Do you sometimes feel like we’re living in an alternate universe? After all, alternate realities and parallel universes are not uncommon concepts in pop culture, let alone physics – just watch the Netflix series *Dark* or DC Comics’ “Crisis on Infinite Earths” or read Ray Bradbury’s short story “A Sound of Thunder,” which gave birth to the phrase “the butterfly effect.” But we’re not really living in the Matrix, or a changed history created by meddling with the time stream...are we?

I *am* certain of one thing – time travel *does* exist. All we have to do is put on a record like *Giant Steps* or *Songs for Swingin’ Lovers* or *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* or *The Fame,* and we can be transported back to the time when the album was recorded and our memories of when we first heard the music. Any time we want.

Reminder: our Name That Column Contest runs through October 31. We’ll be running a new column about PS Audio’s Octave Records label, and we need a name. (For now it’s “The Column to be Named Later.”) The winner will receive a 16 x 24 photo on canvas of *Copper* photographer James Schrimpf’s photo of musicians Dale Watson and Chris Crepps, used as *Issue 105’s Parting Shot.*

Please submit your suggestions for the column name to letters@psaudio.com.

In this issue: Anne E. Johnson gets into *Otis Redding* and his deep soul, and free-jazz trailblazer *Sam Rivers,* Tom Methans *isn’t with the band,* We interview MartinLogan and Eikon Audio founder *Gayle Sanders,* and the *Audio Engineering Society’s Gary Gottlieb,* Roy Hall *takes a trip to Copenhagen* and one of the world’s greatest restaurants. *Todd Rundgren’s Nearly Human* album changes Ray Chelstowski’s life. We have an inside look at *Octave Records’ new release,* *Temporary Circumstances* by Clandestine Amigo. Rudy Radelic digs *The Mavericks’ En Español.*
J.I. Agnew asks: how hi would you like your fi? Jay Jay French revisits the Grateful Dead’s *Workingman’s Dead on its 50th anniversary*. Rich Isaacs revives some unusual cover versions in the latest installment of “Complete Recovery.” Steven Bryan Bieler knows what it’s like to be cool. Ken Sander goes one step beyond with *Madness and the Go-Go’s*, Tom Gibbs finds great new music and reissues from John Coltrane, Cat Stevens/Yusuf, Thelonious Monk and Gillan Welch. Reader Adrian Wu’s audio journey takes him to the present. We conclude the issue with hittin’ the note, spending money and socially distancing.
In my quest for ever-better sound I had purchased a pair of vintage Brook 12A amplifiers – but they came with a story. These amps use 2A3 output tubes in push-pull configuration, and were supposed to be Paul Klipsch’s favorite to drive his Klipschorns. The seller told me that the amplifiers he was selling were defective, the reason for the low price. He had bought them in a non-functioning state and had hired a technician to restore them. However, they sounded distorted even after restoration.

The original wiring of the Brook was a rat’s nest, unlike the British and German amps I had encountered. After I received the amps, I confirmed that the sound was indeed distorted. I downloaded the schematic and checked the wiring. Everything appeared to be in order. I studied the schematic carefully and noticed that the polarity of one bypass cap was reversed. The cathodes of the 2A3s are directly connected to ground via the heater transformers, which means the control grids are at negative potential. The cap that bypasses the grids to ground should therefore have the positive terminal connected to ground, instead of the negative terminal as shown on the schematic. The technician must have used the same schematic (there was only one schematic on line as far as I could find), and made the same mistake. It would have been fine if he had used non-polar electrolytics. After reversing the polarity of the capacitors, the amps sounded like magic. I wrote to the seller to give him the news, and he was not pleased!

The next question was, which components should be used to restore the Brook? I tried Jupiter wax capacitors (the original version), which was a mistake, as they didn’t do well with the heat generated by the amplifiers. There was a temptation to use American components of the same vintage as the
amps, such as the Sprague Black Beauties, but I worry about the reliability of these ancient components. I ended up putting in antique Siemens paper caps, since I had the right values on hand. For resistors, I used my favorite Kiwame carbon films. These retain the tone of the carbon composition resistors while maintaining stability, and they don’t burst into flame either. For chassis wire, I removed the cheap wire the technician put in, and used new production cotton-sheathed copper wire to maintain the antique look.

The pair of Telefunken V69 amplifiers I also bought around this time period actually came as a V69 and a V69a. The difference being that the older V69 has EF12 metal pentodes at the front, and the V69a has EF804S (glass) tubes. Coincidentally, my recording partner had a mismatched pair of V69/V69a amps as well. We therefore did a swap, and he kept the V69s, while I kept the V69as. The amps I bought had been sitting in a basement somewhere in Germany for 40 years. The metal had rusted, but with a bit of elbow grease, the layer of rust was removed from the very sturdy steel cage. The amp is a beautiful example of German quality and precision. Paper capacitors were used throughout, with not a single electrolytic to be found. All the resistors (wirewound) had retained their original values. All the caps were encased in ceramic, and therefore should last forever. I went through and checked everything several times, and decided to bite the bullet and just turn them on to see if they worked. I did not even use a Variac (to gradually bring them up to operating voltage, which is recommended when powering up vintage gear); I just plugged them in and flicked the switches. No bang, no smoke, even the indicator lights worked. I adjusted the tube bias and played some music. There was no noise, but there was some distortion. However, it was amazing that these amps with their original tubes were stored in a dank basement for 40 years and still worked almost perfectly without restoration.

The frequency response of the amps was way off. It turned out that the insulation of the input transformers has broken down after all those years. Teflon wasn’t available for transformers in those days, and they used paper insulation. The dampness in the basement had destroyed the insulation. I contacted Telefunken USA and they were very kind to agree to rewind the transformers for me using the original specifications, but with Teflon insulation. The measured performance of the amps went back to the original spec with the restored input trannies.

The amps came with the standard battleship gray faceplates of all the Telefunken studio gear of the time. I had the plates replicated but with a chrome finish, which looked more in place in a domestic setting.

I have compared the three vintage amps I own for driving my restored Quad ESL electrostatic loudspeakers and a pair of Tannoy SRM10B studio monitors. The Leak TL12.1 has a lovely midrange; the bass is a bit soft, but it sounds very engaging and musical. The Brook 12A has a more detailed sound, with more clarity and transparency, especially in the upper registers. It is really lovely for strings and vocal. As for the Telefunken V69a, these amps use pentode output tubes, whereas the Leak has triode-connected KT66 and the Brook has directly-heated triodes. The V69a have better bass, with more impact and a more solid foundation. Music takes on a larger scale. This amp is also very detailed and transparent, but sounds a bit lean when compared to the Leak. I feel they are tonally more neutral though. I would prefer the V69a for rock and large scale orchestral music, the Brook for chamber music and female vocalists, and the Leak if a warmer sound is desired.

Going back to my day to day system: after moving back to Hong Kong from the US, the conrad-johnson PV10a preamp and Aragon amplifier now needed step-up transformers. Having upgraded my front end with a Michell Orbe turntable, Graham 2.2 arm and Lyra Helikon cartridge, I wanted to improve the other parts of the system as well.
I first met Tim de Paravicini at the Heathrow Penta Hi Fi show in the mid-1980s. He demonstrated his amplifiers with a Revox reel to reel tape player and stacked Quad ESLs, which was certainly unusual at the time and hard to forget. I’d kept in touch with him from time to time, and had always wanted to own his designs. During a trip to London, I went to Walrus Systems in London (now closed) and auditioned some of the EAR amplifiers. I ended up buying the 834P phono stage and the V12 integrated amplifier. The V12 was interesting as it used parallel push-pull ECC83 small-signal tubes for output! The current incarnation uses EL84s, and I have not heard it, but the original version had a rather distinct sonic signature. They actually worked rather well with the ESL, giving a very transparent, involving presentation.

As I got more into vintage audio, I found out that I could buy non-functioning or poorly functioning audio components, restore them to original specifications, and sell them for profit. Since I have more fun restoring and optimizing them than keeping them, this was a good way to sustain the hobby without the headache of finding somewhere to store the equipment. Hong Kong has a very vibrant audio scene and it is very easy to sell vintage and good-quality audio gear. For popular items, I could usually sell them within a day of placing an ad on the popular Review33 website. I was able to source equipment through classified ads abroad and this allowed me to gain knowledge through experimentation to find the best components for restoration.

I also got to know various local artisans such as transformer makers that few people knew existed. Various Leak and Pye amplifiers came and went, and my hobby was financially self-sustaining. I also started to look into turntables, specifically Garrards. My first 301 came about after I spied a Schedule 2 machine on a slate plinth (made by the now defunct Slate Audio) with an SME 3012/II arm and Clearaudio cartridge at a second hand shop in London for the grand price of 1000 pounds. The turntable had already been serviced and the whole thing was plug and play. I sold the cartridge and mounted my Lyra Helikon. It had the drive and the solidity that I felt was lacking in the Orbe. The music had more presence due to the improved dynamics. I decided this one was a keeper and sold the Orbe instead. I subsequently upgraded to a late grease-bearing model, selling the Schedule 2 to a Japanese enthusiast for a good price. As for the SME, as it had a plastic knife-edge bearing, it was a good excuse to upgrade to a bronze knife, and I rewired the arm with silver wire and added a bronze base for good measure. I stayed with this table for 15 years, only recently exchanging some of its parts for a Classic Turntable Company 301. The superior main bearing, sturdier chassis and perfectly balanced platter brought a huge improvement. The improved speed stability results in better dynamics and tonal stability, the lower noise floor manifests as better transparency, and the frequency response also became more extended. This turntable is probably the greatest bargain on the market, especially when compared to the reissue 301 from SME.

I left academia after six years, having experienced the SARS epidemic while working at a public hospital. It was an experience I thought at the time I would never see again, but how wrong was I! I was also totally fed up with the politics of academia. After a few years, with the kids getting older, I thought it would be a good idea to move to a larger apartment closer to work. It was a perfect excuse to realize my long-planned project: horn loudspeakers.

As the apartment needed to be gutted and totally renovated, I engaged a friend who was an acoustical architect to design the lounge (my wife is an architect, but she was very tolerant!). This friend worked for a number of years at the Arup Group in the UK and was responsible for the design of a number of concert halls and performance venues before returning to Hong Kong to set up his design firm. He also advised the late Mr. Winston Ma (former owner of First Impression Music) during the construction of his listening room near Seattle in the late 1990s. I got to know my friend when I wanted to use a concert hall he designed for a recording session. The hall quickly gained a reputation as having the best acoustics in the territory.
After the first site visit of the new apartment, he liked what he saw, since the room was irregular, and had no parallel walls but had the correct dimensions. He designed the air conditioning system, a subject of great importance to me as AC noise has always been a problem in many recording venues, so much so that we try to avoid doing recordings in the summer. Four-inch acoustical foam was placed strategically inside the walls and the ceiling. He also designed a ceiling to break up the standing waves, a design that sent my wife into a tizzy, and which the contractor declared was impossible to build. We ended up with a compromise, a ceiling that slopes at different angles in four directions. It actually does not look so weird once we got used to it, but it always elicits some reaction from new visitors. He even designed the LP shelves on one wall to control the first reflections from the loudspeakers, with the records stored at a precise angle of 23 degrees.

