



Dire Straits

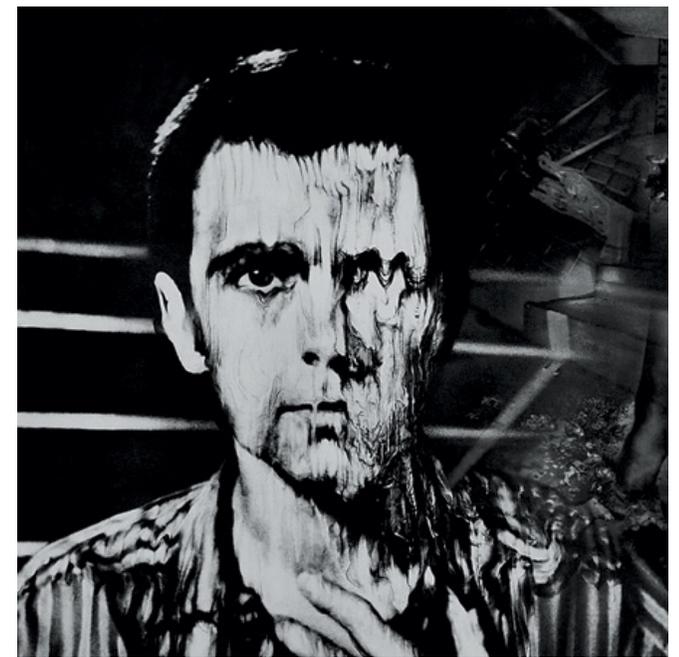
Dire Straits

Warner Brothers (33-RPM 180g LP)
47769-1

I've been a Dire Straits fan pretty much since *Sultans of Swing* was in the UK singles chart, so I was very pleased to hear that Warner would be re-releasing most of Dire Straits' catalogue, with plating and pressing performed at Pallas' plant in Germany, from the original analogue master tapes.

Dire Straits is the eponymously-titled debut album from the British group. The album has a bluesy-rock feel to it, with a hint of country thrown in for good measure. Several of the songs serve as a showcase for Knopfler's guitar virtuosity, perhaps most notably the *Sultans of Swing's* coda.

The sound quality is good, benefiting from the simple, unfussy production. The bass is nice and warm sounding. I don't have an original UK pressing of this album, but I do have a half speed master and another UK pressing, with which I compared this version. The half speed master and this new release were much better than the old UK copy I have: the bass is better defined, details are more apparent, and the treble is more clear. Dire Straits fans: if you want to get a shiver in the dark when it's raining in the park, this is the version to buy! **RT**



Peter Gabriel

3

Classic Records/Real World Records
(four single-sided 45-RPM 200g LPs)
PG 3-45

Originally released in 1980, this is Peter Gabriel's third eponymously-titled studio album. It is often referred to as *Melt* because of the cover art.

This record has more of a funk-rock feel to it than its predecessors, and contains one of my favourite Peter Gabriel tracks, *Games Without Frontiers*, a song about the childish futility of war. The opening track, *Intruder*, is notable as being the first use of Phil Collins' gated drum sound (Collins was one of Gabriel's Genesis bandmates, and succeeded him as Genesis' lead singer when Gabriel left to pursue his solo career).

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The sound quality is as good as the previous Peter Gabriel Clarity releases, i.e., very good, especially for a commercial pop record. The single-sided records are pancake flat with silent surfaces.

These Clarity sets are expensive and are becoming increasingly hard to find, so if you want the ultimate version of this record, get it while you can! **RT**





respectable dynamic range. If you're a Metallica fan, this is the version to get!

RT

Metallica

Metallica

Warner Brothers (four 45-RPM 180g LPs)

511831-1

Despite being eponymously-titled, *Metallica* (also referred to as *The Black Album*) is not Metallica's first album: it is their fifth. The music is, as you'd probably expect hard rock/heavy metal, but just to keep listeners on their toes, the balladic *Nothing Else Matters* is also present. The album's opening track is the classic *Enter the Sandman*.

