

Issue 4, April 11, 2016

JOURNAL OF MUSIC AND AUDIO

# Copper



## Credits

Issue 4, April 11, 2016

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JOURNAL OF MUSIC AND AUDIO  
**Copper**

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## Opening Salvo

Letter from the Editor  
Bill Leebens

Welcome to the fourth issue of Copper! As always, we've covered a wide variety of topics related to music and audio, and our regular columnists open the magazine with a bang...or a series of bangs.

Seth Godin explains how his favorite tweak doesn't involve a new, megabuck piece of gear. Richard Murison describes a phase he's going through. Dan Schwartz offers his vote for The Most-Important Musician of the 20th Century--- and I can't wait to see the emails in response to this. Lawrence Schenbeck introduces Jaap van Zweden, for those who don't already know him. Duncan Taylor writes about being behind the glass with Greensky Bluegrass. WL Woodward contemplates the sounds of peace. My two columns consider losses in the audio world: of physical space, and of personal space.

In our feature articles, Mark Harms tells us about a serendipitous, life-changing musical interlude. In the third installment of our series Over There, Rafe Arnott writes about the surprisingly goofy audio culture of our neighbors to the north, in Canada. Pimm Fox relates the stream of consciousness of streaming, while awaiting takeoff. This issue's whimsical In My Room comes to us from German reader Folke Persson.

On a personal note---rather than a Persson-al one--- I'd like to thank all the readers who have taken the time to write us. Both Paul and I read every email and letter, and take the time to consider each one. While it's nice to receive praise, it's also good to receive thoughtful criticism. I can't, and won't, promise to change the magazine in response to every critique, but I can promise to consider them.

So: thank you--- and mea culpa, as appropriate.

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# Letters



## **Damn!**

Damn...WL Woodward's piece 67. One of the best articles that I have read in a long time.

Fresh, open, informative and best of all RAW!

You bought back lots of memories and it seems we had similar experiences with music and with first acquired stereos.

The first stereo I own was a SEARS Silvertone. The turntable flip down from a concealed door and both speakers could be detached with 3' of zip cord wire.

My FIRST album purchased was the BEATLES "Help" album released in August '65. I was a big fan from the first time I seen them on the Ed Sullivan show but after seeing the movie "HELP" I just had to have that album.

Fortunately for me in some respects my parents were oblivious to me enjoying music.

Thanks for the stroll down memory lane!

Please don't change your style of writing with the English language. It is slowly disappearing with the P.C. B.S. of the ever so changing world we live in.

Regards,  
Frank

## **Good Morning Copper**

Thank you for the interview with Elizabeth Newton in issue #3. This was right up my alley as a young college musician. The tone of the interview was exactly what I was looking for as a reader. I appreciate the references back to issue #1. I started my readership on the 3rd issue, and now I cannot wait to go back and read the other two. Keep up the fantastic work! I have really enjoyed every page so far. Well, almost... The article "Saved by the Bell" was probably the most bland thing I have read in awhile outside my college history courses, but I do appreciate the varieties of writing in Copper. The writing itself was

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very good. Perhaps, the topic was simply not to my taste. Which is expected when writing about such a subjective thing as sound and music. You can't make everyone happy. Thanks again and have a great day.

Philip Brooks

## Quest for Audio Nirvana

In my quest for audio nirvana, one of the problems I keep running into is being able to REALLY compare the different audio formats. I certainly will not wade into the controversy regarding PCM, DSD, 1-bit, multi-bit, sample rates, bit depths, etc. The problem I have always run into is that there is no real comparison available. I can buy a hybrid SACD for example, but the two layers are obviously mastered differently and can not be compared for sound quality. The various download sites are using music with questionable provenance.

Is there any help out there for the person just trying to make up their own mind? Maybe a music clip using all of the different formats, but it is the same and not manipulated, compressed, processed, etc. That would be a neat trick!!!

Genoaz

## Unbelievably Funny

Thanks Copper Magazine

Unbelievably hilariously familiar.

Thank you Seth Godin.

PMB Gallery

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# Letters



## A Few Suggestions

I'm really enjoying the articles in these first few issues, and I hope you'll accept these suggestions in the spirit of constructive feedback.

- Although the Opening Salvo provides a preview of the articles, a conventional Table of Contents would be much appreciated.
- From a readability standpoint, it would be helpful to have artists' names, song titles and album titles set apart in bold font/quotes/italics when mentioned.
- The interview with Elizabeth Newton was easier to follow than the one with Flemming Rasmussen because the attributions were in bold.
- I'm sure the repeat of Desmond Fretz's "In my Room" was unintentional, but it reminded me that I wanted to correct his designation of the Audio Research SP-14 as a tube preamp. It's actually a hybrid, with the only tube residing in the phono stage - I'm currently using mine for just that purpose.

All quibbles aside, I look forward to each issue. Keep up the good work.

Rich Isaacs

## Where are the Women?

I'm really enjoying this edition of Copper. I have only one big observation and criticism. You are at the beginning of a great project, the establishing of an interesting magazine for audiophiles. As the owner of an already very good Ayre and Revel based system, I truly appreciate not being sold stuff at every turn of a page.

Here's the observation and the criticism. Please, please take the opportunity to grow a readership amongst women. First, you might have to diversify your staff and second you will have to include writing that induces men to bring the magazine to the attention of their partners. My wife loves music therefore, I do not have a dedicated listening room. 'Our music' is played in our living room. It would be great to have advice for readers about how to negotiate difficult room acoustics and to negotiate the placement of audiophile equipment into living room furniture.

Best regards,

Pat Case

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# Letters



## Tired of Hypocrisy

After reading the letters about your article in issue 2 about Ken Kessler's piece, I felt it necessary to give my support. My hope is that you are not going to pull any punches in future articles. It's refreshing to see that someone has the balls to tell it like it is. Stating the obvious, if others don't like what you write, they do not have to read it. I was once told that liberalism is actually a disease, it seems to make people blind to the truth and totally irrational. The uber left preach tolerance, but as soon as truth is spoken, they freakout. So very tired of the hypocrisy.

R.P.

## Feeling the Pain

PAUL:

IT PAINS ME TO TELL YOU THIS BUT COPPER SUCKS SO FAR! I JUST READ ISSUE 3, IT'S A TINY BIT BETTER BUT----. WHERE DID YOU FIND THESE CONTRIBUTORS? I BELIEVE THAT MOST OF THEM WRITE NONSENSE, WHY DON'T THEY WRITE THINGS THAT WE, AS AUDIOPHILES, CAN SINK OUR TEETH INTO? SO DO I WANT TO UNSUBSCRIBE? THE ANSWER IS NO. PLEASE PAUL, YOU MUST DO BETTER!

JIM GERMANN

## Call it Brass Instead

I'll keep it simple - give it up - this is junk. Talk about retreading a bunch of old white guys with extraordinarily boring retread tripe. Ken Kessler?!!!!!!!!!!

I am happy that PS Audio has for some time now caught on to the notion of good marketing and some sales success.

But please! Don't fool yourselves into thinking you have anything other than that going on here. Copper! Call it Brass and you will be much closer to reality!!!

Thanks,  
Tony Rizzo  
Fairfield, CT

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# Letters



## Bell Labs

This is fantastic stuff - please keep it up.

I think many (most?) today have no idea about the contributions ATT and esp. Bell Labs made to the audio field - we are still in many cases using wire principles based on their development of the need for "long lines".

To say nothing of research and discoveries in other areas ( Bell Labs and the "big bang" for example). I am one who is of the opinion that the breakup of ATT was a monstrous travesty of justice and set the US back technically 30 years ( esp with the eventual "demise" of Bell Labs). And that the M\*\*\*\*\*F\*\*\*\*\*R presiding judge should be - well never mind - he's already dead.

Anyway - Bill this is really really great stuff and I look forward to reading more from you on this and other topics of interest.

Tom Terrific

## Broken Stereo

Recently had a similar experience as Seth Godin.

One channel of my tube amp stopped working.

Didn't take long to discover the unplugged speaker cable at the amp end.

However, as most tube amp owners should be aware, plugging the cable back in won't fix the problem.

It took a quickly responded to email to the US distributor to asuage my angst!

Luckily for me , my Silk Audio MS-38 has output fuses to protect it from clumsy cleaning & tidy owners like me!

I hope you didn't damage both of your amps?

I think we missed a "teachable moment" for tube amp owners here somehow.

Still can't help feeling that your story lacks credibility.....All four conductors?

At the same time?

Really???

CLM



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## GET A HORSE!

I was curious to see what Ken Kessler wrote in issue 2 that got so many people worked up enough to write some hate mail. It seems to me we have another Andrew Benjamin here. I gotta love it. The last one tore screaming into the night and didn't stop until he got to Eastern Europe where he originally came from.

"I have worked as a journalist covering high-end cars, watches, and other goods that do not masquerade as anything other than luxury products. Trust me: Rubinacci, Goyard and Ruinart never apologize for being exclusive. Nor should they. As a result of this contact, I have first-hand experience of such diverse elements of the luxury sector as the Ferrari test track and the Cartier restoration workshop, the Hermès museum and Patek Philippe's factories."