The built in bass trap doubles as a storage unit (or is it the other way around?). The idea was to make it a normal living room with only subtle hints of acoustical treatment. When I check the RTA (real time analysis, a measurement of the frequency spectrum of an audio signal) from time to time, I am still amazed at the smoothness of the frequency response. And the AC is completely silent. Most importantly, being in an apartment, the room is soundproofed with a subfloor floating on rubber insulation (to isolate it from the walls, which transmit noise to other floors of the building), and the same type of doors that are used in recording studios were installed for the front entrance and the corridor leading to the bedrooms.

In the meantime, a pair of new horn speakers were planned. I had heard various horn iterations over the years in friends’ systems. Trips to Tokyo also presented opportunities to visit horn builders as well as antique audio dealers. I visited Jean Hiraga in Paris while he was still the editor of the magazine La Nouvelle Revue Du Son. He had set up at the time a pair of Altec A5 Voice of the Theatre loudspeakers, with his own crossovers, driven by Hafler solid state amps (no 300Bs!). The source was the original Philips CD player (probably modified, but my French at the time was not good enough to ask for details). Not exactly how I imagined it would be given his reputation. However, the sound was quite a revelation. Very dynamic, life-like and musical. He gave me a tube data manual (in French) as a gift. I also visited La Maison de L'Audiophile during that trip. Jean subsequently visited Hong Kong and gave me advice while I was setting up my horn system.

During a trip to LA, I visited Dr. Bruce Edgar, creator of Edgarhorn loudspeakers. He was a very kind man and full of knowledge and experience. Unfortunately, he was in poor health at the time, having just got out of hospital after a leg infection, but he still spent an afternoon with me. I finally settled on the combination of an EV (ElectroVoice) T350 tweeter, a JBL2450 midrange (picked up at a good price in Hollywood) and Altec 515C bass drivers. I had trouble finding a good pair of vintage 515C. I then found out that an outfit called Great Plains Audio was servicing Altec drivers, and they had just started to produce some new drivers. I called the owner and explained to him what I wanted, but he was a bit bemused to learn that I wanted the Alnico version. He could not understand why since he did not believe it was in any way better than the ferrite version, and it loses magnetism over time. Anyway, I convinced him that there was a market for it, and he agreed finally to produce a prototype. Months passed, and he finally contacted me, telling me that he had a pair of prototypes that performed to the original spec. I bought them, and the 515C has been a regular item on his catalogue ever since.

I had considered various high-frequency drivers such as the JBL 077 and various Fostex models, but I had been impressed with the sound of the EV T350 at a friend’s place. Pretty much the only thing that can go wrong with these drivers is the voice coil, and amazingly, EV still produces these phenolic diaphragms. I bought a pair of 400 Hz rectangular exponential horns and reflex bass cabinets from a builder (Tatematu Onko, no longer in business) in Japan, the latter designed specifically for the 515C. I decided to use active crossovers, which allows for easy adjustments,
maximizes sensitivity of the speakers and avoids adding reactance. I built a three-way crossover from Marchand Electronics initially, and subsequently switched to an Accuphase F-25 analogue frequency divider.

To backtrack a bit, a few years before I started the horn project, I got to know Allen Wright. In my quest to learn more about amplifier circuits, I came across his writing on the internet. Allen was an Australian guru who started his career as a technician at Tektronix. He designed the amplifier used in oscilloscopes, which were all tube-based in those days. These amplifiers needed to be extremely quiet and linear up to the megahertz range. He then decided to tackle audio and set up his own company, Vacuum State Electronics. He was very well respected within the DIY circle, and was in high demand for doing modifications and upgrades, as well as consulting for manufacturers.

He was developing his Realtime Preamplifier at the time, and wanted beta testers to iron out problems. I became one of his 10 beta testers, and was sent the components and the chassis to build the preamp. The design is very complicated, with a phono section that has an input sensitivity of 0.1mV. It is a dual mono, balanced differential design based on the E88CC tube. It has a shunt regulated power supply. Allen had a set of principles that he steadfastly adhered to. These included:

1. A fully differential circuit.
2. Zero negative feedback.
3. Internal wiring with the thinnest conductors (solid wire and foil), preferably in pure silver
4. He advocated using the cheapest RCA plugs and sockets (the conductors in audiophile connectors are too thick), or preferably, the Lemo Redel connectors (non-magnetic connectors normally used in MRI scanners and the defense industry).
5. Teflon dielectric.
6. All electrical "anchor points" are tightly regulated, which means the extensive use of current sinks and current sources to achieve the highest impedance possible.
7. Choke-filtered power supply with solid state rectification. Fast-recovery diodes for high voltages, Schottky diodes for low voltages.

The whole experience was an excellent learning exercise, not only in the theory of audio electronics, but also in the art of point-to-point wiring construction. It took a good two years to finalize the prototype. The preamp is very quiet, dynamic and tonally neutral. I used it as my phono preamp for several years before buying a factory built RTP-3D version. Last year, I modified the prototype to serve as my tape head preamplifier.

For power amplification, I am using two pairs of Allen's DPA300B tube amps. These amps have a differential input stage using a pair of the Russian 6H30Pi in cascode to drive a pair of 300B power tubes in push-pull configuration. These amps serve the tweeters and mid-range drivers, while a Mark Levinson No. 27.5 amplifier drives the bass.

Back to the loudspeaker discussion: a few years ago, I was introduced to a friend who had built a speaker system using field coil drivers made by G.I.P. Laboratory in Japan. These are recreations of the ancient Western Electric drivers, and are extremely expensive. The system had very impressive dynamics, but he was still working on integrating the various drivers, and the system was not very coherent as a whole. However, what it did do well got me interested in field coils. [A field coil loudspeaker uses an electromagnet which needs to be powered by DC, as opposed to more conventional speakers that use permanent magnets. – Ed.] The GIP drivers were out of my price range, but Line Magnetic in China also produces similar drivers at a somewhat lower price level.

However, I don't believe 80 years of advances in science and engineering could not improve upon
these ancient designs. Classic Audio Loudspeakers in Brighton, Michigan produces a line of modern field coil drivers using state of the art materials such as beryllium diaphragms, and the designs are based on Altec and JBL drivers. This meant I could get drop-in replacements to use in my current set up with minimal adjustments required. After detailed discussion with John Wolff, the designer of these drivers, I bought a pair of 6475, which is based on the JBL475, the consumer version of the 2450, and a pair of 1501, based on the Altec 515.

The higher breakup frequency of the beryllium diaphragms allows me to operate the midrange drivers up to a higher frequency, and I moved the crossover frequency up an octave to 7kHz. There was an immediate and marked improvement with the new drivers. There is more detail and the dynamics, both at the micro and macro level, are greatly improved. The bass notes are faster and more tuneful. One can perceive the vibrations of the membrane of the tympani after each strike of the mallet. The tonal color of the instruments seems more natural and real.

I also changed from the T350s to the Acapella ion tweeters, something I had been very interested in doing ever since I heard them several years before. These tweeters use high-energy electrical plasma to vary air pressure and create sound. What I liked about the T350 is that the phenolic diaphragms avoid the hard edge that metal diaphragms can impart on the high frequencies. Yet the ion tweeters go further and impart a totally natural, ethereal quality to string tone, female voice and percussive instruments. The better high-frequency extension also gives an enhanced perception of space and depth. I estimate that the ion drivers made the greatest difference to my system, even though the frequency response of my ears rolls off above 12 kHz!

As I feel I have finally accomplished a satisfactory result with my speakers, I have moved on to deal with the recordings that I have made over the years. I needed a master recorder for editing and playback of the tapes. The Nagra IV-S is good for neither task; its playback electronics are more of an afterthought, and it does not allow for precise positioning of the tape for editing. The Nagra T-Audio recorder was initially developed as a scientific instrument, and later adapted for the television and film industry. Due to its substantial cost when it was introduced, it was too expensive for most music studios. The listed price in 1983 was £26,000, enough to buy a modest house in London!

Luckily, by the mid-2000s, analogue had fallen out of favor, and I was able to pick one up, fully refurbished with new heads, from Nagra for 8,000 CHF (about $8,800 US). I was attracted to its small footprint and the amazingly precise mechanical function, which makes tape editing very easy. However, the playback electronics of the machine, while competent, are not up to audiophile standard. The extensive use of 1980s-vintage op-amps and complicated compensation networks give the sound an unnatural, electronic character, although the dynamics and scale of the sound are outstanding.

There is now a trend for audiophiles to bypass the native electronics of professional recorders, and this was what I did. I wired the playback head with solid core pure silver wire directly to my prototype preamp, after modifying the RIAA EQ network for IEC and Nagramaster equalizations. (Most commercially available 15-ips tapes nowadays use IEC EQ, and all my own recordings use Nagramaster EQ.) It took some experimentation to optimize the frequency response, but the end result is highly satisfactory. The writeup about the modifications has been published at my group’s website (the Asia Audio Society) for those who are interested in the technical details. Tape playback avoids the pitfalls of LPs, such as distortion, noise and dynamic compression. It also sounds more natural and musical than the majority of digital recordings.
Commercial recordings are becoming available on 15-ips reel tapes from companies such as Tape Project, Analogue Productions and others. I also have a collection of master tape copies of some of my favorite music, which I have obtained from a couple of recording engineers in Europe.

I feel I have finally arrived at a sound that I find quite satisfactory, and I can just enjoy the music without worrying about what I need to do next (for a while).

However, I have been neglecting my turntable for quite a while! And I have not even started looking at digital...
Gayle Martin Sanders was one of the co-founders of electrostatic loudspeaker manufacturer MartinLogan, along with Ronald Logan Sutherland. (They combined their middle names to name the company.) The company first exhibited at the 1982 CES and soon became a major force in electrostatic/hybrid speakers with models like the Monolith, CLS (Curvilinear Line Source), Sequel and beyond. Sanders moved from the company in 2005 at first retiring but then getting restless and returning to audio in 2019 with the founding of audio system manufacturer Eikon Audio.

Following is Part One of a two-part interview.

**Frank Doris:** When was the first moment you really got hooked on high-fidelity sound?

**Gayle Sanders:** I’m dating myself now, but my father and I experimented with some of the first mono to stereo conversion systems in 1958, which was revolutionary back then. We built our own speaker systems using Norelco 12-inch coax (I think) drivers that we bought from Burstein-Applebee in downtown Kansas City.

Dad was an engineer, so we did things like building a go-kart – we welded up our own frame with a modified Briggs and Stratton lawnmower engine attached. Since it was winter and there was snow on the ground, I convinced mom to let me take the go-kart downstairs and drive it. It was fantastic listening to music in stereo as I four-wheel drifted round and round the basement, barely missing our washing machine! The entire basement filled with exhaust fumes. Today we’d probably be kicked out of the neighborhood for doing something like that!