The sound quality is surprisingly good. The bass and kick drum thunder away (and the cymbals are a bit hard-sounding), but unlike their 2008 album, *Death Magnetic*—which became a poster-child for the campaign against the loudness wars—this album has a



Love comes in two formats: just the album, or the album plus a limited edition 12" EP containing three extended remixes of *She Sells Sanctuary*. The latter is a bit expensive but worth it if you're a fan. **RT**

The Cult

Love

Vinyl 180/Beggars Banquet (33-RPM
180g LP)

VIN180LP013

Love is The Cult's second album, and was originally released in 1985. Spawning two singles (*Rain* and the somewhat anthemic *She Sells Sanctuary*, the latter being a particular favourite of mine), I'd describe the music as gothic rock.

The sound is OK, although it sounds like a bit of smile-shaped EQ has been applied, by which I mean that the bass and treble seem to have been lifted slightly. The effect isn't too off-putting, and perhaps gives the album a bit of a boost on systems with less extension at the frequency extremes.

Rock Record Reviews



Arcade Fire

The Suburbs

Merge Records (two 33-RPM LPs)

MRG 385

The third album released by Canadian indie-rock group, Arcade Fire, *The Suburbs* won a Grammy Award in February 2011 for Album of the Year (and was nominated for two other Grammy Awards). Listening to the album, it's easy to see—or rather, hear—why: musically, the album is pretty good. Incidentally, the vocalist's voice reminds me a bit of New Order's Bernard Sumner.

Unfortunately, the sound quality is more than a bit disappointing: the frequency extremes seem to be limited and too much compression has been applied. Not quite enough compression has been applied to

render the album unlistenable, but the damage is substantial, and it could have been much better. A great album let down by poor production decisions. This is somewhat ironic given how the album was created: each track was pressed onto a 12" lacquer, which was subsequently recorded digitally to produce the album's master, the idea being that the CD version should sound the same as the vinyl... **RT**



David Gilmour

Live in Gdańsk

Columbia Records (five 33-RPM 180g LPs)

88697344701 DC1

Originally released in September 2008, *Live in Gdańsk* is a recording of the final show in Gilmour's *On an Island* project, where he played to an audience of 50,000 at the Gdańsk Shipyard. The concert itself consumes four of the five discs, and in addition to numerous old favourites including tracks from *Dark Side of the Moon*, *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*, and *Comfortably Numb*, it contains the song *A Great Day for Freedom*, which was on Pink Floyd's final studio album, *The Division Bell*. *Live in Gdańsk* is also the final Pink Floyd related recording to feature the late Richard Wright, who died a week prior to the album's release.

The fifth disc in the set contains three live recordings from Nice and Abbey Road, and a couple of so-called Barn Jams.

Bearing in mind it's a recording of a live concert, the sound quality is pretty good. Better, in fact, than several studio albums that have been on my platter!

The beautifully packaged boxed set comes with a 20-page colour booklet, a poster, and a download code for an MP3 track, presented as a web pass. This vinyl set is now out of production and I highly recommend it (especially for Pink Floyd fans), so get a copy while you can! **RT**



The Verve

Urban Hymns

Hut Recordings (two 33-RPM LPs)

HUTLP 45

Urban Hymns is The Verve's third album, and is the album from which their most successful single, *Bitter Sweet Symphony*, was taken. In addition to being the album's musical highlight, *Bitter Sweet Symphony* was surrounded by controversy regarding ownership of the song. That notwithstanding, the rest of the album is made up of indie-rock songs.