As a journalist, did you mention to those you write for that as of a couple of years ago when Andrew Benjamin was writing the same nonsense around these parts, that the most accurate wristwatch in the world was a \$400 Casio electronic watch which turned those \$100,000+ models into "anachronisms?" What dumb stupid pieces of junk jewelry they are, in constant need of cleaning and adjustment. As a practical matter, even a \$10 flea market watch is good enough for most people because by the time it has accumulated enough error to be reset, it's time to change it anyway from daylight savings time to standard time or back again. Ever seen that horse drawn carriage the queen of England rides in during certain ceremonies? Guided to the point of costing a bazillion dollars a Volkswagen Beetle would be a better choice for going food shopping or for going to work every day.

It's not a matter of snobbery, it's a matter of STUPID! Most of that high end audio equipment could be reverse engineered and built by electronics hobbyists for a small fraction of what they sell for and as for the so called "research" that goes into designing them, that's a joke all by itself. Where I come from where the real thing happens, most of what they do is called "tinkering."

Soundmind

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# Letters



## For What It's Worth

Inventing the moving coil cartridge? Possibly it is viewed differently on this side of the pond but I've read for years that Joe Grado developed (invented?) the first MC, even though he chose not to put it into production. Maybe Ortofon's was first in production?

Brick and mortar as "disrespectful" term for store front dealers? I wonder if this might be a language misunderstanding since it merely means having a physical building where equipment can be auditioned and purchased? Nothing to do with what they are selling.)

Kessler's ignored artists should be a fun series as lists of other's undiscovered treasures can stimulate new finds. And so a few comments on his first listing:

The Left Banke? Must admit I don't remember them at all, others on his list I knew a little to quite well. Jesse Colin Young, "The Soul of a City Boy", haven't listened to this in years but I remember it as possibly the best thing he did.

Rick Nelson, "Memphis Sessions" is my favorite of anything I've heard by him, and a pretty nice recording as well. For those with further interest, a lot can be learned about how his early career was dictated by his father.

Nilsson, must admit I'm surprised to find Harry on a list of undiscovered artists. "Back then" he got lots of air play in So. Cal. and while I don't have any numbers, RCA considered him popular enough to release a long list of albums.

Also as Ken notes he wrote a number of hits aside from being a performing artist.

Keep it up.

Tim

The Left Coast

# My Favorite Tweak

By Seth Godin

It involves an Eberhard Faber Design Art Marker No. 255, in green if you insist, but you can also use a pencil.

While listening to music (it works with analog or digital, by the way), read a book about the music you're listening to. Find an obscure website reference. Ask a friend for her take.

I know, it would be better if this tweak was more arcane, more difficult and more expensive.

Bear with me, please, because while it's none of those, it is time consuming. But worth it.

When we were youngsters, we read album liner notes. This, it turns out, is not that different from reading the cereal box while eating your Cheerios in the morning before school. You're not reading the box because it's new or interesting. You're reading it because it's there.

And so it was with album covers. Despite a very dubious award category in the Grammys (shouldn't it be called the Grammys?), most liner notes aren't particularly entertaining or memorable.

On the other hand, just ten or fifteen minutes of listening to or reading Phil Schaap on the history of a particular Charlie Parker recording session will almost certainly change the music. (Phil's Grammy awards for liner notes completely justify the category, by the way).

Part of the audiophile experience is the knowing. Knowing where the instruments were in space at the session. Knowing what the trombone really sounded like. Knowing what it was like to be there...

But the knowing needs context.

Ornette Coleman is unapproachable if you start at the end of his discography. He's playing for us, sure, but also for himself, extending himself from what he did in the previous album, or in the previous set. If you start early and work your way up, you begin to know.

Look, here's a book about the songs Bob Dylan didn't write. Five hundred pages of truly obsessive reporting on how Dylan discovered Robert Johnson and what listening to what one of his songs did to

## HOBGOBLIN



his writing. And listen... here, here's Bob singing that song the author just told us about. Yes, it sounds different. Better. More plaintive. How could it not?

Oh, here's a website ([genius.com](http://genius.com)) that dissects lyrics. It's strong on rap, but is expanding into just about everything.

And, wait, here's a recent article about Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. It turns out that the taxi horns have been played in the wrong key for the last fifty years. You can bet that those taxi horns will sound less veiled the next time you play them on your fancy rig.

There are two theories of art: One theory is that you must come to it cold. You see what you see. You hear what you hear. Your interpretation is all that matters.

The other is that you learn first. You understand what the artist intended (if she chooses to reveal that). You understand the context. You figure out what was going on when it was created, what the swirl was all about.

Both theories are valid, but it seems to me that only one aligns with the audiophile mindset.

The obvious question to ask: Which books, Seth? Tell me what to read, where to look.

That's actually not the next question, because it turns out that one man's obsessive yearning for the details of a Binghamton show by the Dead is another person's waste of time. No, the next question is: do you care enough about the experience of listening to sign up for this journey?

At some point, you're going to have trouble finding yet another electronic tweak for your system. It's likely, though, that you'll never run out of Post-Its, Blackwing pencils or good conversation.

**Seth Godin** is the author of 18 books that have been bestsellers around the world and have been translated into more than 35 languages. He writes about the post-industrial revolution, the way ideas spread, marketing, quitting, leadership and most of all, changing everything. You might be familiar with his books *Linchpin*, *Tribes*, *The Dip* and *Purple Cow*.

# It's Just a Phase

By Richard Murison

I want to devote a column to Phase Response, and this is actually a good time to take that particular detour. Phase is in essence a time delay. If a system has linear Phase Response, then all frequencies that go into it come out of it at the exact same time. Sound propagation through air displays linear phase response. If I play a musical instrument at one end of a room, when the music travels across to the other end, all of the music's different frequency components arrive in synch with each other. If sound propagation had a non-linear phase response, then the different frequency components of the music would all arrive at different times. [Interestingly, by way of contrast, light traveling through glass has a non-linear phase response, and the different wavelengths of light do in fact emerge from the glass at different times. This is how a prism splits white light into a fan of rainbow colors.]

Phase distortion – applying a non-linear phase change – has some interesting effects. It can change the shape of the waveform without changing its frequency content. We're used to seeing charts showing the frequency response of some audio component or other. We look for flat frequency response and consider it a desirable characteristic to achieve. This is because research has shown that the human ear is sensitive to deviations from a flat frequency response. We perceive such deviations to colour the sound, usually in an unacceptable manner. But if a system has a flat frequency response in combination with a non-linear phase response there is a lot of uncertainty as to whether – and if so, in what way – the resultant phase distortion is audible, even though the result can manifest itself in dramatically visible distortions in the actual waveform itself.

Simplistic experiments, using synthesized waveforms, pretty much always show the same result – that even the most gross phase distortions, accompanied by the most gross distortions of the waveform itself, are apparently inaudible. Phase distortion is therefore given relatively little attention. A body of opinion is emerging, though, which holds that phase distortions make their presence felt audibly not through tonal colorations, but rather through a loss of precision in the ability of a stereo system to create a stable 3-dimensional image. At this point, though, it is fair to say that such notions remain speculative.

## QUIBBLES AND BITS



However, the notion of time alignment in loudspeaker design is not new, and has been around for decades. If you adjust the precise fore-aft position of a loudspeaker drive unit in its enclosure, you are adjusting the relative times taken for the sounds emitted by each drive unit to reach your ears. This adjustment process is known as time-alignment. What it is actually doing is making a coarse adjustment to the loudspeaker's overall phase response. Normally this is done at the design stage, and by the time the product is manufactured the preferred alignments will have been baked into the design. However, Wilson Audio – some of whose iconic loudspeakers are priced like automobiles – has introduced (on their Mercedes- and Lamborghini- priced models at least) a facility to fine-adjust the time alignment of the midrange and high frequency drivers.

I have twice heard these über-Wilsons being set up, and when the alignment is in the Goldilocks Zone there is absolutely no doubt – the stereo image just 'snaps' magically into place. What is interesting is that if (and this is a big if) the effect we are hearing is solely due to getting the time alignment right, then it enables us to put some specific numbers on the amount of phase distortion that is potentially audible. And those numbers are surprisingly small.

So where does phase distortion come from? Mostly, in electronic equipment, it comes from components or circuits that are frequency-sensitive. Suppose you make an amplifier that contains a low-pass filter. This filter can be there for any number of reasons from stability enhancement, to RF rejection, to noise reduction, to specific sonic tailoring. Generally there will be region where the frequency response is pretty flat (usually the audio band), and a region where the filtering kicks in and the frequency response takes on a desired characteristic. What you tend to find is that the phase response is pretty linear over the flat region, but goes wild wherever the frequency response fluctuates. This kind of behavior is pretty much unavoidable, and is largely explained by various theories with names like Kramers-Kronig, Sokhotsky-Plemelj, and Hilbert Transform. Check 'em out on Wikipedia....

The important takeaway is that if a filter exhibits a dramatic perturbation of its frequency response, then you can count on it introducing a concomitant dramatic perturbation of its phase response. The one causes the other. Now, if the filter's corner frequency – where the frequency response starts to do things – is a long way from the audio band, then there is a good chance that the phase distortions themselves will also be confined to frequencies a long way from the audio band, and the phase response within the audio band may remain close to linear.