Anyway, I was an audio nut from the beginning but it wasn’t until I experienced my father’s friend’s
system that I became forever changed. He had a pair of Klipsch La Scala loudspeakers, McIntosh pre
and power amps and a Thorens turntable with an SME arm. The power! The bottom end! The attack
(of the instruments), the ability to create this wonderful soundstage – I had no idea a system could
recreate an event so powerful and emotional. That was an “imprinting moment” for me. [Gayle and I
had joked about when we both heard a good audio system for the first time, and that it was like a
baby duck being imprinted by the first thing it saw, thinking that was their mother, by sheer instinct.
– FD]

It changed me, but it was much later that it became clear that the pursuit of absolute perfection in
reproducing sound would be my life’s calling.

FD: How did you meet Ron Sutherland? And how did you decide that electrostatic loudspeakers
were “it,” and that you were going to pursue making them?

GS: My first exposure to electrostatic loudspeaker (ESL) technology goes back to the 1970s. I had
finished college, and found myself selling audio in a wonderful store, David Beatty Stereo on the
Plaza in KC. We had all the high-end products of the day and were on the cutting edge when new
designers hit the market. Lloyd Bloodgood was the distributor for Stax ESL headphones and I
 auditioned them when they first arrived in the US. They were a revelation. Oh my god! When you put
on those phones you heard detail, depth, and refinements that were light years beyond anything up
to that period.

Fast forward a few years and Arnie Nudell hit the market with his new company Infinity Systems and
a speaker system known as the Servo-Statik 1. For those of you not familiar with the history of
Infinity, they started their fantastic career with a product so fricken revolutionary it was like going
from a Model T car to a Mach 1 jet fighter. The market is still catching up. Anyway, that system
consisted of RTR electrostatic tweeters combined with electrostatic midrange drivers designed and
fabricated by the infinity team. The system also included an 18-inch floor-loaded servo-controlled
subwoofer of their own design, driven by dedicated custom-designed amplification and (who had
ever heard of it?!) with a servo control to monitor the motion of that monster woofer and correct it
on the fly. Whaat? I was floored!

I went nuts for that system. When set up correctly, the power, the soundstage, the holographic
image rendering and the resolution were light years beyond anything else up to that point.

All things considered, the Servo-Statik 1 would still be considered a reference system today – but it
had some big problems. It had very little horizontal dispersion so it was a “one man” system in terms
of listening in the sweet spot. It also broke constantly. The ’stats deteriorated practically right
before your eyes. Arnie and his team quickly moved on, and I got an appreciation of the significant
hurdles yet to come if one wanted to bring electrostatic loudspeaker technology into everyday life.

It wasn’t for another 10 years that I naively thought I could solve the daunting problems ESLs posed.
In the 1980s I was designing and building speaker systems for bands, discos and private users at
night and managing a stereo shop during the day. I was living in Lawrence, Kansas and had the
engineering library at the University of Kansas at my disposal. I launched myself into researching all
things electrostatic, from Navy documents to the wonderful papers Peter Walker of (electrostatic
loudspeaker and electronics manufacturer) Quad had written.

I was also able to take advantage of all these aerospace materials that were becoming available. I
could go through the Thomas Register (a directory of industrial suppliers) and at the time, all these
companies who developed materials for organizations like NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory were trying to get them into everyday use. And so they were open to anybody and everybody calling in, wanting to experiment with those materials. I was able to get people to crank up their R&D for the benefit of my little electrostatic project!

Electrostatics up until then had a reputation of being unreliable, but I was able to get my hands on new materials like Teflon, conformal coatings, new adhesives and transformers, and once you implement those, you can hit an electrostatic speaker hard and it can take it.

Soon I was building my first ESL panel. Those of you who have had a chance to visit the MartinLogan facility in Lawrence, KS have seen that first transducer. That's when I met Ron Sutherland. Ron had graduate degrees in both physics and electrical engineering. We met at Kief's Gramophone Shop, an audio shop I was managing at the time, and as we chatted about our passion for sound he volunteered to design our first power supply, crossover and transformer configuration to energize my transducer. Together, we were off and running.

After a year of research and cobbling together the elements we had our first prototype. That first ESL transducer was something to behold. It looked like a bad screen door stuck together with plexiglass strips and contact cement. I had found some half-mil polymer film and managed to figure out how to etch it with graphite powder to get just the right conductive surface for the transducer diaphragm, and then sprayed the metal front and back frames that held it with a product called Rid-Arc (which was supposed to Insulate the stators and of course did not as you will see) to keep the diaphragm from arcing. So it was one ugly transducer!

I can still see us that night when we finally put things together and played our first prototype. It had been two years of work and the final monster at last sat in my living room.

It worked the minute we set the tone arm down. I was gobsmacked. Ron just stared at it as gorgeous music poured from this beyond-ugly beast. As we hugged and cried I shouted, “Let’s turn it up!” and of course, I then cranked it up to 13 and immediately the entire panel lit up in one glorious lightning strike. KABOOM! And then, silence.

A puff of smoke curled itself around the panel and wafted to the ceiling. I looked at my Hafler DH200 amplifier that I had laboriously hand-assembled (from a kit) and saw a similar puff of smoke emanating from its vents. So much for our first transducer – the first of more than a thousand experiments. Well, at least 200. I learned that what causes electrostatic speakers to blow is extremely high voltage. You’re basically creating a lightning storm in the power supply, the transformer or the transducer itself.

But we were undaunted, and kept refining the design until we had success.

FD: What were some of the early success stories and failures of MartinLogan? The CLS was a sonic revelation when it first came out. The first time I heard one I was flabbergasted. I’ve read the story of how you decided to make it a curved-panel speaker, but could you elaborate for us?

GS: The CLS led me through one of the biggest success, failure, and resurrection-back-to-success journeys in my life. It actually started before our Monolith project, but it was way too difficult to create to be our first launch product. At the time I could see it as something on the horizon, but I knew the pathway was going to be long, treacherous and just as hard as the journey to develop the special high-efficiency, wide-dispersion, crossover-less, rugged ESL that had already taken me two years to develop.
It’s so simple…right? All you have to do is create a full-range single-panel electrostatic transducer capable of reproducing all frequencies...an almost massless transducer with blazingly fast transient response reproducing all frequencies from highest to lowest. Without a crossover?! The diaphragm has to change motion up to 40,000 times in a second, as fast and as perfectly as that super-low-distortion amplifier tells it to move and yet – move mountains of air. I mean, way beyond just the air in a normal living room, at frequencies where the wavelength extends from 10 feet long at 100Hz, descending into the nether regions of bass, and reaching to wavelengths that are longer than 40 feet at the lowest depths of bass. Deep bass is literally instantaneous barometric pressure change, amplified to the point where you can feel it in your body and soul. And subwoofers had not been created yet (with the exception of Arnie Nudell’s servo sub 10 years earlier).

So the MartinLogan story did not start with the CLS. From the beginning, the Hybrid Monolith speaker (with an electrostatic midrange/tweeter mated with a conventional dynamic cone woofer) made more sense. Limit the stat panel to 100Hz and above and let a traditional dynamic woofer handle the lower frequencies...perhaps not a perfect loudspeaker but hey, a damn good speaker that will rock the world. Good enough for me and that was easier and more practical than developing a full-range ESL. So, the Monolith was born. We introduced it at CES in 1982. Later, the Sequel was basically a Monolith cut in half! That was a big success story for MartinLogan.

Once we launched the Monolith, I would stare at that transducer – at the time it was rather crude looking and the membrane was opaque – and would envision what it would be like to create a pure, see-through speaker with just that ESL panel. That was the idea behind the CLS. Naturally, the company was still in start-up mode with limited financial resources, so it made sense to begin design work on the full-range CLS with the same metal framework material that we had purchased for the Monolith.

By then we had developed a rugged, high-efficiency (90dB) transducer and I had now invented and perfected a way to achieve uniform dispersion by developing the CLS Curvilinear Line Source. We literally curved the transducer to achieve a time-coherent 30-degree line source. That was a significant challenge. To curve the diaphragm is like trying to curve a polyester bag and make it hold that shape in free air. Trying to make it taut and hold that quasi-cylindrical shape plagued me for years.

One morning I woke up and as I was strumming a guitar I noticed that it embodied the same issue, and realized – If I could stretch the diaphragm in one direction (longitudinally) then I could literally implement an arc across its length and the system would become stable in that quasi-cylindrical mode. The idea was sound but the implementation took another few months, but before long I created not only one of the first high-efficiency, reliable electrostatic transducers, but one that finally achieved ideal dispersion. Not only that, as a dipole, it retained a vertical line source dispersion mode, which offered a host of advantages in terms of minimizing room interaction.

But I had to push the available technology at the time to the boundaries of materials science and physics. I began a huge effort to tackle the challenge presented by a full-range ESL – new stator materials capable of higher levels of rigidity, and advanced transformer designs capable of extreme voltages, among other things. Two years, every night working away. Failure after failure, but bit by bit I began extracting maximum performance out of that technology. We blew up a lot of ‘stat panels, transformers, and amplifiers that year, I’ll tell you, but by 1984 I could see what would become the CLS (later the CLS II) performing its magic for almost all but the lowest frequencies.

It was not an easy speaker to set up – move the placement fractions of an inch and things change – but when set up correctly, the performance, the ability to suspend disbelief, was incredible. I think it
still sets a standard today for creating that ability to look beyond the sound and into every detail of that three-dimensional space, with multicolored dimensionality. It was breathtaking, just like my first experience with the Stax SRD-1 headphones.

The day came to launch the new CLS at, I believe, CES 1986. By then Ron had left to start his own company, Sutherland Engineering, so I was on my own. The future was uncertain but I thought the world would love this new creation.

The launch was amazing. People were overwhelmed with its performance and we were truly off and running. Running hard. However, this revolutionary product with all of its advanced materials held within it a sinister problem. In the beginning it wasn’t apparent, but over time, a nagging problem would eventually show its ugly head and create a nightmare for me and everyone involved.

My first vision for the CLS was one uniform diaphragm with a 30-degree horizontal curve that produced a perfectly uniform diaphragm reproducing all frequencies. The problem that manifested itself over time was that the diaphragm tension would change, and as it changed, a resonance would occur. And that diaphragm had to produce huge excursions, yet remain uniform in behavior at all times. When this resonance developed it became a big nuisance – and over time, it happened to each and every CLS.

By this time we had over 200 pairs in the field. My dealers, distributors, their customers – everyone was calling me, angry as hell. They felt betrayed. And I felt a huge responsibility to each and every person involved. Finding a solution became my number one priority. But for the next few months, no matter what solution I tried, nothing worked. Day by day I approached that moment when I would have to give in to failure. If this happened, not only would it devastate my life, but also everyone in the wonderful team at MartinLogan, our dealers, our distributors, our customers...they all stood to be devastated by this huge challenge. It was all on my shoulders.