The sound quality is only average, and some tracks seem to suffer from a bit too much compression. Fortunately, this isn't over done, so the album isn't rendered unlistenable. What is nice is that the album's 13 tracks are spread over four sides: the songs weren't

squashed dynamically or mastered whisper-quiet to fit onto a single disc, so kudos to Hut/Virgin for that! **RT**



Exile

Mixed Emotions

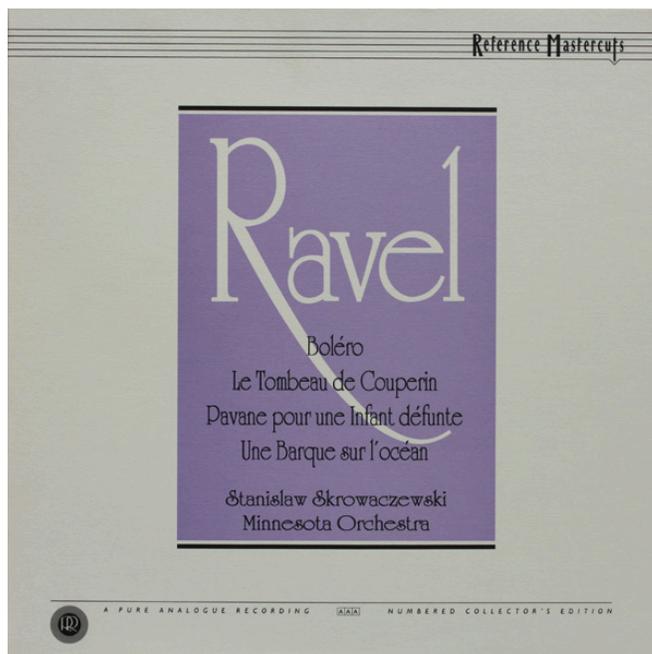
Warner Brothers (33-RPM LP)

BSK 3205

I'm sure that nearly everyone has a song or two that they really like, but are somewhat embarrassed to admit it. One of my guilty pleasures that fits into this category is Exile's *Kiss You All Over*, from their third album, *Mixed Emotions*. With the exception of *Kiss You All Over*, the music is a so-so blend of soft rock and country, with a traces of disco sneaking in now and then.

The sound is pretty good considering the genre. The bass is warm and the snare has that typical late 1970s wet sound. Not an audiophile spectacular, but I've heard much worse so feel free to spin this one when you think no-one else is listening! **RT**

Classical Record Reviews



Maurice Ravel

Boléro

Reference Recordings (33-RPM 180g LP)

RM-1001

In August this year, Reference Recordings announced their long-awaited return to vinyl publication. Our review samples of the first two newly-available titles didn't arrive in time for this issue, so to mark the occasion we decided to review the first ever title in Reference Records' Reference Mastercut series, Ravel's *Boléro*.

In addition to the 17-minute long crescendo that is *Boléro*, this record contains another long and two shorter compositions by Ravel, all played by the Minnesota Orchestra conducted by Stanislaw Skrowaczewski.

As befitting something called a Reference Mastercut, the sound quality on this all-analogue recording is superb. The uncompressed dynamic range is readily apparent as the title piece gradually grows in volume from ppp to fff. Be careful not to start this one too loudly! **RT**



JS Bach

The Brandenburg Concertos

Erato (two 33-RPM LP)

STU 70801/2

I was introduced to the Bach's music by way of Sky's rocky rendition of *Toccatà*, and the *Brandenburg Concertos* (specifically, the third) via Wendy Carlos' excellent album, *Switched on Bach*, which contains a number of Bach pieces played on a Moog synthesizer. So I was curious to hear what the *Brandenburg Concertos* (there are six in total) would sound like when played on acoustic instruments. In a word, they're great!