But sometimes that's not possible. A good example is the brick-wall anti-aliasing filter that an analog signal is required to pass through before it is digitally sampled. For standard 16/44.1 "Red Book" audio, the audio band finishes at 20kHz, but all frequencies above 22.05kHz need to be scrupulously filtered out. This requires a low-pass anti-aliasing filter that will exhibit serious perturbations in its frequency response [0-100dB in 2.05kHz has a certain kinship with 0-100mph in 2.05 seconds.], which in turn will cause serious perturbations in its phase response. But it will be making those perturbations at frequencies immediately adjacent to the audio band, which will cause the resultant phase response non-linearities to extend down into the audio band itself.

Even if you can persuade yourself that the frequency response of the anti-aliasing filter is sufficiently flat throughout the audio band, you really need to take proper account of any related phase distortion before you can definitively claim that any such a filter is inaudible. This is an area in which I suspect great progress will be made in the coming decade.

**Richard Murison** enjoyed a long career working with lasers, as a researcher, engineer, and then as an entrepreneur. This enabled him to feed his life-long audiophile habit. Recently, though, he started an audiophile software company, BitPerfect, and consequently he can no longer afford it. Even stranger, therefore, that he has agreed to serve in an unpaid role as a columnist, which he writes from Montreal, Canada.

# It's Nothing Personal

## AUDIO CYNIC

By Bill Leebens

Horseshit. Everything is personal. If something is directed towards a particular person, it is, by definition, personal.

“What prompted that offensive outburst?” you might well ask.

One of my many responsibilities is to prowl the internet, including audio discussion boards and forums, to see what's being said about my company, and act as needed. Despite the fact that I've been online for 20 years now, rarely a day goes by where I'm not flabbergasted (or, if I'm in a UK-kinda mood, gobsmacked) by an egregious, potentially-libelous, and just plain untrue remark about my company.

What then? Responding to such comments generally requires three steps:

1. The spoken, often shouted, verbal response directed towards my monitor (mind the coffee!);
2. The initial typed response, accompanied by further verbal comments, which is quickly deleted;
3. The actual response, couched in diplomatic terms, proving that I'm a reasonable soul and surely, surely, you couldn't possibly have meant what you seem to have said.

Why do I find it necessary to go through such an elaborate process in order to respond to comments made by immature idiots?

Because, despite possessing a real temper, I'm NOT an immature idiot. I'm a grown-up. And there are standards, even if many (somedays, most) seem unaware of those standards.

I was born a Yankee, in Minniesoda, but spent twenty-five years in the South (Memphis), and another fifteen years south of the South (the Gulf coast of Florida). In addition to the obvious differences in language (“y'all”, rather than “you gize”), there were substantial cultural differences. One distinction that baffled me was that rather than saying, “that's stupid”, as would've been the practice in Minnesota, Southerners frequently said, “that's ignorant”. It took me a while to understand the difference.





The dictionary will tell you that “stupid” means “lacking intelligence or common sense”, and will list “ignorant” as a synonym. When Southerners say that someone is “ignorant”, they don’t mean that someone is lacking intelligence. They mean that that poor soul is lacking in understanding, or knowledge, as in the common Southern expression, “he just don’t know any better”. There is an element of pity in such statements, an emotion not , found in “stupid”.

What’s my point? There is a great deal of intelligence exhibited on audio discussion boards, even, on occasion, genius. I have a number of specialist geniuses whom I call upon just to explain the things I read there, to my decidedly non-specialist brain. Does that make me stupid? I think not; if I lacked common sense, I wouldn’t recognize the need to confer with specialists.

What I am is ignorant, lacking in understanding, or knowledge. And what I see on those boards is a whole lot of ignorance.

Some of that ignorance is quite harmless: a newbie who misunderstands a fundamental concept, simply because they lack some essential knowledge. If they’re lucky, some kind soul will gently explain what’s what.

Some of that ignorance is decidedly not harmless, and all too often becomes malevolent. There appears to be widespread ignorance of basic courtesy and social graces, the stuff that is needed to get through daily life without inciting a riot or a homicide. Such ignorance is facilitated, even enabled, by the anonymity of online forums.

If you could say the most hateful, off-the-wall, untrue things that you could dream up, would you? For far too many folks in the land of “reality” TV, the answer would be “hell, YEAH!”. They view outrageous, offensive comments as being their right, and have been shown, over and over again, that such conduct gets plenty of attention. Whether that attention is positive or negative doesn’t seem to matter.

So if you took a world in which outrageous conduct had no consequences, coupled it with a world in which information is not just confused, but mistaken for wisdom...you’d have the world of online discussion boards. The ‘net in general can be vile and toxic, but somehow, the worst of the audio boards are ever so much so more so.

I’ve often posed the question: “How can something that is based in something as beautiful as the love of music, become so incredibly hateful and destructive?”

If you have an answer for that...let me know, will you?

**Bill Leebens** is Editor of Copper and Director of Marketing at PS Audio. He has been in and out of the audio business for over 40 years. Each time he returns to it, he becomes more cynical. He does not intend to go quietly.

# The Greatest Musician of the 20th Century

By Dan Schwartz

“I simply had never seen anyone have that much fun in my life.”[1]

That’s someone writing about the subject of this column, on the same night that I’m writing about. But I’ll go further. I’ll say: Ringo Starr is the most important musician of the twentieth century.

There. Done.

I would have written this a few weeks ago, but Paul Kantner died, and that took precedence. Anyway, nothing anyone says will dissuade me from knowing this. People have tried and quite a few of them go away convinced I’m right.

I know, I know --- “But Stravinsky!” you’ll say. Or: “Louis Armstrong!” I’ve heard it all before. Miles, Coltrane, Bernstein; you name it, I’ve heard it. Notice I don’t say the best. That’s probably Horowitz, or Jarrett, or Ali Akbar Khan. Or whomever you like.

I didn’t always think so. In fact, I never thought about it, until one day about 10 years ago, when I was watching the LD of “The Beatles’ First US Visit”. There they were, the Fabs on Ed Sullivan, doing what I’d seen them do so many, many times. But this time I had a vision, which persists until this day: watching Ringo “playing his heart out”, at the back on the drum riser, sending waves of sheer positivism, of love (in the big and musical sense of the word), out through the other three (like the Ark sending its rays of something-or-other into the Nazis at the end of Raiders of the Lost Ark) --- and on to 275 million of us.

So much has been written about that night, 52 years ago. I find the argument that we were hungry for something like it pretty compelling. Kennedy was killed only 11 weeks before (see *The Devil’s Chessboard* by David Talbot, Harper Books). We were in shock --- a nation in mourning, as the saying goes. We needed the Beatles.

George has said the world used the Beatles as an excuse to go mad ---- and mad we went. To give some idea of what he meant, at another point he said that the fans gave their money and their screams,

## MUSIC AUDIO AND OTHER ILLNESSES



but the Beatles gave their nervous systems: mass, collective hysteria. Ringo was the final lynchpin adding up to a perfect moment, the point when whole civilizations pivot.

Since I had this revelation from the god of music, everything that I've read has just deepened my conviction. Mark Lewisohn's wonderful and impeccably detailed *Tune In*, the first part of a 3-part biography on "The Boys", paints a picture of three very ambitious, talented but un-amazing pop musicians – and their drummer, Pete; a nice enough chap, matinee-idol good looks, brooding and a loner with a very helpful mother; all that, but not really cut from the same cloth. When the time came for them to back-up fellow Liverpudlian Tony Sheridan in a studio in Hamburg, he had to be recorded minus his bass drum because of his inconsistency with it. And it comes out that a lot of their live show at the time was developed out of necessity; they stomped on the stage to keep him in time. The three up front merited, needed, a better drummer. Ringo had sat in with them and George was agitating for him. When George Martin made it clear that he was going to book in a session drummer for their first session, they made their move: they went for the best drummer in all of Liverpool. That was during the summer of 1962.

None of them knew what they were in for (any more than anyone else did) --- only that they were aiming for "the toppermost of the poppermost". They invented it as they went along, and everybody around them invented it along with them. Presumably they got better as they went.

And Ringo was so in love with playing, with music --- and especially with them. He was an only child who was ill and in a hospital for a few years as a child (that's when his drumming began). Now he had three brothers. The four of them went through things together that only they know, that only they can know; at first enjoying --- and then enduring years in the proverbial eye of a hurricane.

So what do I mean by love? Openness, optimism, anticipation --- all the things one feels in the first flush of love. As a nation we were horrified by what had happened 11 weeks earlier, and we were desperate to feel something good. Ringo was the final piece of the puzzle, the final boost they needed to rise up to the occasion.

But I think he was more than that ---- I think he made the band, took them from a trio with nascent talent to the most fully realized artistic statement of the time. You have to go back to Beethoven, and his invention of 20th century harmony in the early 19th century, to find an event of similar scale---and it was the crucial addition of Ringo that took them all the way.

Musicians at that time seemed to compress a lifetime's learning into just a couple years. You can think of virtually any player at that time, and see unbelievable growth. From the start of Ringo's appearances in the US, to his final album with them 6 years later, his growth is astounding (but it may be that he was always that mature and the recording of him simply grew that much).