To be continued...
In our most recent test, we asked Ella Fitzgerald’s old friend and longtime jazz arranger, Nelson Riddle, if he was listening to Ella live, or Ella as recorded on a Memorex cassette.

He couldn’t tell.

Why?

Our MRX2 Oxide formulation.

Since we introduced this exclusive formulation, a lot of other ferric tapes have been scrambling to find something to beat it.

Nobody has.
Is it live or is it Memorex? Who knows?

In our most recent test, we asked Ella Fitzgerald's old friend and longtime jazz arranger, Nelson Riddle, if he was listening to Ella live, or Ella as recorded on a Memorex cassette. He couldn't tell. Why? Our MRX₂ Oxide formulation. Since we introduced this exclusive formulation, a lot of other brand tapes have been scrambling to find something to beat it. Nobody has.

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One of the most iconic taglines in advertising history, 1974. We'd bet you guys and gals could tell the difference though!
Music makers: vintage strings and picks going back decades. Author's collection.
"Pocket-sized?" Maybe if your name is Gulliver. From Audio Engineering, March 1953.
Audio industrial art, and you could hammer nails with it. From *Audio*, April 1957.
Sometimes a performer is so taken with another artist’s song that they just have to do their own performance of it. These cover versions can range from faithful portrayal of the original to something else entirely. Here are some more of my favorites that fall mostly in the latter category:
(The original artists for the songs are in parentheses.)

**CHEVY CHASE** – “I Shot the Sheriff” (**Bob Marley/Eric Clapton**)

Okay, this is really a parody, but still…it’s a lot of fun. Produced in 1980 by **Tom Scott** and featuring a stellar lineup of L.A. session musicians (including PS Audio/Octave Records’ own **Don Grusin**), the album is pretty much all covers with a twist. Other oddball takes include parodies of “Short People,” “Wild Thing,” and a **Chipmunks**-style rendition of “Let It Be.” Don’t miss the faux-Jamaican-accented asides.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEb5D2WIE-s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEb5D2WIE-s)

**CHRISTOPHER MILK** – “Locomotion” (**Little Eva**) / “I Want to Hold Your Hand” (**The Beatles**)

Let’s keep the laughter coming with a “twofer.” **John Mendelsohn**, a rock critic from the 1970s who wrote for *Rolling Stone* and *Creem*, was in this short-lived band named for an old San Francisco Bay Area brand of dairy products. Their first effort was an elaborately packaged four-song EP for United Artists Records. They subsequently signed with the Warner Bros. label to record a full album, which was one of the first sessions ever by the legendary producer **Chris Thomas** (**Badfinger**, **John Cale**, **Procol Harum**, **Roxy Music**, **Sex Pistols** and countless others). Mendelsohn’s sense of humor was a hallmark of their style. “Locomotion” comes from the LP, and “I Want to Hold Your Hand” was the B-side of their single cover version of **Terry Reid**’s “Speak Now or Forever Hold
Your Peace,” neither of which was on the LP. The Beatles track is re-imagined as a vocal trade-off between Bob Dylan and another artist. The YouTube graphic implies that it’s Iggy Pop, but I’m not convinced. (Readers, what do you think?)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi2V-enYtf4

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6e7eSOmDis

GLASS MOON - “Solsbury Hill” (Peter Gabriel) / “On a Carousel” (The Hollies)

There aren’t very many covers of Peter Gabriel songs, so this first one qualifies as unusual on that basis alone, even if it’s not that different. Glass Moon was an under-appreciated progressive pop/rock band. They put out three albums, the last having only one member who was on the first two: keyboardist/vocalist Dave Adams. Those early albums also featured guitarist Jamie Glaser, who had been part of Jean-Luc Ponty’s fusion band of the late 1970s. The band had a minor hit with this 1980s-sounding re-make of “On a Carousel.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bew5 PxTozOQ

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0x69gHccEA

THE IGUANAS – “Fortune Teller” (The Del-Rays or Benny Spellman)
The original was an uptempo track from the early 1960s written by Aaron Neville (under the pseudonym Naomi Neville). Here, it gets the “slow ‘n’ sexy” treatment from this New Orleans Tex-Mex band. I use this track to demo my little FoxL Bluetooth speaker – it always impresses.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5K-KAMF3Fj0

THE MOVE – “Don’t Make My Baby Blue” (The Shadows/Frankie Laine)

In England, The Move was a highly successful, and just as highly regarded, band in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their earliest works were more in the pop/psychedelic vein, with song titles like “Flowers in the Rain” and “I Can Hear the Grass Grow.” Roy Wood, and later, Jeff Lynne were the driving forces behind the band which would ultimately morph into the Electric Light Orchestra. Shazam, the album from which this track comes, was quite varied, and marked a real departure from their previous sound. Released in 1970, it was also the last album to feature original vocalist Carl Wayne. Here, the band gives a heavy, almost Black Sabbath-y twist to the pop song.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xryNtfA6GNc

PEOPLE – “For What It’s Worth” (Buffalo Springfield) / “We’re Off to See the Wizard” (from The Wizard of Oz)

This is an ultra-obscure twofer from late 1960s San Jose band People. They had an international hit (big in Japan!) earlier with a cover of the Zombies song, “I Love You.” I saw them in May of 1969 at the Northern California Folk Rock Festival. Jimi Hendrix was the headliner that day, and Poco and Lee Michaels were also on the bill. The Buffalo Springfield track gets a questionable up-tempo, funky treatment complete with horns. “Wizard” starts at 11:30 in the video — and stick around for (or jump to) “The Willie Tell Experience” at 36:25. I think drugs may have been involved.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIbs9lYLXq8&t=697s

VANILLA FUDGE – “Some Velvet Morning” (Lee Hazlewood/Nancy Sinatra)

If you know the original, you’ll agree - this one’s waaay out there. A long, spacy/heavy instrumental intro that incorporates a motif from Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring” (!) gives way to a light, wistful vocal. Has anyone ever made sense of the lyrics? Years later, the Vanilla Fudge rhythm section would team up with Jeff Beck as Beck Bogert & Appice, recording one studio album and a subsequent live one.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7qcVXxgizM

Header image of the Vanilla Fudge, 1967 courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/KRLA Beat/Beat Publications, Inc.
When I was in fourth grade, I enrolled in Manhattan Music School. Not to be confused with The Manhattan School of Music, a private conservatory near Columbia University. The school I attended was on 84th Street and Madison Avenue above a diner and a ladies' clothing consignment shop. Once a week, I would climb the long flight of worn linoleum stairs to a dusty wooden floor arrangement of small studios with scratched upright pianos and gray fluorescent lighting.

Mr. Adams, my first teacher, was a pleasant young man who made my beginner's pieces sound musical. He even showed me how to strum an acoustic guitar and blow a saxophone that tasted of tarnish and spit. After a year, Mr. Adams left, and an older lady took over my education. With her fixed expression and Slavic accent, she taught piano according to the old method: a solid foundation to be established by rote, practice, and hand strengthening exercises.

My practice instrument was a piano owned by an old-time Broadway star, Dorothy Lindsay, also known by her stage name, Dorothy Stickney. Her husband was Howard Lindsay, half of Lindsay and Crouse, who, along with Rodgers and Hammerstein, was the team that created The Sound of Music on Broadway in 1959. Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse were both dead by 1977, so the piano sat idle unless one of Mrs. Lindsay's theatre cronies played it during cocktail parties. Otherwise, I was the only other person to make its lush tones come to life.

My mother spent her days as Mrs. Lindsay's chef, and I hung out in the kitchen most afternoons and weekends. I loved being in that townhouse off Fifth Avenue and 94th street. It was full of dark corners, unused spaces, and a creepy cold basement with a coal room used to store wood for the fireplaces.

On weekends, I would volunteer to take Dorothy her breakfast. When she awoke, Mrs. Lindsay rang down to the kitchen on an ancient intercom, letting the staff know she was ready to dine. As the white buttered toast, poached eggs, bacon, marmalade, and pot of tea were being plated, Mrs.
Lindsay performed her *toilette* before she could be seen, even by a 10-year-old. I placed the tray and morning papers onto a cart and rode the two-person elevator from the ground floor to her room on the third floor. At the opposite end of a long hall was Mr. Lindsay’s bedroom suite, which had been left intact and used as a guestroom. The floor above was for the live-in help. The second floor consisted of an office and my music room; dining and living rooms were on the first, and an antiqued parlor was on the ground floor in front of the kitchen.

Mrs. Lindsay, a frail 80-year-old in a 1920s flapper wig and bright red lipstick, was perfumed and propped up on a giant bed, dressed in a frilly robe and flanked by two cats: one a regal Siamese named Madam, and a creamsicle Angora, Butch, who was very sweet but ignored. As soon as Butch realized he could get attention from me, he began following me wherever I went.

Mrs. Lindsay had no children, and I had no grandparents in America, so our moments together were familial. I sat at the foot of her bed, and we talked about school, the musical pieces I was learning, and what my performance plans were after fifth grade. Mrs. Lindsay could hear me from her room, and she encouraged me to practice. Piano was the basis for everything – the springboard for other instruments, singing, and composition. There’s not a stage or rehearsal space without a piano. But I didn’t want to be like her friend Oscar Hammerstein or Vladimir Horowitz, who lived down the street, or even Elton John. I wanted to play guitar like Brian May, but my stepfather considered electric guitars and drums vulgar, and the people who played them "low class."

Several days after school, I brought my school-supplied vinyl attaché packed with my latest scribbling in my composition and workbooks, along with various pieces of sheet music to practice on Lindsay’s black grand Steinway. The instrument was polished and well maintained. It had no scratches, the hammers were new, and its strings all attached and tuned. However, Butch and I preferred to explore the music room filled with souvenirs, portraits, black and white photos, show posters, programs, and awards. There were cabinets, drawers, and closets stuffed with records, sheet music, and wind-up music boxes. I guess all the artifacts appealed to the historian in me, while an aspiring showbiz kid would have come away with a greater appreciation for the golden age of Broadway or at least Mrs. Lindsay’s most well-known play, *Life with Father,* which launched at the old Empire Theatre in 1939 and ran for 400 weeks.

I was too obsessed with the guys in *Creem* and *Hit Parader* magazines to understand that Mrs. Lindsay was a rock star in her own right who had done vaudeville, talkies, television, Hollywood movies, and theatre. My mother heard her sing in Bob Fosse’s *Pippin* on Broadway just a few years earlier when Mrs. Lindsay was still working at 76 years of age. I do feel like I cheated my parents out of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If I had only been born with a few of Mickey Rooney’s song and dance genes, maybe Mrs. Lindsay could have catapulted me to stardom. Instead, all I came away with was a dowagers’ love for orange marmalade, Earl Grey tea, and cats.