As for the sound quality on this album, it's not an audiophile spectacular (nor is it intended to be one), but the quality is pretty good nonetheless. I'm a bit of a sucker when it comes to the sound

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of harpsichords, and the one on this set is nicely captured. Being played by a Jean-Francois Paillard's Chamber Orchestra, the soundstage is, of course, not very big. This is a rather intimate sounding pair of records. I'm very pleased I added this to my collection; if you're a Bach fan, I think you will be too. RT

Jazz Record Reviews



Elvin Jones

Puttin' It Together

Music Matters/Blue Note (two 45-RPM 180g LPs)
MMBST-84282

The casual jazz fan is probably aware that Elvin Jones was an integral part of the legendary John Coltrane quartet. His six year stint with Coltrane brought him the wider acclaim, and acknowledgement he deserved. His passionate, relentless drum solos were lauded by fans and critics alike. One song that really highlights Jones' skill set is *The Drum Thing* from Coltrane's *Crescent* LP. The song features Jones' improvisational drumming for more than seven minutes, with periodic, melodic accompaniment by Coltrane on the tenor sax, and Jimmy Garrison on the bass. The song was meant to be a showcase for Jones, and it delivered.

Subsequently, Coltrane continued to play with Jones in this manner off and on, until his death.

Apart from being part of the Coltrane Quartet, Elvin Jones was also known as the younger brother of fellow jazz giants, Hank Jones and Thad Jones. Less celebrated by the casual jazz fan (perhaps, because they don't know) is his stellar work as a leader. Some of his finest dates came when he was at the helm, leading his own bands, instead of being relegated to sideman duties.

One such date that has Jones shining is his *Puttin' It Together* LP on Blue Note records, with a newly formed trio in tow. The album was recorded in the spring of 1968, less than a year after the death of John Coltrane. Joining Jones on the LP was his former Coltrane Quartet alum, Jimmy Garrison, on the bass, and Joe Farrell on the tenor sax, soprano sax, flute, and piccolo. I was thrilled to see that Music Matters decided to reissue it.

The music here is nothing short of breathtaking. On paper, Farrell seems to be out of his element performing with heavy hitters like Jones and Garrison. However, Jones seemed to have brought the best out of Farrell, because he delivers what is arguably one of the

best performances of his career to date. The opening track, *Reza*, has Farrell playing some melodic, enchanting notes on the tenor, as he tries to keep pace with Jones and Garrison. He does so successfully. Other highlights include *Keiko's Birthday March*, which starts off with Jones' drumming, leading way to Farrell's amazing piccolo playing, *Jay-Ree*, and Jimmy Heath's *Ginger Bread Boy*. There are no duds here, but with a lineup like this, that should be expected.

Like all Music Matters 45-RPM reissues, *Puttin' It Together* comes in a thick, glossy, gatefold jacket. Inside are Francis Wolff session photographs. The quality of the LP jackets are really the best in the business. You will not find an LP sleeve like this anywhere. In terms of fidelity, this is where this reissue truly shines. For lack of a better term, everything just has an organic sound and feel to it. The sound of Jones' drumming will catapult your mind back to Rudy Van Gelder's studio. You'll think you're there with Jones, Garrison, and Farrell. The Francis Wolff session photos only add value to this already great package.

I highly recommend this title, even for the casual jazz fan. If all you've heard from Elvin Jones is his work as a sideman for John Coltrane, then do

yourself a favour and get this Music Matters reissue. You won't find a better version of this LP anywhere, certainly not for \$50. **Atane Ofiaja**



Geri Allen

Flying Toward the Sound

Motema Music (two 33-RPM 180g LPs)

MTM-52

Flying Toward the Sound is a collection of nine original solo piano compositions, inspired by the works of Cecil Taylor, McCoy Tyner, and Herbie Hancock. Although I find the music not quite to my taste (yet), I have no doubt that aficionados of those three artists will find much to like, and one can't help but admire the skill and dexterity with which Allen plays.

Mastered by Soundsmith's Peter Ledermann, the sound quality of this minimalist recording (a single pair of mics capturing the sound of the Fazioli grand pianos, I think), is very good. I especially like the way the final sustained note slowly disappears into

the blackness on some of the tracks. The sound quality is further aided by the music being spread out over four sides, so if the music is your cup of tea, hesitate no longer! **RT**

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