*The video referred to is only available in the online version*

Right around the 2-minute mark, playing *I Saw Her Standing There*, you get a nice side-view of him. You can see the pure exploding joy he feels in playing just perfectly right here. Nobody had ever been through what they we're going through (have I said that?), and Ringo is giddy with excitement.

And here's the growth I was talking about, from very late in their career:

So soft, so brisk, and played with brushes. He becomes the perfect drummer for every song --- by modern standards, his kit is tiny, but his touch always just right.

This last one is one of the Maysles brothers talking about the making of the documentary I was talking about, for the die-hards:

*The video referred to is only available in the online version*

Agree, disagree --- it makes no difference to me. I'm certain of it. Everything pivots on Ringo and his rise to Ed Sullivan February 9th, 1964. The world was different afterwards.

[1] This Bird Has Flown: The Enduring Beauty of Rubber Soul, Fifty Years On  
by John Kruth and The Beatles (Backbeat Books)

**Dan Schwartz** is a parent, sort of a husband, and has been a musician of some years, having played on quite a few records - and even a few good ones. He's recorded or played with Rosanne Cash, Bob Dylan, Jon Hassell, Brian Eno, Bernie Leadon, Dave Navarro, Linda Perry, Sheryl Crow, Stan Ridgeway, and was a member of the Tuesday Night Music Club. In his spare time, he used to write for Harry and Sallie at the absolute sound and the Perfect Vision. Professionally, he keeps trying to leave music, but it keeps coming to get him.

# Jaap van Zweden

# TOO MUCH TCHAIKOVSKY

By Lawrence Schenbeck

Maybe you've already heard: Mr. van Zweden will succeed Alan Gilbert as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 2018. This is not altogether surprising, but already the usual tongues are wagging about the choice.

Why should we care?

Being top dog at the Philharmonic doesn't signify as much as it once did. The number and quality of America's professional orchestras have risen—yes, risen—dramatically over the last half-century. Some of the best orchestral recordings lately have come out of Seattle and Portland, not Los Angeles or San Francisco, which also boast superb ensembles and performing spaces.

If American orchestra-building were played as blood sport, Chicago would long since have been named Winner and Permanent Champion. Having appointed charismatic younger conductors, Philadelphia and Boston are also feeling spry again. Even Cleveland and Pittsburgh have a right to sing the not-blues. But watching the NYPO navigate the hiring waters has been like seeing the most talented kid on your Little League team continually trip over his own feet.

I blame Lenny.

During his 1958–69 reign as Music Director, Leonard Bernstein set an impossibly high standard. He went everywhere, did everything: led (and recorded) a wide range of music, commissioned new works, gave TV the Young People's Concerts, and continued composing himself, crossing boundaries wherever he could. Naturally when it came time to re-hire, the board went looking for another modernist composer-conductor.

Pierre Boulez fit the job description, but he lacked Bernstein's social skills and joie de vivre. And his performances in the core Germanic repertoire didn't move patrons the way Bernstein's had. After a scant



six years, Boulez moved on. He was replaced by Zubin Mehta, whose conservatism and close ties to the Israel Philharmonic endeared him to board members and longtime subscribers. Mehta lasted longer than any other Music Director in the orchestra's history. In 1991 he was succeeded by Kurt Masur; in 2002 Lorin Maazel followed Masur. Like Mehta, both excelled in the core repertoire. Unlike Mehta, they also worked hard to raise the orchestra's performance standards.

Did this set the stage for Alan Gilbert in 2009? It's hard to say. Gilbert revived an emphasis on new music. His homeboy credentials (both his parents played in the Philharmonic) actually bettered those of Bernstein, a Boston native but quintessential New Yorker. Everything argued for the success of this marriage.

And yet Gilbert announced he would leave by 2018. He will have outlasted Maazel but fallen short of Masur's eleven years in charge. After due deliberation and much speculation, the board appointed another technical taskmaster proficient in the German classics. Eh, why am I not surprised?

Here's what to expect from van Zweden: more Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Bruckner. Meticulous attention to detail without (hello, Maazel's ghost!) eccentric re-interpretation for its own sake. If you like traditional repertoire done in Toscanini's intense but "faithful to the score" manner, he's your man. If you liked Gilbert's innovative staged concerts (e.g., Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*) and feasts of Nielsen, Lindberg, and Salonen, i.e., the new or unusual, prepare for leaner times.

You may still be asking, so what? I listen to recordings. (Isn't Copper all about audio?) How does van Zweden stack up as a recording artist?

A lot has changed since Bernstein's day. His hectic schedule included making scores of records for the major American label that also recorded Philadelphia and Cleveland. Meanwhile, Chicago and Boston recorded for that other major American label. Smaller labels also maintained active relationships with orchestras.

Now the only majors committed to extensive classical recording are Universal—DG and Decca—and, a bit less extensively, Sony/BMG and Warner. Everything else falls either to Naxos (they're yuge, as you-know-who would say) or boutique operations like Harmonia Mundi, ECM, Hyperion, Linn. A plethora of even smaller labels also generate product. Few make any money at it; most survive through support from government, foundations, or individual patronage. Vanity projects and self-promotion abound.

In response to this changing landscape, many American orchestras have launched in-house recording enterprises. It's part of their non-profit outreach. The best of these operations involve broadcasts, physical product, downloads, and streaming audio or video, plus high-resolution sound. Think Berlin, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston. New York?

Keeping right up, thanks! The NYPO website invites you to peruse an attractive backlog of podcasts (weekly radio broadcasts hosted by Alec Baldwin), and also directs you to free streaming via Spotify; I listened to Gilbert's performance of a Ravel/Debussy/Salonen program with considerable pleasure. You can buy digital downloads (via iTunes, alas) and a few silver discs, including those marvelous Nielsen SACDs from DaCapo and wizard engineer Preben Iwan. (They're also available as hi-res downloads, but not on the NYPO website.)

Expect all this to continue—except for the DaCapo connection. Still, audiophiles have reason to hope: in days of yore, conductors would bring their recording affiliation with them to a new post. Maybe van Zweden will maintain his ties with Challenge Classics and star producer/engineer Bert van der Wolf. I've listened to van Zweden's recent Bruckner Symphony No. 1 (Linz) with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, and it's a knockout. Besides hybrid SACDs, Challenge regularly makes a broad swath of download product available in two hi-res flavors (DSD, PCM) and several strengths (assorted bitrates, 2.0 and 5.1).

Here's as much as you want to hear of the Bruckner, a Gramophone Editor's Choice:

Someday we'll have a talk about how conductors can ethically keep old music fresh. For now, know this: van Zweden lets the music speak for itself. It sounds grand. No tricks in the engineering either. While immediately appealing, his way with Bruckner should also enjoy a long, happy shelf life. (I'll have more to say about his Ring Cycle launch next month.)

So, Jaap! Welcome to New York. Word up: better bring Bert.

**Lawrence Schenbeck** was born on a mountaintop in Tennessee. In spite of that, he became a historical musicologist. He is the author of two books, many more scholarly articles, and countless liner notes, music reviews, and "casuals." He lives in the Atlanta area with his family and too much music, Tchaikovsky being the least of it. Literally.

# Recording Greensky Bluegrass/ Part 1

## BEHIND THE GLASS

By Duncan Taylor

Behind The Glass is something of a recognizable phrase, and refers to my perspective as a recording engineer. Studios come in many shapes and sizes, but one of the most common elements is a window between the control room where the board lives, and the recording room where the players play.

The view isn't always that interesting in my studio. The window is mainly for communication, and when the band looks my way they probably just see the top of my head as I intently make changes to the board. My view into the room is from an angle, and mic stands, wiring, and video lights can clutter it up a bit.

I'm using the term here in a more figurative sense to refer to my perspective on the bands that I've recorded and liked. The aim is to go into detail about great bands that came to my studio, bands that are built on skill and excellence and tradition. Bands with serious players, well-crafted compositions and competent management.

One such band was Kalamazoo, Michigan-based Greensky Bluegrass.—Well, they had two out of the three, anyway.

Three years ago I saw them pop up on the schedule for the recording studio, and was immediately interested. We'd been recording a lot of bluegrass, and while I prefer to publish a diverse mix of genres, Greensky was then on a serious upward trajectory. They were beginning to headline big and important festivals around the country, and had some money behind them. There are good reasons for that; every member of the band was a particularly good picker, and the dobro player was one of the best I'd ever seen.

The band was a good match for us. For our studio, a great session could result in big video views down the road. For the band, a set of well-produced promotional videos could result in major exposure, and the timing was right. Given our recording fee of absolutely nothing (all of our sessions are free of





charge), the price was certainly also right for the boys from Kalamazoo.

Brief recap: my studio is a full-band, live-track video recording room just off to the side of the local newspaper's newsroom. In essence what we do is very similar to NPR's Tiny Desk Concerts, which you may have seen online. The difference between us, besides the millions of views, is that for NPR, bands often strip down and convert electric elements into acoustic for simpler live music video recordings. Not us: we record whole bands in the same room, with the vocals, and overdub nothing.