After fifth grade, my family relocated 40 miles north of New York City to Bedford, NY. I thought moving would cancel the lessons, but my stepfather loved the piano and was determined that I should master it. Perhaps he envisioned summoning me to the salon to entertain our cultured friends and family with a few licks of Minuet in G minor (which seemed like the only piece I ever played). Thankfully, we never owned a piano, never had space for a piano, and never had money for one. By some turn of misfortune, my stepfather found a new place for me to practice: at his boss’s house. Lessons resumed.
This piano sat in a gentleman's library with built-in bookshelves that seemed 50 feet high, leather chairs, a desk the size of my bed, and a billiard table. From the big picture windows, I looked at the swimming pool and tennis court. Though I'm sure the piano was first-rate, I remember absolutely nothing about it. The people who lived there had two kids, the darling teenage Katherine with a tan, braces, chestnut Farah Fawcett curls, and what I imagined to be strawberry-flavored lip gloss. Then there was her brother, a tow-headed boy younger than me, Richie, whose energetic charm sprouted from knowing he was not the favorite child. He was desperate for a playmate and came looking for me whenever I was around. So Richie and I shot pool, slammed air hockey in his basement rec room, and even started playing tennis, another activity for which my parents sought formal training. I spent a whole summer at a tennis clinic in Central Park trying to be Björn Borg, but Richie beat me every time. He beat me at everything, but playing with him was still more fun than practicing piano.

Every Wednesday, I took a bus to the local music store in town for my hour of torture. Lessons took place in the back, past rows of shining guitars of all shapes and colors. As I clanked down on the keys, the instructor would eventually grow bored and start eating his supper, and it was always something delicious-smelling. Like a weekly tour of the Carnegie Deli, he brought salami on rye one day, stacked bologna on a hard roll another, and then tuna on white with a side of loud crunchy pickles. No matter what, he always had something better than my public school lunch and breakfast of menthol cigarettes stolen from a silver box at Richie's house. I wasn't really a smoker and only lit up when the morning school bus approached. Just before the yellow door swung open, I flung my cigarette to the ground and blew out a plume of minty exhaust as I boarded, hoping someone saw me. Unlike my friends, I wasn't allowed to have long hair or wear torn jeans, concert tees, and Keds to school. I wore Earth Shoes, off-brand polo shirts, and khaki pants. I thought the cigarette would detract from my squareness, but it made me look like a smoky substitute teacher instead of a stoned Keith Richards. By 4 pm, I was jittery and starving as my instructor rustled foil, chewed, and slurped while barking music terms I was supposed to study: "Staccato! Tempo giusto! Molto allegro! Adagio!" These half-hearted performances went on for a few weeks until he'd had enough.

Having teachers call home was a common occurrence in my household, but my parents were paying good money for these lessons, and they were done throwing it away. I had disappointed them again. Not only was I the most defeated at tennis camp and a C- student, but now I was a failed musician too. Their dream of having a Beethoven-playing son was dashed for good. My luck finally turned around when my friend Jaime invited me to play piano for a jam session with his band Soul Solitaire. This is what I wanted all along: to be in a rock group. It was really happening.

Jaime was a naturally gifted musician and one of my best friends since fourth grade. His father was of the Woodstock era and had all the classic rock records, so Jaime's foundation was built on Duane Allman, Jimi Hendrix, and Neil Young. His first guitar was a blonde Hondo Stratocaster knock-off. It looked real enough. The deal was, if Jaime showed he was serious about guitar, he would get a real Fender Strat by high school, but he already had all the dedication, perseverance, and talent required.

During an afternoon when Jaime's parents were still at work, we smoked a few skinny joints before setting up on the backyard deck that faced a small patch of woods. Lead guitarist and vocalist Jaime was on his Strat, Chris on bass, Nick on rhythm guitar, Aaron on drums, and me on a miniature organ belonging to Jaime's sister – my six-year-old cousin had the same one. Once plugged in, a little fan came on to propel a few octaves of mournful gasps through a mesh vent out the front. Because it was made for little kids, the organ was low to the ground, so I had to kneel to reach the keys. It didn't matter. I was just happy to be in a band. With my keyboard miked up to a small amp, we were ready to rehearse The Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" off the Beggars Banquet album.
For a piece that requires an assortment of keyboards, guitars, and a samba orchestra's percussion section, "Sympathy for the Devil" was a complex song for our junior high band. Nevertheless, Jaime was a natural arranger and knew how to fill in the sounds. That's where I came in. I was expected to improvise the first two minutes of Nicky Hopkins' piano part. I listened to the song a bunch of times but didn't prepare anything like the other guys. It didn't seem very "rock and roll" to be doing homework. Consequently, I was lost during rehearsal. Even if I had sheet music, I probably couldn't decipher that level of detail. To get us through the beginning of the song, Jaime taught me three chords. "Come in on two. Okay now! Hit the next chord... now!" He kept count for me, but it wasn't working. I couldn't keep time. Then Jaime decided I should do the woo-woo parts of the song. All I had to do was contribute one well-placed chord for two-thirds of the song.

"I watched with glee [woo-woo]  
While your kings and queens [woo-woo]  
Fought for ten decades [woo-woo]  
For the gods they made [woo-woo]  
I shouted out [woo-woo]  
Who killed the Kennedys? [woo-woo]  
When after all [woo-woo]  
It was you and me [woo-woo]"

And so it went with more than 100 woo-woos.

With the help of Jaime's head cues, I slowly got the rhythm and was reaping the rewards from years of classical piano study. While beating out my chord, I added stage embellishments such as rocking the keyboard back on its legs, dancing from the knees up while pointing to my bandmates with my free hand in a show of solidarity and encouragement. "Yeah, man, you got it!" The first song was done, and I was ready to learn the chord for the next. In the meantime, I worked up quite a thirst.

I walked through the sliding door flying high – not from all the pot we smoked, but from the satisfaction of a solid performance. Like Billy Preston did for the Stones all through the 1970s, I brought my keyboard skills to complement the band's sound without overtaking it. I was comfortable not being the center of attention and not having too much responsibility.

As I poured juice from a pitcher, I imagined my show business arc as a part of Soul Solitaire. We would rehearse, do some local shows, and move down to the city to get discovered. Then, who knows? My rise to fame would be a comeuppance for my stepfather and the two piano teachers whom I would not credit in my Grammy speech. People were finally going to realize that I was a rocker all along.

When I went back outside, I noticed my band members huddled around the little organ on short legs. Perhaps a blown fuse, or a spilled soda, or maybe Aaron dropped his cigarette on my knee cushion borrowed from the couch. As I came closer, I could see they were disassembling my keyboard station. The long extension cord that powered my instrument from the kitchen was needed elsewhere, and so was our only other microphone and amp. Jaime, our leader, and my friend from the old neighborhood had the task of demoting me to a hanger-on. I'm relieved he didn't ask me to be a roadie in exchange for weed. I would probably be hauling crates to this day.

"Sorry, man, Aaron needs that mic," he said. I wondered, indigantly, why he needed my mic when those drums were loud as sh*t already! I could barely concentrate on my keyboard part as it was. "He's going to sing the woo-woo part, like in the song." I was beginning to understand. Jaime was just trying to include me, but this band didn't need a member who could barely land three fingers on the right keys. Not only could Aaron drum with all four of his limbs in rhythm, but he could sing at
the same time. My talent went as far as posing in the mirror with a tennis racquet and pretending to play under bright lights like the guys in magazines. It was all gone – limo rides, leather pants, groupies, and easy money. I was washed up by seventh grade. All I could do was go back inside and play records until the rehearsal was over. But Jaime and I remained best friends until my family moved back to Manhattan.

After high school, Jaime honed his craft for years by playing the blues in New York City before packing up his guitar and moving to Italy. He didn't stop at performing covers; he went on to write his own material, and nowadays, he makes a living playing Delta blues with his band iNNeRSOLe! throughout Europe. His love of the blues is authentic and flows naturally. He might not be well known, but as a composer, songwriter, musician, and singer, Jaime Dolce is in the same company as Hendrix, Allman, and for that matter, Lindsay and Hammerstein.

As painful as it is for so many young men to realize, most of us are destined to be lifelong spectators and never participants in making music. I'm sure I could start taking lessons again and probably learn a song or two, but that doesn't make it art. My playing was always stilted and lacking emotion, and I had no desire to improve. On the other hand, Jaime took his lessons seriously. He loved to play, and practicing wasn't a chore for him. In case expulsion from music school wasn't enough of a cease and desist, Jaime ultimately freed me from the burden of playing ever again so I could enjoy listening even more. He also saved my parents from a future of humiliation and financial woe as they paid for my studio apartment, electric pianos, and lessons well into my 40s. Best of all, they would never have to hear me explain my joblessness at family functions with, "I have a job – my music."
Over the years, Newport, Rhode Island has been home to many of my life’s best memories. No trip to town was ever complete without a pop in to The Music Box, once one of the finest record stores in the Northeast. I can’t remember ever leaving empty handed. Unfortunately it closed its doors for good this past New Year’s Eve and on its last day I reminisced with the owner about the famous people who had come by over the years to thumb through his bins, and shared some of my most memorable “finds” from his store. To this day, Todd Rundgren’s *Nearly Human* is the most significant.

I bought *Nearly Human* on an unforgettable August weekend in 1989. The record had just been released in May and the single “The Want of a Nail” connected with me quickly. There are those songs that, when you hear them for the first time, you realize that buying the entire record was going to be inevitable. This was one of them. In those days, there was no just hopping on a computer and downloading a track or an album. It meant actually going to a record store. For people like me that means carving out a few hours. Shopping for records isn’t like running into a grocery store for milk and eggs. I camp out. That day in August I knocked out a few hours at The Music Box and my first grab was *Nearly Human*.

Todd Rundgren had always fascinated me. For starters, I have always had a soft spot for all kinds of Philly soul. The first being the Philadelphia soul of songwriters and producers like Thom Bell, Linda Creed, Norman Harris, Dexter Wansel and the production teams of McFadden and Whitehead, and Gamble & Huff. The other is the blue-eyed soul of Hall & Oates and Todd Rundgren.

Over the last 50 years Todd has remained one of our most consistent singer/songwriters. Across his many bands and incarnations he has brought a familiar and bright soaring orchestration to his music. With his best known work it’s almost become a signature sound. But he has also remained on the periphery of popular music. Rundgren has released just enough hits to be a familiar name but never enough to be considered a superstar. That doesn’t seem terribly important to him. He is
instead regarded among the best of musicians as a genius, and has produced some of the most successful rock records ever, like Meat Loaf’s *Bat Out of Hell* to name just one. That recognition has always seemed to be what drives Todd, along with having the freedom to follow his own path.

At the time, *Nearly Human* was the first album he had released in over four years. Like many of his records the songs here deal with self-doubt, loss, and spirituality. The songs are carefully selected because they play a role in the general dynamic of the record. Not because they could be a hit or court rock radio. It’s always a tremendously pure endeavor with Rundgren. That was the case with *Nearly Human*.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lmuptc-eJc

Rundgren had done some work producing the band Bourgeois Tagg, who was known at the time as an incredible live act. Working with them in the studio convinced Rundgren that his next record should be recorded live. No overdubbing. As groundbreaking as it might have appeared at the time, it had been a process that had been the norm up until the mid-1960s. But by the late 1980s no one was doing anything live. Music was assembled, recorded instrument-by-instrument on multitrack recorders, and stripped together, becoming something distilled and clinically removed from its soulful origins in the process.