For most of the last four years at the newspaper we've had a constant stream of musicians and bands through the studio, filling the adjacent newsroom with enough sound to make work a little difficult but a lot more fun for the reporters and editors.

The studio project benefits from the newspaper's traditional media model, its access to musicians and the paper's audience reach. The newspaper benefits, because in this day and age a well-built digital feature with excellent journalism looks really good to audiences and to the newspaper's owners.

The local paper used to be a bigger voice for the local music scene. But journalism is in turbulent transition, and the fiscal reality has carved remaining newspapers nationwide into lean machines. A new outlet for vigorous local and national music advocacy was sorely needed, and bands rallied around our cause quickly and convincingly.

But enough of a recap---back to the Greensky Bluegrass recording session.

Nothing good is ever easy

The bastard was in my chair.

But I should back up. My "day job" was as copy editor and nighttime page designer for the newspaper. If not for our recording with Greensky Bluegrass, I'd be arriving at 3 p.m. to start building the paper.

The band was supposed to show up at noon, but I got the call around eleven that the band had arrived early and was getting antsy.

An entire hour early. Not a good start.

I hustled through a shower and sped to the paper, careening into the parking lot about 20 minutes later.

When I entered my studio to start unwrapping cables and to set up stands, the tour manager for the band was sitting in my damn chair with his arms crossed.

When I approached, he didn't move. An inauspicious introduction, indicative of some aggressive unit-measuring to follow.

One of the first things I had to achieve with the newspaper studio project was to gain the trust of excellent bands and managers. There are plenty of well-meaning people involved in the recording business who unfortunately possess more enthusiasm than skill, or knowledge. So I can understand a band's

hesitation when approaching us, especially since live-track recording isn't often on the C.V. of your average journalist.

But talk to me about it. See what I know, and check out what I've done before. That's a simple request, and you'd think it would be something everyone would do before recording in a new environment. The band's tour manager on this day hadn't seen any of our videos.

His attitude showed more than just hesitation. This guy expected me to not know a thing about what I was doing, and it wasn't 5 minutes alone with him in the room before he was literally shouting at me about what he'd done and with whom he had worked.

This didn't look good.

**Duncan Taylor** is a product specialist at PS Audio, and recording engineer and producer of live-track video recording studio Second Story Garage. He also plays a few instruments, pens a weekly music column for college students, and likes to build speakers and amps in his spare time.

# Are You a Collector or a Hoarder?

## VINTAGE AUDIO

By Bill Leebens

We'll take a brief breather from our historical review of audio technology (back next issue with a look at Acoustic Research, AR) in order to take a look at just how you---yes, YOU--- accumulate and hold onto vintage audio equipment. This may require you to acknowledge some issues you'd rather not look at, square in the face. If it makes you too uncomfortable, ask your spouse or partner to take the test (and yes, I lied back in Copper #1. There will be a test.). Odds are, they'll be MORE than happy to answer honestly on your behalf...or at least in the way most likely to make you look bad.

This is a subject that has been bubbling in my subconscious for a number of years. In a former life I dealt in rare books, specifically rare-ish books on physics and engineering. Once upon a time, decent business could be done in such things. With the advent of the internet, eBay, and Amazon, dealers in rare books either went to the top of the market, with the rarest of the rare, or to the bottom, as warehouseers of millions of volumes. I was somewhere between the two extremes, and opted out of the business.

Antiquarian Bookseller was the journal of the trade in those days, and they presented articles on extraordinary book collections. The differences between those libraries and mine were of focus, quality and determination: those folks picked a very specific area of interest, and relentlessly stuck to it. Whereas I had a loosey-goosey gathering of books kinda-sorta related to the history of automobiles and audio technology, found largely by chance and good fortune, the collectors focused on a very narrow niche, say, "Pre-Raphaelite Painters and Poets Published by English Hand-presses Before 1900", and set out to obtain every worthwhile title in that area.

Those collectors would encounter valuable books in related fields, but they would use those titles to trade for or fund the purchase of the specific titles needed for their collection; they wouldn't keep something just because it was cool. The same distinction appears in other fields: in Art, you see Collectors who buy with a purpose and focus---say, "Watercolors from the Ash Can School, 1905-1915"---and then



you have the Hoarder Charles Foster Kanes, who buy every damn thing they kinda like, and never even uncrate or display the pieces.

Do you so where this is going? In the almost-half-century that I've been hunting for old and rare audio, I've only rarely encountered Collectors like the one who has a perfect REL Precedent tuner, lovingly and respectfully preserved, not restored, elegantly displayed and used every day in a system whose components are of similar vintage or provenance.

Far more common in my experience are the guys (and yes, they are ALWAYS guys) who lift a garage door to show you stacks of equipment, most of it incomplete or broken, amidst teetering towers of newspapers and rusting piles of lawnmower parts. For a bulky guy like me, the sidestepping needed to access the aisles of equipment is tricky at best, anger-inducing at worst, especially when accompanied by a running commentary from the curator of the "treasures" on how he KNOWS that that smashed and smudged Pioneer receiver is worth THOUSANDS....

Even worse are the indoor-storers: "It's all down HERE," they say as they lead the way down a dimly-lit, rickety staircase into a dank, mildewy basement reminiscent of Buffalo Bill's dungeon in *The Silence of the Lambs*. Absolutely worst of all are the Spare Room Storers: here, the tippy towers are in an 8 x 10 room in icky proximity to a sweat-smelly, disheveled Master Bedroom (ha!), and in these rooms, swirling maelstroms of cat-hair dust-bunnies and an eye-wateringly acrid aroma of piss from Pussy are nearly always present, so much so that I learned decades ago to carry an inhaler on home visits, in anticipation of the inevitable asthma attack.

I get a little wheezy, just thinking about it.

Lest my point be lost: these are not collectors, these are hoarders. You can expect the always-on TV to be tuned to *Duck Dynasty* or Pat Robertson or something equally-angst-inducing, you can expect personal hygiene to be neglected, negligent or negligible, and you can expect, by God, that you WILL need a drink after you leave, probably several. Just hope you don't hit a house where Ma is present in a carelessly-askew shift revealing an ancient, dingy bra, prowling around hunting for her dentures.

Oh, boy. Deep breaths. Be still, my oscillating alveoli.

And lest it be thought that I'm just an arrogant, judgmental bastard (and yeah, I am, a LITTLE <cough>), I was once a hoarder of all things audiophilic. Non-working Kloss Novabeam in the garage, next to the console with the Marantz 1 and 2 and JBL D123? Check. One broken Apogee Stage, just one? Check. Drawer full of cartridges with snapped-off cantilevers? Absofreakinlutely. So...been there, done that, never ever want to go there ever, ever again. Ever.

We've delayed the inevitable long enough. Here comes the test.

Question 1: When it comes to audio equipment, I will buy

- A. Only very specific pieces in working shape, to fulfill a need (0 points)
- B. Anything made by my specific brand of interest (1 point)
- C. Anything I think is cool at the moment, if it's cheap (2 points)

Question 2: After I buy something, it will go

- A. Into a carefully-arranged system or showcase (0 points)
- B. Into a system, once I get around to fixing it (1 point)
- C. Into one of those piles, and I'll get to it sometime, maybe (2 points)

Question 3: If free equipment is offered to me, I will

- A. Take it if it is in good condition, and fills a specific need (0 points)
- B. Take it if I need it, or can trade it or sell it to fill a need (1 point)
- C. Take it, whatever it is, in whatever condition (2 points)

Question 4: My goal is to use my gear

- A. Every day, I have it to use and enjoy (0 points)
- B. Pretty often, especially when fellow hobbyists are over (1 point)
- C. Some time, when I can get together a coupla working pieces (2 points)

And finally, Question 5: My family

- A. Likes my equipment and enjoys using it (0 points)
- B. Makes fun of me, but tolerates my equipment (1 point)
- C. Threatens divorce/physical assault/ calling the health department regularly (2 points)

Scoring: add up your answers to all 5 questions. If your score is:

0-2: Congratulations! You're a pretty serious Collector, in control of things.

3-5: Ehh: you're mostly in control, but you could go over the edge pretty easily. Watch it.

6-10: Yeah. Umm...there's a problem. Change, or expect an intervention in your future.

Next issue we'll return to a less-in-your-face topic. Meanwhile...suck up them dust-bunnies, willya?

**Bill Leebens** has bought and sold vintage gear since the days when it was new. He regrets that a goodly number of classic American components now reside in Japan, because of him. Mea culpa.

# Sound

# MUSIC TO MY EARS

By WL Woodward

Sometime in '72 – '73, my first of many years in college, I had a dog named Reefer. I should qualify two claims there. First, I never 'had' Reef, he was like a friend you met at a Grateful Dead concert, and you guys hung out for a time. Also, I had no way of knowing his name was Reefer prior to our meeting. I gave him the name and he went for it.

He was a small shepherd/schnauzer mix, and the smartest animal I'd met since my mother. Neither of us on a leash, we'd hitch-hike to campus every day with honest intentions to go to classes. These intentions worked out as long as we were going to Drugs and Deep Purple 101. Reefer hated Freshman Physics, and I couldn't talk him into it.

Wandering through the park behind the student union, I'd run into a friend or another guy skipping Physics and we'd be discussing critical subjects like the location of the next keg party. Reef bored easily, and often wandered off. I'd realize Reefer was absent and would start calling for him. You do that in a park behind the UConn student union in 1973, and that sound got some attention, and hey, new friends.

When you're young and before you start to go deaf and blind on many levels, the world is redolent with insanity. You seem to notice, to freak, to see everything. Once you leave the farm you realize there are canoes filled with shit out there your parents never told you about.

And so much of that will be accompanied by sound.

The opening percussion on the first song of Santana III, with each next instrument adding, still transports me back to lying on my bed on the second floor of the boyhood home with headphones and a pipe of tobacco.

A nutzoid high school bud shoplifted a cassette from Woolworth's because of the picture on the front, a ghoul in a graveyard. He'd never heard of the band, just dug the cover. Black Sabbath's first album. I still remember THAT phone call. True story.



There was the sound on the bus, after winning the high school state championship in soccer, heading back to the school. My critical role here was cutting oranges. A minor role to be sure, but Jack (of pilfering cassettes from Woolworth's fame) and I excelled.

The soundtrack to Easy Rider the first time you saw the picture. One of those pics where the story gets dated but the soundtrack lives and breathes.

The sound of each our kids' first word. In each case, 'No'.

The sound of the crack in Cronkite's voice when he told us the president was dead.

This morning I woke up suddenly at 3AM in the cradle of my home, in about as middle- America as you can get. This was the morning after the Brussels news/wtf/tragedy. It's mid-March, and the house is cold. I dashed to the bathroom, then back to the warmth. I crawled under the covers, arranged the pillows and started working on a way to go back to sleep. But what had really woken me up in the first place, and kept me up, was the smothering knowledge that there was a city, a country, a continent, a cousin scared to death this night.

I prayed. And I wondered. Brussels, Belgium, Europe, Earth. How can we do this shit to each other? Neighborhoods, countries, religions and friends in so much fear. Families fleeing from horror because they can't send their kids to school or go to the market, just to be faced somewhere else with suspicion and denial. Lord, please rest your hand on the hopeless.

And here I was under 12 pounds of blankets in that whole mid-America thing.

The ticking of the grandfather clock in the living room outside our bedroom got me thinking about math. The furnace kicked in and I was reminded of how much I loved that sound. Then the early coal train came through town, blasting a warning to drunks and angels at each crossing.

I realized what I was listening to, and I thanked my Lord.

Drifting off, thinking of pink utility trucks and dance hall monkeys...and peace. The sound of peace.

**W L Woodward** is the Director of Operations at PS Audio. He has been married since 1974 to his high school sweetheart and should practice his guitar more.

# O, Myyyyyy, Canada!

By Rafe Arnott

For this entry of Over There, we go north to Canada. To hear Rafe Arnott tell it, Canadian audiophiles aren't the mild-mannered, "Sorry"-loving sonsofguns portrayed in American stereotypes. Having worked with Canadian drag-racers in the past, I can vouch for the fact that craziness exists north of the border. Enjoy...eh?

---Editor.

Everything you've read about how hardcore, party-insane Canadian audiophiles are... is true. I never used to think we were a crazy crew, but after attending a number of big, high-end audio shows in the States, I've come to realize our fellow sound-hounds in the U.S. of A. just don't go as hard on the stepped attenuator as us Canucks do.

Okay, some do. But only a few.

Not all American audiophiles are this loose, but sometimes one gets exceedingly lucky

I know, I know... "what is this guy talking about? Canadians are so... polite," is what you're saying to yourselves right now.



WRONG.

Not when it comes to spinning 200-gram Bernie Grundman remasters, we're not polite.

When the Editor asked me to report back to his acoustic-panel damped hi-fi lair in Colorado about what was happening north of the border with third-



order harmonics groupies, I knew he wouldn't believe how hedonistic the listening sessions were up here.

That time shit went sideways, and we put together speaker stands

Booze, sweat pants, lasagna. One buddy even makes pickled eggs, and sausage.

My audio brothers come over to hear me spin rare-ish vinyl at my humble abode, and sometimes I don't even use my anti-static gun when I'm flipping LPs. "BOOM!"

That was your mind being blown.

Don't even get me going on how sometimes I unscrew the covers off valve amps after a few local, artisanally-crafted beers have been poured down my throat. Dust covers on turntables? Pffffffttt. Shit gets real in Canada.

Of course, there are never any women at these parties, but then again, I've yet to see a woman at any American hi-fi throwdowns either. (You just haven't been to the right ones, Rafe.---Ed.)

We've had blind AC-cable listening tests, cartridge-loading parties... shit, once we even messed with the toe-in on speakers. Don't get me started on cable-risers.

We're an odd lot to be sure, but we do share a genuine love of music, and a system that recreates that "in the room" illusion of musicians spread out on the sound stage between the speakers is what we all vibe on. To that end there is a trend toward tubes with the people I drop needles with, and vinyl.

Shindo, Audio Note, McIntosh... there's even some who dabble in Ayre, and Nelson Pass (you know who are), but to a man, they'd all rather have a friend over to listen than sit by themselves, locked away alone in the dark, fiending over timbre, tone, attack and decay, or stroking LP spines of Original Master Recordings.

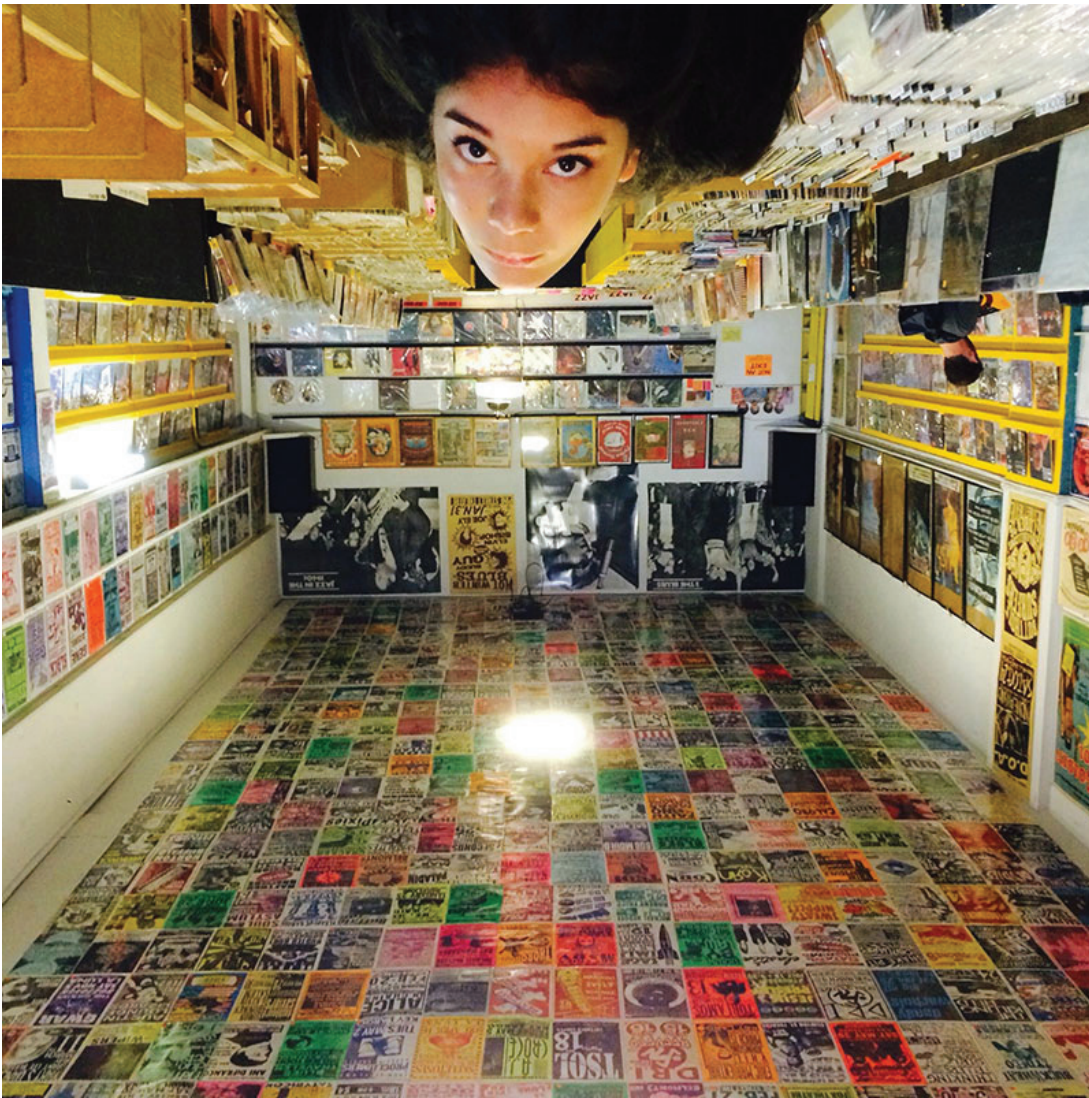
My girlfriends have all put up with my audiophile madness, which is worse than many, but not nearly as bad as some I know. My children love the sound of my system, but worry about my sanity when I repeatedly fetishize over Japanese cartridge porn online. My daughter loves record shopping.