Rundgren has often said that music at its best is a platform for people to communicate things that are sometimes too difficult to express with words alone. With all of the then-new recording technology that had become available, most music began to miss a certain live performance element that helped make that expression real. By cutting the album live, Todd knew that he could better capture that energy and amplify the meaning of each song. With that he headed to California to begin recording.

The approach to each song was old school and unique in its simplicity. Each day was devoted to only one song and he would begin by assembling his musicians and running through take after take of the track. Once they seemed to have a handle on what he was looking for, Rundgren would leave them to rehearse on their own. In a separate room he would assemble as many as 30 singers and they would work through the vocals. Finally, he would then bring everyone together and they would begin to move through the song as a complete band. Start to finish, each song took eight to 10 hours.
While this may not sound that complicated, it’s almost impossible to pull off. Today, session players know that they can go into a studio and lay down a track as their own schedule permits. It doesn’t matter when they do it; it doesn’t matter if anyone from the band is even there. That’s how they book their work. Todd wasn’t able to get a lot of people that he really wanted on the record. They just couldn’t make his live recording process fit around their other commitments. As difficult as it was for him to pass on these players, his overall vision was more important. Todd wanted everyone in the room looking at each other as they performed. As you listen to the record you can hear why.

The band he assembled for this record is as good as it gets. First, he started with the core of Bourgeois Tagg – Brent Bourgeois on keys, Lyle Workman on guitar, Larry Tagg on bass, and Michael Urbano on drums. Urbano would later gain more attention as the drummer for Smash Mouth and the touring drummer for Cake. From the Tubes he recruited Vince Welnick on piano and Prairie Prince on drums and percussion. On sax he brought on board the incomparable Bobby Strickland. Lastly, on background vocals he assembled a chorus of over two dozen different session singers and one surprise guest in the late Clarence Clemons. The first single, “The Want of a Nail” features soul great Bobby Womack whose shout-outs gives the song even more weight and resonance. The song charges along like a freight train, perfectly kicking off the record and re-establishing Rundgren as the bearer of the blue-eyed soul crown.

A musician who is masterfully skilled on almost every rock instrument, Rundgren is often overlooked for the range and expressiveness of his vocals. Here he owns each song, knowing just when to push the vocals forward and when to hold them back. With the more delicate pieces like “Parallel Lines,” *Nearly Human* offers his best group of ballads since the previous, and superb, *Hermit of Mink Hollow* album and tracks like “Can We Still Be Friends.”
The record includes cover songs as well. He transforms the old Tubes song “Feel It,” taking it to Philly by adding beautiful choruses and a fat sax solo by Strickland. It sounds like something straight out of the Philadelphia International Records catalogue circa 1975.

httpv://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx6Qk5CYkLA&list=OLAK5uy_nVf_CdEcdNRAu2FiD4Wijy9UYSFK84KI4&index=8

There’s even something for fans of his old band Utopia. The song “Can’t Stop Running” reunited Rundgren for the first time in five years with his Utopia bandmates Kasim Sulton, Willie Wilcox and Roger Powell. They apparently just showed up at the studio one day, surprising Rundgren. He quickly put them to work where they helped him lay down what might be one of the best Utopia songs ever.

Rundgren went out on the road to promote Nearly Human with an 11-piece band along with backup singers and guest performers. Even then it was rare to see an artist head out on the road with such a large outfit. It doesn’t make much financial sense. But the tour was met with rave reviews and unfortunately was only captured on film during performances in Japan.

It’s unclear why the album was named Nearly Human. It may simply reference the manner in which the album was recorded. In the end, it doesn’t matter much, because in what has been argued to be Todd Rundgren’s best album ever, he demonstrated a commitment to his craft that broke with convention. From the songwriting process to the expansive live tour, Rundgren is presented as a master at work with an eye for detail that can’t be overlooked. With Nearly Human he delivers some of the most beautiful, best-performed music of our time. So much so that when you let it spin what you’ll hear is not only nearly human. It’s almost godly.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pF3NuZoaShI&list=OLAK5uy_nVf_CdEcdNRAu2FiD4Wijy9UYSFK84KI4&index=5
Separation Anxiety

THE RUN-OUT GROOVE

Written by James Whitworth
"SO THEY'RE CALLED 'SEPARATES' BECAUSE THEY SEPARATE YOU FROM YOUR CASH?"
"SO THEY'RE CALLED 'SEPARATES' BECAUSE THEY SEPARATE YOU FROM YOUR CASH?"
The two Vietnamese gals that were hanging out backstage asked me what I had in my briefcase. Contracts, travel itineraries, touring papers, that kinda stuff, I answer. “Oh, so you are the road manager,” the one on the left said. “Yup, I am,” I answer as I double-check that my briefcase is locked and turn back toward the stage at the Fab Mab. I remind myself not to put the case down…anywhere!

I am not in Kansas anymore. This is San Francisco, a wide-open town where in the 1800s men were drugged, given a Mickey, knocked out and kidnapped only to wake up on a ship in the Pacific Ocean headed for some exotic locale in the far east. These new involuntary crew members had just been Shanghaied.

The Mabuhay Gardens (aka The Fab Mab) at 443 Broadway is located in the North Beach section of San Francisco, an area best known for its strip clubs. The punk rock club was run by the infamous Dirk Dirksen, who liked to think of himself as the “pope of punk.” The nephew of Senator Everett Dirksen (a status that he promoted), he deliberately provoked and insulted the audience and the bands. I too had that experience with him. He was a putz, but Dirksen is considered one of the club promoters responsible for bringing the original late 1970s wave of British punk rockers to the United States. He created an “exchange program” where bands from England would come to the Mabuhay Gardens and bands from New York would go to England in return. This helped popularize punk rock. According to Wikipedia, the alley located next to the former site of the Mabuhay still exists and is now named for Dirksen. It has been noted that it still reeks of bad vibes and violence.

These are not money gigs, I mean yeah, the band gets paid, but not much, barely making expenses so the record company has to kick in money and an advertising budget. This time I am working a
promotion tour for the ska revival band, Madness, who just had their successful UK album *One Step Beyond* released stateside on Sire Records. They are touring the States for a few weeks and then the band goes back to England.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOJSM46nWwo

Ska evolved in the early 1960s when Jamaicans in their own way attempted to replicate the sound of the New Orleans R&B they heard over their radios. On purpose or by accident they created a new music style. Instead of mimicking the sound of the R&B, the first ska artists developed a distinctive style and voice, which eventually became reggae.

In the late 1970s, several British bands like the Beat (later the English Beat), The Specials, The Selecter and others began reviving the sound of original ska, adding a nervous punk edge to the skittish rhythms. The ska revival bands were often more politically-oriented than any other British musical style. The sound is angry and macho, like the Stranglers and the Sex Pistols. This was a real niche type of music, and Madness, who became known for their style known as “The Nutty Sound,” was successful in England but here in the States, not so much. The political issues of the Caribbean and the UK do not seem to register stateside.
We were booked for a few nights at the Fab Mab, Nov 30th, and Dec 1st. Those were tough nights with dust-ups in the house with audience members and backstage among the various crews and security. Madness did not mind but I was certainly surprised. You just didn’t see that in the rock scene in the States. This was a few months before my Stranglers tour in England [see Ken’s story in Issue 111 - Ed.] and it certainly was a learning experience for me.

Finishing up in San Francisco we flew down to the relative safety of Los Angeles for a couple of nights at the Whiskey A-Go-Go. The opening act was The Go-Go’s.

I’d heard of them, a local LA girl punk band who were pretty much self-taught musicians and were paying their dues. They had a reputation of partying hard and musically they were very raw. To be honest I never was very interested and the odds of them being successful at least to me were dubious.

The first night we (Madness and I) hung around after soundcheck to watch the Go-Go’s first set. They were pretty good; I was impressed. Still a bit raw but you could see they had that certain something.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f55KlPe81Yw

Madness apparently felt the same way and immediately took to them. After the Go-Go’s set, the guys in Madness went to the Go Go’s’ dressing room and told the girls how much they liked their music. It was instant friendship between the bands. shortly after, Madness invited the Go-Go’s to come to England and open for them on their dates.

The girls were excited and intrigued. It seemed like a great opportunity and they immediately
In a few months, Miles Copeland, founder of I.R.S. Records signed the Go-Go’s to a recording contract. Miles managed and oversaw British Talent Managers (BTM), Frontier Booking International (FBI, then run by Ian Copeland, Miles’ brother) and I.R.S. Records, which handled the wildly successful rock group the Police (their drummer Stewart Copeland is another brother). The Go-Go’s became the opening act for the Police; same management, booking agency, and record company, so it made sense. Even though they were an opening act to the Police, the Go-Go’s were playing stadiums.

Around then Miles Copeland asked producer and Sire Records co-founder Richard Gottehrer to produce the Go-Go’s. One of the first things Gottehrer incorporated was to get them to slow their songs down. Doing this enabled the listening audience to understand the lyrics and increased the desirability of the Go-Go’s songs.

The Go-Go’s wanted to work with Richard Gottehrer because of his work with Blondie and his sixties hits “Hang on Sloopy” (The McCoys) and “My Boyfriend’s Back” (The Angels). Beauty and the Beat was their first album. The album also had the effect of moving the girls towards pop and away from punk, which initially horrified them. Two very successful singles came out of that album – “We Got the Beat” and “Our Lips Are Sealed.”

That is the thing about live music; it tends to be faster than the studio recordings. I have noticed on tours that an hour and three quarters set at the beginning of the tour many times will time out to an hour and forty minutes by the end of the tour. In the case of one group I worked with the set got so short by the middle of the tour that they had to add a song.

Back on the Madness tour, we went east to play the Mudd Club in Manhattan. New York welcomed them with open arms. Madness’s label, Sire Records, is based in New York so there was a big turnout of press and music business personnel. There was such a demand for tickets they could have
played the Mudd Club for a week and sold out every show!

Madness had a few more dates that included the Paradise Club, Tier 3, Hurrah, and the Hot Club. The attendance was good. The lads had a good time on their short American tour but were happy to get back home to their UK fans and drink some scrumpy.

In 1982, Madness would hit it big with their smash, “Our House.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwIe_sjKeAY

**Postscript: A Note on Record Labels and Royalties**

Sire Records is an interesting record company. It started in 1966 as an independent record label founded by Seymour Stein and Richard Gottehrer (this was before Richard became the producer for the Go-Go’s) and occupied a townhouse on West 73rd Street. Over the years Sire records signed many acts besides Madness including Madonna, the Pretenders, Ice-T, Talking Heads, The Ramones, Depeche Mode, The Cure, the Smiths and k.d. lang just to name a few.