"Dad, we were just here yesterday..."

Many of my stories are probably painfully banal by many hardcore hi-fi enthusiast's standards, but I remember one time when I got wind of an uber-unknown vinyl collection that was coming up for sale here in Vancouver, if my whiskey-addled memory serves correctly, it went something like this:

The name scrawled in pen on the small crumpled piece of paper I held in my hand said "Andrew," and underneath was a phone number. An acquaintance who works at a local record store had silently pressed it into my palm after telling me in hushed tones about a fellow who was looking to sell his considerable, and well-curated LP collection.

Seemed the record store in question had offered the chap an unflattering amount for the whole lot, and



that it was not nearly enough, so the guy was looking for some local collectors who might be interested in some bulk purchases.

“Keep it quiet,” the acquaintance said, not wanting to waste the seller’s time with tire kickers. “He’s particular,” he whispered with a sideways glance.

I held my index finger alongside my nose with a knowing wink to show that I was no hick, and could be trusted to keep things on the down low.

Later that evening I fished the paper out of a coat pocket, and called the number. After several rings there was a click, and a

soft-spoken man answered, “Hullo?”

I introduced myself, mentioned my acquaintance’s name, and that I’d be interested in taking a look at what he had the following afternoon. “Around 5 p.m.?” I asked.

“Sure,” a click as the line went dead.

I went about my business that night and the next day, only absentmindedly thinking about Andrew, and what his collection could hold. Over the last few years I’d been to a number of homes of collectors who were offering LPs, and invariably there were one or two albums of interest, but never more. No pay dirt.

For the record (!) I love jazz. Original pressings are awesome, but OG Blue Notes are like Civil War artifacts, and far too pricey for a man of modest means like myself. But, what about Analogue Productions or Music Matters 45s? Classic Records remasters? Cisco? Mobile Fidelity (especially the ‘80s stuff)? Impex? ORG? Japanese pressings of just about anything? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, and more yes.

Not the kind of stuff that comes up often for sale in this part of the world. That was what I was always

on the hunt for, but sadly it was usually private sellers overseas on the Discogs website that ended up taking my money.

So the next afternoon, after a 30-minute train ride and a 15-minute walk through a nondescript suburban landscape, I came at last to an unassuming high-rise, and buzzed Andrew. Taking the elevator to his floor in the mid-30s, I stepped out, found the right door, and knocked.

It opened, and there stood a very mellow, casually rumpled fellow with a warm smile, and a humble air about him. A cat meowed at my feet. We shook hands, and I glanced around the modest apartment as I stepped in removing my shoes.

That's when my eyes widened: A beautifully-restored pair of vintage Quad 57s sat on the floor, a mint Quad 33 pre-amp and 303 amplifier next to them. Dozens of cardboard boxes packed with LPs were scattered all over the floor .

What looked to be a Clearaudio turntable poked out from beneath a cloth on a table in the corner.

I smiled nervously, noticing all the obi-wrapped Japanese pressings spilling out of a few haphazardly-opened boxes, as Andrew led me into another room, off the living area. Here was an almost floor-to-ceiling arrangement of shelves that held hundreds of AP and Music Matters 45s, Classic Record remasters, ORG 45s... Mobile Fidelity 33s were as far as the eye could see.

I started sweating. I mean, honest-to-God sweating.



I mumbled something about the temperature, and started taking my coat off so I wouldn't look crazy. I was having trouble processing the sheer amount of pristine vinyl that had been so carefully curated over what must have been decades of collecting. This was a labor of love, and despite doing mental gymnastics at the worth of such a collec-

tion, I managed to ask Andrew in a slightly-hoarse voice "Why are you selling?"

He pointed to a stack of what looked like a jumble of gutted '70s, and '80s keyboard electronics taking up half a room, and explained he was getting into writing, and producing synth-based music. Vintage keyboard gear wasn't cheap, he intimated, so he was funding the enterprise by selling his hi-fi kit, and LP collection.

I nodded, and swallowed dryly.

I'm not what most would call religious, perhaps spiritual is a better moniker for me, but I thanked my lucky stars for stumbling into this cavern of analog treasure before anyone else had.

Having only brought a couple hundred dollars with me since I really wasn't expecting to find much, I left with only a half-dozen albums – several more put aside with assurances I'd be back the next day to collect them – and proceeded to photograph large sections of album spines on the shelving, and boxes on the floor to text to my friends Chris, and Howard who I knew had both the financial means, and pre-requisite weakness for LP collecting that was needed here.

Both were none-too-happy with my texts, each knowing full well that I had just cost them several thousands of dollars each.

I couldn't help but smile. Once again I realized that it was our mutual addictions and fetishes that were galvanizing part of my small circle of high-end audio friends, and despite their hard-partying ways, and flagrant disregard for proper component vibration isolation, in the end it was the music they cared about most.

Isn't what that's really about?

We could all argue about whether outboard speaker crossovers are really "just a tweak," and proper loading with step-up transformers until we're blue in the face, but if the music isn't making us air-guitar on our sofas, or raise a glass to toast one another on our good fortune to fall into this most esoteric of hobbies, then what's the effing point?

**Rafe Arnott** has several major flaws, most exploited by Japanese whiskey, Japanese moving-coil cartridges, Japanese mid-'80s vinyl pressings, and British-built tube amplifiers.

His frantic scratchings on hi-fi can usually be found at Part-time Audiophile.

# A Meditation While on the Ground and Not in the Air

By Primm Fox

Living without the joy of music or the spoken word seems a bit depressing.

A Canadair CRJ700 aircraft is larger than the top of the line Gulfstream G650, but smaller than Donald Trump's 757. I know this because I spent four hours on such a CRJ700, Delta 5515 with service to Birmingham, Alabama, in a driving snow-wind-rain storm on the tarmac at LaGuardia, late into the night.

And so I was able to behold through a port side window, a TRUMP boldly painted on the side of a Boeing 757, newly arrived from South Carolina. I looked around the darkened cabin and every face, save that of a woman across from me, was illuminated.

Science-fiction candlelight. A group of women having a good time with selfies, while the flight attendant bravely predicted that there was no way we were not going to Birmingham. She made it clear that she was not going to spend a night near the airport (and she was correct).

It seemed a good time to insert a nice pair of earphones. The only thing streaming out on the tarmac was the weather, as Gogo and Boingo don't overlap in the deadzone. Beyond the reach of mankind.

With batteries draining quickly and the wait increasing, I launched another BBC4 In Our Time on my Blackberry's Sandisk media chip and I am good to go.

Eleanor of Aquitaine, Robert Hooke and Issac Newton, as well as the California Gold Rush of 1849. I downloaded the podcasts at home over WiFi. If I can do it anyone can do it. It's like shopping on eBay.

As I sat there listening, the whir of the engines indicated that the winds were below 40 knots, and we would soon be on our way. I unplugged my ears to listen to the captain explaining that we are just going back to the gate, because we need more fuel in order to remain waiting.

A small wave of exhaustion hit me.

I turned from the history of electromagnetic motors, to Glenn Gould playing Bach. My headphones and Blackberry were my lifeline for at least an hour, until sense and reason took over.

What better time to be able to enjoy the highlights of civilization and culture - at the press of a few buttons?

The here and now are what matter. It is great to have the best; I've already convinced myself of that.

Why not use the cheap throwaways? Mainly, because of a combination of discomfort, and the lack of an airtight seal.

Whether it is the spoken word podcasts of Melvyn Bragg or the I Am Oak music video that really isn't a music video, but a video of a skateboarding nut ---- it's just amazing --- using any old device works fine.

It's whether the form-factor works for you. For me, having a Blackberry in which I use a little generic SIM card, makes it possible to download 64 gigs (\$25) worth of podcasts.

Not only is there so much more to learn---The Rings of Saturn, for instance--- but having something with a keyboard let's me share my experience with others...in 570 words....

**Pimm Fox** is the co-host of Bloomberg Radio's Taking Stock on Sirius XM 119

# Alternate Routes

By Mark Harms

**October, 1964:** It was a picture-postcard autumn day in rural upstate New York. The leaves were turning the spectacular reds and yellows that excite the whole country for a few days every fall. The rest of the year, the area is not very different from much of the rest of the country; call it Norman Rockwell time. A similar day, many months earlier, had led me to go to school there, at Colgate.

I walked across the quad with no purpose except the dorm was close, it was about time to eat, and it wasn't yet time to go to town to explore how much one could drink without falling down. Back then, East Coast schools with delusions of importance forced all freshmen, including me, to wear a maroon beanie and a black knit tie. Along came a senior, and rather than the usual harassment, he told me that there was something that I absolutely had to do that evening.

He pointed to the Chapel (think North Church Boston, and Paul Revere) and said that Ravi Shankar was performing there that evening, and the event should not be missed. Who? Ravi Shankar? Chapel was the LAST place I would go voluntarily; we freshmen in our beanies and ties had to go three times a week before class, to maintain our status as students. Miss too many, and home you go! Imagine the stink multi-culturists would raise today.