Record companies are an unusual business, where a hit record makes so much money that it covers the loss of the records that do not sell. If a record company has 90% failures and 10% hits it is probably doing just fine. In fact, record companies are frequently just rented offices with executive suites, an art department, an A&R department, and public relations and promotion people. There are no hard assets and all manufacturing is farmed out. Expenses are rent, salaries and cash outlay for the artist, payments for the plants for vinyl and/or CD pressings, and distribution.

Everything a record company does for the artist including advertising, tour support, studio rental, travel, promotional items and such is charged back to the artist. Not all record companies are successful, but I have never heard of one going bankrupt (they own no assets, and if they had a catalog or publishing they could sell those rights or merge with another record company). Nowadays artists try to get their money upfront upon signing with a label because the process of getting royalties is, and I quote, “a long and winding road.” The songwriters do better over time and even though the record companies ask for the publishing rights, the labels are happy to settle for fifty percent, but the artist should fight to keep it all.

When you are in a band everyone usually splits the royalties evenly, but the songwriter or writers get additional songwriting revenues separately. To me, this seems fair but because of the different amount of cash each band member may receive it sometimes causes issues between the people in the band.

An aside: In 1985 the Beatles catalog sold for 47.5 million dollars to Michael Jackson. He was advised to buy it by Paul McCartney, and it was a particularly good investment. In 1995 he sold the rights to Sony/ATV for $95 million. In 2018 Paul McCartney regained the rights in a confidential settlement agreement with Sony/ATV.
First off, I am proud to announce two projects of mine that you may be interested in:

I will start my own podcast in about a month. It will be called *The French Connection* and I’ll be talking about all things music and beyond...it will cover my many and varied interests such as: musical artists, the music business, motivational speakers, guitars, health, politics, watches, wine and more.

Coming in 2021, my first book will be published, titled *A Twisted Business: The Soul of Twisted Sister and the Art of Reinvention.*
And now, back to the business at hand.

So many great anniversaries,

So many great albums.

So many great artists...

This was not the one I thought I would be writing about but I have had second (and third and fourth) thoughts about my history with the Grateful Dead.

Recently, through the help of my friend Justin Kreutzmann, the son of Dead drummer Bill Kreutzmann, I had the great fortune to speak to Betty Cantor, the longtime Dead live sound engineer and co-producer of *Workingman’s Dead*. (More about that later.) *That album is now 50 years old.*

Let’s, for the sake of this article, just pretend that I am writing about a band that had more of an influence on me than every other artist except The Beatles, Stones and Bowie and that I loved.

I can’t deny that I’ve spent more hours listening to the Dead, both live and on record, than any other band in my life. Period. It is with this background that I approach my opinion of *Workingman’s Dead*.

For starters, this is not about the remastered *50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition*. Yes, the timing of this article feels right because it is 50 years ago this summer that the album came out, but this is also more about this band and this album at this time.

It’s not about how the remaster sounds or the bonus live LP of a 1971 GD concert at the Capitol Theater in Portchester, NY. (Sure, if you are a Deadhead, then you might just know that yes, I was at that GD concert that night...)

I had asked my record company president at Rhino, self-confessed Deadhead Mark Pinkus, to send me a copy of the *50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition*, but alas, COVID-19 has prevented the staff from going into the company building in LA to retrieve a copy for me.

I couldn’t wait.

I decided to listen to the high-quality version from the Warner/Rhino Dead vinyl box set released several years ago. I also listened to my original LP from 1970. My feelings about this album transcend whatever extra sparkle a remaster could give me anyway.

Why? Because, unlike the remastered Beatles albums that I have reviewed, and which I have listened to every month of every year over the last 50 years, I hadn’t listened to *Workingman’s Dead* in its entirety since October 1972, the month and year that I decided that I was through with the band.

Of course I had heard “Casey Jones” and “Uncle John's Band” many times on the radio and in bars, but not the rest of the record. Also, back in those “good old days” one tended to listen to at least one uninterrupted side of an album, if not both. Most of the time, I used the album cover to roll my joints on. So, the occasion of the album’s 50th anniversary prompted me to re-listen.

In the summer of 1970 I was 17 going on 18 and staying with a drug buddy of mine named Jerry. We
had met at a drug rehab clinic about six months earlier. We would sit around with three other guys who were drug addicts at various stages of addiction, listen to the counselor, then go back to my parents' house to get absolutely wasted. It was a great time.

Ah...the summer of 1970, hanging out in Fire Island. If you don't know about Fire Island, then you have missed out on one of the great summer hangouts in the USA. It's a barrier Island off of Bay Shore Long Island, accessible mostly by ferry. There are no cars allowed, just bicycles and wagons to carry luggage and food from the ferry docks and the local supermarkets. (If you're a band playing there it's quite a challenge to bring your equipment.)

Some of you may have heard of Cherry Grove. Cherry Grove is among the most famous gay communities in the US. It is on the east end of Fire Island and I mention it only to give geographical context to those not familiar with the area.

My friend Jerry had a house in Fair Harbour, the town just west of the largest town, Ocean Beach. My parents used to summer out there and I had been going every summer from 1966 onward.

The vibe of Fire Island is hard to describe. Kind of like Key West in its laconic summer feeling. Very few live there all year around because of its limited accessibility. When I was hanging out in the 1960s, cartoonist Jules Feiffer had the big house on the dunes, on the street that divided Ocean Beach and the community known as Seaview. That was always a local landmark.

To a teenager, free to just hang out and listen to (or play) music, it was paradise. Just get wasted, hang out at the beach to watch the sunrise to start the day, go to a place called Sunken Forest where there was a secret boardwalk path to a platform in which you could watch the ocean on one side and the bay (during sunset) on the other. This was done, on acid, with regularity all summer long...for us, it was paradise.

During that summer of 1970, *Workingman's Dead* provided the soundtrack. The Grateful Dead lineup on that album included Jerry Garcia (guitars, banjo, vocals); Bob Weir (guitar, vocals); Ron McKernan aka “Pigpen” (vocals, keyboards, harmonica); Mickey Hart (drums, percussion); Bill Kreutzmann (drums, percussion) and Phil Lesh (bass, vocals).

That is why I know this record so well, and why I wanted to revisit something that had at one time meant so much and then...poof...just disappeared from my consciousness.

It is almost impossible to listen to this record now without recognizing it as one of the precursors of the music format known today as Americana. For modern-day Americana, this music style really began just two years earlier with the Band’s *Music from Big Pink*.

I can only imagine the pressure from the band’s record label, Warner Bros., on the Grateful Dead to somehow break through with some kind of commercial hit record. No one could argue how great a live band they were but...it just wasn’t translating onto vinyl. But according to Betty Cantor, the Dead had insisted on the release of a live album to follow 1969’s *Aoxomoxoa*. The label fought it.

Following the release of 1969’s *Aoxomoxoa*, the Dead insisted that a live album be released prior to the next studio album (*Workingman's Dead*). As such, *Live/Dead* was released November 1969 with *Workingman's Dead* being released in June 1970.
Then-label president Joe Smith came down with the order. The next album had to have songs, real songs, four-minute songs.

The pressure was on the band, according to Betty. For the label to be satisfied, they had to achieve enough commercial success to have their music played regularly on FM radio. How ironic for Jerry Garcia, who had started out in a folk/jug band, to not be appreciated as a “true musician” and rather, be considered some kind of R&B acid-soaked improvising version of Syd Barrett (original guitarist for Pink Floyd). Add to this the fact that, for their vocals, the band had started to want to sound something like Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. But vocals, to the Dead, were always an afterthought.

The fact is, as was brought home to me as I listened to this album over and over, the Dead were never very good singers. They were passable on their best days.

They were earnest and well-meaning but compared to CSN&Y and The Band, not in the same league. In my opinion, The Band may have had the best vocals of any American band outside of the Beach Boys, with CSN&Y coming close behind. I remember reading articles about CSN&Y working with the Dead on their vocals at the time. Whether they actually did is not as important as the result, being a much more cohesive vocal delivery on Workingman’s Dead that really matured six months later on American Beauty.

Jefferson Airplane and Moby Grape all had way better vocals than the Dead. I just didn’t think about it 50 years ago, but now it’s plainly obvious. Garcia’s vocals are really a matter of taste. I did like the whole package back then so I hadn’t really noticed the vocals in particular in those days. To be fair to the Dead, though, what they lacked in vocals they more than made up for by their incredible musical improvisations.

When it came to driving an audience crazy, the Grateful Dead could do it with the music. But knowing bands as I do, I know that they wanted to be more than just an acid soundtrack. Every band wants to have the kind of songs that become standards. They badly wanted to elevate to that level.
Meanwhile, back on the east coast, The Band was about to go three albums deep by releasing *Stage Fright* that August.

Back to the present: here is the good news. My appreciation of the incredible playing of Garcia and bassist/vocalist Phil Lesh has only increased as I've revisited *Workingman's Dead*. I always was a fan of Lesh, but with the resolution of my current system, his bass-playing foundation and unique style of improvising is just that, The Foundation of the Dead. With the perspective of a 50-year break, are my current observations of *Workingman's Dead*:

The album's first track, “Uncle John's Band,” tells you that this is going to be a different album. It’s hummable and easily digestible. You can hear how hard they were working to make the vocals sound the best they could. It's an opening track that tells you that the Dead were serious about having some kind of commercial success; something that would go down easy on FM radio, like “Suite: Judy Blue Eyes” or “The Weight.” That was a tall order as CSN&Y pretty much had that road all to themselves by the summer of 1970. Well, “Uncle John’s Band” ain’t either of those songs but it’s good enough.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yxvy9cT4JBQ

“High Time” is the track that’s the least impressive. Here, they try to convince you that their efforts to improve their vocals was really taking them to another level. Well, to me, it just wasn’t worth the waste of the wax, sorry. The following song, “Dire Wolf,” is, however, a great song, and brings to the fore the irony that Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter could impart to the Dead’s material.

“New Speedway Boogie” is not really a classic boogie as such, but it’s another very good track. However, If I was the album’s producer I would have had Pigpen sing it as he would have brought a much better sense of time and place to this track.

“Cumberland Blues” is truly the boogie song and Jerry and Phil kill it. This is the kind of song that tells you where the band could go if they were let loose, which they did live many times. I keep going back to this track, as it just really lets loose and you can hear the band push.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xosZDm01ffc

I asked Betty if both of the band’s drummers, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart, played on all the tracks. She said that Bill did and Mickey provided extra percussion when needed; sometimes drums, sometimes other percussion instruments. During the recording of the album, both sets of drums were set up, though. I’m mostly drawn to Phil’s playing, however. It all comes emanating from the loping bass lines of Dr. Phil. Phil Lesh is the glue and in rediscovering this album it has never been more apparent to me.

“Black Peter,” while a rather slight song, moves along in a bar-soaked haze that allows for a breather. Great albums pace themselves like this, or at least they used to.