It was Monday or Tuesday, with absolutely NOTHING else to do, so I walked the 100 yards to the chapel. Inside, only 30 or so others had made this monumental decision, so I took a front row seat. In 1964, it was likely that Ravi Shankar had heard of the Beatles, but equally likely that George Harrison had not yet heard of Ravi Shankar. It would be a couple of years, 1967, before Ravi played the Monterey International Pop Festival, and his name became well-known.

After a few minutes' wait, a small, robe-clad dark man with tied-back longish hair appeared, along with his supporting musicians. He carried a large instrument that almost dwarfed him; I shortly learned this beast of an instrument was a sitar.

The concert that followed was transformative. I had never, ever heard anything like it, and neither had most of the Western world, including George Harrison. That would change, along with a LOT of other things, in the next couple of years.

After the performance, everyone went on to other things...everyone but me. I decided that I absolutely had to meet this man in person. There was no competition to get through the door to go backstage, and no security to stop me. I'm sure that things would've been a lot different at Monterey, in '67.

Ravi was happy to see that at least someone was interested in his performance, as this was his first show in the US. As a very mediocre 5-string banjo player, I was interested in how the sitar was played; it has a whole bunch of strings, and five was a handful for me.

This simple question resulted in a 45-minute sitar lesson, included a few strums by me on the master's instrument. He was either the epitome of politeness, or genuinely interested in how one plays traditional American folk music. I wished I'd had my banjo to show him a thing or two. I don't think he pursued this line of inquiry, as I never heard that he and Earl Scruggs ever made contact.

I continued banjo-picking a bit, poorly, and never picked up a sitar again. Ravi went on to become George's sitar guru, and I thoroughly enjoyed even the simple sitar lines George was able to accomplish. Ravi had spent his entire life learning his instrument: sitar ain't bean bag.

In 2008, I again heard Ravi, this time with his daughter Anoushka and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. I inquired to see if a back stage audience could be arranged with Ravi, thinking that this might be a book-end deal: meeting with him on his first US tour, and on what might perhaps be his last. It would be extraordinary if he had remembered our time, as I had, almost 50 years earlier.

But no, security concerns made such a meeting inconceivable. A pity: who knew that a beanie walking across the quad would have such a chance experience, one which would resonate with him for so many years? All it took was listening to Ravi's 1967 Monterey album one night with a glass of Scotch to trigger this flashback, and for me to realize that my enjoyment of music today was fostered by chance, one night in 1964. What if instead, I'd spent the evening at Hickey's Tavern, as usual?

I'm grateful for a side-road taken, a fork in the road chosen without thinking.

**Mark Harms** is a retired attorney who lives with his wife in a single-family home in Winnetka, just outside Chicago. His audio system (Thiel CS-6 driven by McIntosh and Bryston, Ernst-tweaked MacMini, Rotel DAC, PS Audio power cables and Dectet) would be too much for a condo. It would also be too much for the wife, except that the CS-6s predated her and she brought a nice dog to balance the speakers.





By Folke Persson

Now approaching fifty years as an audiophile, I'll recount my quest for a system that fully satisfies.

Long ago I discovered a high-end stereo shop in the suburbs of Philadelphia where I grew up. It was called "Music & Sound" and what I experienced there led me to become a "high-end" audiophile. The store name says it all about our hobby which involves a passion about these two things.

In the beginning, for me, it was mostly about the sound. I was attracted to playback that I felt sounded like musicians were actually in the room. It didn't much matter what was playing, so for years I was obsessed with "demo discs" (it was all LPs back then), recordings that sounded real. Of course much depended on what equipment was being used and in this shop, then, it was the exotic and expensive gear (Magnepan, Audio Research) that sounded most realistic to me.

Obtaining all the components of such systems became the quest. And I sought out the demo discs to show mine off to friends and to myself. Music appreciation took me a lot longer. I grew into it, helped by audiophile friends who shared their music knowledge and discoveries. I found the genres and art-

ists that appealed to me and learned more about the music and musicians. Today, music and sound are twin obsessions, with one or the other holding sway at different times. I need and demand the best of both.

There is a rich vocabulary to describe the sound quality (SQ) of playback systems. Much of it was codified in the 60s by Gordon Holt, an early pioneer audiophile who published a then ad-free magazine called *Stereophile*. One important attribute is called “imaging” or “sound-staging” and I’ve doggedly pursued its improvement in the systems I’ve put together over the years. It is that three-dimensional character of SQ that adds to realism—that allows me to “place” each instrument and voice in space (in the room) in front of me as I listen from the “sweet spot”.

My transition from analog to digital, from LPs to CDs, took ten years and involved a lot of overlap, listening to both for quite some time. In recent years I’ve moved almost exclusively to ripped and downloaded digital files.

With guidance from a high-fidelity consultant, my early system included a Linn LP-12 ‘table, Paoli tube preamp, ARC D-150 tube amp, Fulton Gold speaker wires, and Fulton J Modular speakers. It served me for 40 years, but had such a low “wife acceptance factor” that it and I were banished to the garage after I got married. I worked with what I had, even employing our two cars in room treatment :)

My wife enlists me in putting on elaborate Halloween productions for neighborhood kids and parents. Garage doors open, my system plays appropriate music and sound effects out into the street. Two years ago I’d recorded effects that included a closely-miked whoopee cushion. In the heat of the event my wife kept yelling, “Turn it up!”. There was soon a great ripping sound as the pulses laid waste to all midrange drivers.

I’d nursed the J’s along for decades from a cache of spare parts. Now there were no more. I asked a trusted audiophile friend for speaker suggestions and chose Triton Ones from the three offered. Within



two days the Tritons were installed :) and the J's hauled away :( Thus began my journey to a new system—and a new understanding—that are hugely satisfying and fulfilling.

We recently moved into a larger home and I was granted the empty living room(!) for listening. It's 13 x 34 x 8-10 feet high with a peaked ceiling—solid and with great acoustic potential.

I had read *The Audio Expert* by Ethan Winer and finally begun to understand the full potential of acoustic room treatment. Over the past eight months I implemented a reflection free zone and bass trapping in consultation with folks at RealTraps, the company Winer founded. No investment has returned more than these in terms of a fully-rendered sound-stage that is infused with “live” qualities.

But there were several that delivered all the information required for that rendering, with all its quiet subtleties: ARC SP-14 tube preamp, Mac Pro with LaCie Thunderbolt 2 solid state drive, Amarra/iTunes and NAD M51 DAC (for stereo PCM files); Sony HAP-Z1ES (for stereo DSD files); WyWires Blue speaker wires (\$350!); and Oppo BDP-105 (for multi-channel DSD files, SACDs and DVD-A). I use an FMI 80 for center and NHT Super Zero speakers in the rear, driven by two Musical Fidelity Class D amps for multi-channel playback.

After being rebuilt a few years ago, the ARC D-150 amp carried over to drive the Tritons. All was sweet and good until its right channel failed. I swapped it out with an AVA 600R hybrid amp that I'd used with Maggies in a second system (a whole 'nother story). At first I was disappointed in its midrange reproduction (“I knew D-150, and you're no D-150!”) but grew to appreciate its character there and throughout the range.

So here I am in the “living” room with the best sound in my experience. And the best music, as hi-res audio pours forth for easy purchase and download. Especially now I realize that we can't do this alone. We reach out to other audiophiles in communities like this one and get help.

It's a new day for both music and sound and their power to enrich our lives. The real hi-res audio revolution is about awareness, opening the doors of perception, and practicing the art of listening.

I have come to enjoy a wide range of music that includes jazz, blues, folk, classical, rock, electronic and alternative. The best recordings in my collection have a quality I call “release” which means clarity, effortless dynamics and naturalness—as if unattached or unable to be ascribed to any component in the chain. They present a pristine stereo image that's just there—the very meaning of “stereo” which is “solid”. And they come through almost any decent system. But all my work has been to fully release these presentations at home, and the tears of joy or sadness they can generate. Room treatment has enabled it. The reflection free zone is where I most want to be and, when the mid-bass is controlled, it all blossoms.

In recent weeks I've had the privilege of experiencing MQA decoding in my system. I bought Meridian's Explorer 2 DAC and downloaded free tracks from 2L's HiRes Test Bench page.

Initially I was unable to get the blue light to come on, indicating playback of Master Quality Authenticated, but the new DAC offered such improved SQ with other files through Amarra that I sold my NAD M51.

I succeeded in decoding the MQA files using Audirvana as my player and “it was on”—sound quality beyond anything I’ve heard here before. Of course the provenance of the 2L music is impeccable but the imaging and presentation proved astonishing. Larger, higher, extending farther forward to include the listening position, and with unrestricted dynamics and utter clarity. “Deblurred” describes it nicely.

If you came over for a listen, I’d play these files for you:

“You’ll Never Know” by David Elias from his “Rare To Go” CD

“Sisters of Mercy” by Cameron Carpenter from his “If You Could Read My Mind” CD

“Walkin’ Blues” by Keith Brown from “Hellhound On My Trail—The Songs of Robert Johnson” CD

“Bach-Concerto for Two Violins BWV 1043-Largo ma non tanto” played by Rachel Podger (DSD)

“Magnificat” from 2L (MQA)

# Copper

## Upcoming

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