The best natural singer in the band is also the least-recorded – Pigpen. Pigpen is the Ringo Starr of the band. The guy who brings the party. He isn’t only earnest, he’s totally authentic. The difference between Pigpen and Ringo however, is that Pigpen is actually a really good R&B singer. It’s in his blood and you can hear it. Pigpen was the best singer in the band and Betty agreed with me on that.
“Easy Wind” is a biker song if there ever was one, and Pigpen was the band’s biker rep. During the jam during “Easy Wind,” just floating below the surface, you can almost hear them wanting to slide into “Turn on Your Love Light,” Pigpen’s live-performance highlight, at a moment’s notice.

This whole re-listening experience is causing the remnants of all that acid that may still reside in my cranium to get released. It brings a smile to my face. My wife is stunned that I’ve been playing a Dead album. Not just once but 20 times...in a day.

“Casey Jones” closes out Workingman’s Dead. For those who never experienced the band live, “Casey Jones” is another beast entirely. Here, though it would become one of the band’s signature songs (along with “Truckin’,” “China Cat Sunflower,” “Friend of the Devil,” “Dark Star” and many others) it is just the closing track, however excellent, but live, it pushes and pushes like a locomotive, and takes the audience right along with it.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxCfnq7A56M

Been there many times...

For the techies among you, according to Betty, the album budget was roughly $15,000. It took three weeks to record at Pacific High Studios in San Francisco, and was done on 8 tracks on an Electrodyne/Quad-Eight console. The Dead trusted Betty to oversee the mastering and she had sole control over the final sound.

However, the latest Workingman’s Dead remaster was done without any consultation with her. This is not unusual. Steve Miller told me that his label doesn’t even tell him when re-releases are coming out!

As a recent subscriber to Tidal, I was able to compare the original vinyl mix of Workingman's Dead with the 2013 remaster at 44.1/16-bit through Tidal. I also compared my original 50-year-old vinyl and a 2010 version from the 5-disc vinyl box released at the time.

I preferred the 50-year-old pressing. It had greater sonic range and better bass definition, and the volume levels were higher. Of course, given the fact that up to around 1,000 copies of any record can be pressed from a single lacquer, it’s impossible to know where these respective vinyl versions were in the pressing order. That can make a difference in many ways.

The 2013 remaster through Tidal was fuller-sounding with much better bass articulation, and the acoustic guitars had better separation.

I have no Grateful Dead CDs to compare to any other format and haven’t heard any of the latest 2020 vinyl remasters since they were not available to me at the time of this writing. [At press time, a 24/96 version is available on Qobuz if you have a subscription. – Ed.] And since I don’t have every remastering of Workingman’s Dead, this article is more about the song and album experience than a definitive statement on the relative merits of the album’s sonic evolution through various reissues.

What I can say is that, for me, this whole exercise was so much more than just revisiting this album. It brought back to me a huge portion of my life as a Deadhead and its impact on my musical journey.

Maybe it’s because of our current COVID-19 existence that the nostalgia of this album or the summer of 1970 has so much meaning. Regardless, it has been a great experience to revisit an album that meant – and again means – so much to me.
Workingman's Dead at 50. It's made me a Deadhead again!
Hi Dad, we just managed to get a booking for Noma in Copenhagen. Would you like to join us?"

My son Ilan is a chef and one of the things chefs love to do is eat in really high-end restaurants. Noma is one of the best and most storied restaurants in the world. Through connections, my son’s partner in Los Angeles, who interned there a few years ago, landed this coveted reservation.

I decided to join them and make a business trip out of it by visiting my German, Danish and Swedish distributors. Through Airbnb I found a lovely one-bedroom apartment in old Copenhagen. Situated very close to the university, the apartment had an old bar almost directly below it. A really good coffee shop was nearby and opposite the apartment was the newly-renovated Great Synagogue of Copenhagen complete with two 24/7 guards.

That first night, I descended to the bar. The room is cozy with half a dozen tables and some bar stools. Most of the customers were young. The friendly barman served me various aquavits and I started to talk to two women who coincidentally hailed from Long Island.

Opposite me was a table with a young woman sitting, staring any me. She beckoned me over.
“Sit down.” She said. I sat. She put her hand on mine and looked into my eyes. “Stay with me,” she commanded. Intrigued but disinterested (or perhaps a little too scared by her offer), I declined and returned to the bar and my new companions.

Ilan and his friends had taken an apartment not far from Freetown Christiana, which is a commune established in the 1970s by hippies wanting an alternative lifestyle, available marijuana and a life free of government interference. Now that the hippies have aged and the area has become more gentrified and further away from its original aims, it has become a large tourist attraction.

Ilan’s apartment, in a newly renovated old building, was on the sixth floor of an elevator-free residence. The walk up, seemingly endless, wasn’t too hard for me. Not so for two of our party. Both of them, half my age, had to frequently stop for breath.

What can I say about Noma?

From the beginning to the end, it’s a performance.

We, the chosen few, congregated outside until summoned by name. We were greeted by René Redzepi, the owner and all the staff.

The restaurant is airy and bright. Very Scandinavian in feel with light wood on the ceiling and walls. The floor is made from very large light pine planks.

The menu, all 15 courses, was more of an event than a meal. Prawns caught by one fisherman in a certain fjord in Norway. Berries only grown on a tiny volcanic island in Denmark’s Kattegat. Giant mussels from the Faroe Islands. Sea snails and roses. Horse mussel ragout. Squid in seaweed butter. Head of the cod. Venus clams. Sea snail broth, Sugar kelp tart and plankton cake.

The menu in winter is always seafood-based and the wines to match were perfect. Everything was delicious and served by the chefs themselves. After the meal, René Redzepi showed us around the kitchens. There were rooms full of all sorts of liquids fermenting. We saw his test kitchen where other chefs were experimenting with next season’s menu.

There is something wonderful about eating in such a place. A once in a lifetime experience since I doubt I will return.

Since I was traveling with chefs, eating was central to the trip. We ate in another two or three top-class restaurants but the one that stood out in memory was Schønnemann. About 150 years old, it is a lunch-only restaurant specializing in freshly-made smørrebrød and all sorts of the most amazing herring you could ever imagine. Marinated herring, fried herring, curry herring, ginger herring, pickled spiced herring and smoked Bornholm herring – just to mention a few. There was a recommended and perfectly matched aquavit for each different herring. Ultimately this much simpler food made the biggest impression on me.

The transport system in Copenhagen is magnificent. Trains, subways and buses seamlessly integrate. The station near my apartment had a subway and a train station in one place. In fact I caught the train to Gothenburg, Sweden from that very station. Gothenburg is where my distributor lives and it is also the home of Volvo cars. It’s about three-hour journey from Copenhagen on a very pleasant, quiet and spotlessly clean train.

On the day of my departure, I had an afternoon flight to New York. To save time, that morning I
purchased a subway ticket to the airport. As the train was pulling into the airport station, an inspector approached and asked to see my ticket. I gave it to him and on looking at it he declared, “This is invalid.”

Perplexed, I asked why.

“You purchased it this morning, it is only valid for 90 minutes,” he said.

Incredulously I looked at the ticket and he was correct.

By this time we had disembarked the inspector had taken my passport and written out a ticket. He explained that there was a website, in English, that I could contact to dispute the charge. I thanked him and continued to check in.

On the plane I got chatting with my neighbor and told her the story.

“How much was the fine?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Let me look.”

The fine was equivalent to $100.

On my return, I contacted the website, explaining that I bought the ticket in good faith and had no idea about the time limit.

The reply was terse. Rules are posted in English in all subway stations and I had to pay the fine. (Note to myself. After arriving jet-lagged in a foreign country, before anything else, make sure you familiarize yourself with the subway rules.) It also said that if I wanted to further dispute this finding, there was another website I could go to file my grievance. I clicked on it and it informed me that to continue I had to pay the equivalent amount of $100.

I took the ticket and added it to the pile of unpaid European tickets I had previously collected. Four speeding fines from France, One from Spain and another from Norway. ($375 for going nine miles over the 50 MPH speed limit...?) Now I am a scofflaw in four countries.
Few musicians in history have been industry game-changers to the degree that Otis Redding was. And he barely made it past the age of 25. The soul singer seems to have impressed everyone who heard him; decades after his death, his popularity is as great as ever.

Born in 1941 to a family of Georgia sharecroppers, Redding sang and played piano as a kid, even bringing in a little money every Sunday by performing gospel on the local radio station. After winning a weekly talent contest 15 times in a row, he landed a job singing with a band called Pat T. Cake and the Mighty Panthers, who toured the Chitlin’ Circuit, a network of venues where African American artists were allowed to perform. When Redding’s longtime friend, guitarist Johnny Jenkins, quit the band, Redding cast around for new opportunities too.

It was when he drove Jenkins down to Stax Studios in Memphis for a session gig that Redding was discovered and signed by studio chief Jim Stewart. Over time, the single from their original sessions, “These Arms of Mine,” ended up being one of his best-selling songs. It became part of his first album, *Pain in My Heart*, a 1964 release on the new Volt Records, owned by Stax. Redding immediately demonstrated his ear for suitable cover material. *Pain in My Heart* included songs like Ben E. King’s “Stand by Me” and Little Richard’s “Lucille.”
In fact, Stax’s Stewart had originally complained that Redding sounded too much like Little Richard, and you can hear the singer’s devotion to that charismatic performer in his version of “Lucille.” He’s got that simultaneous growl and falsetto down pat, not to mention the wild energy.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heFb5pUV0nE

One huge advantage for any artist working with Stax was the constant access to some of the best studio musicians in the country. For *The Great Otis Redding Sings Soul Ballads* (1965), Stewart surrounded Redding with Booker T. & The M.G.s plus the Memphis Horns; historians believe Isaac Hayes played piano, uncredited (he is listed on later albums). The single “Mr. Pitiful” was Redding’s first top 10 hit. That tune is historically noteworthy because it inspired engineer Tom Dowd to install an Ampex stereo mixer in the studio. Dowd was an innovator in multi-track recording who engineered hit albums by artists ranging from Aretha Franklin and Charles Mingus to the Bee Gees and Primal Scream.

As with the previous album, most of the tracks are covers. However, Redding was stretching his wings as a songwriter. “I Want to Thank You” milks that horn section for everything it can contribute, filling the gaps between phrases with tight harmony. As for Redding, he uses a style of delivery that brings singing closer to the natural rhythm of speech.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLyZOYvLWBI

Redding was not one to linger painfully over the creation of his recordings. Most of his third album, *Otis Blue: Otis Redding Sings Soul* (1965) was laid down in a single day in 1964. And it reached the top of the R&B chart anyway. The lineup of musicians is nearly identical to the previous album.

As usual, there are some fun covers here, mostly drawn from the expected soul and R&B sources, such as B.B. King’s “Rock Me Baby.” But Redding surely surprised everyone when he decided to record The Rolling Stones song “Satisfaction.” While the brass blats snidely, Redding shows the true madness behind the lyrics; the single hit No. 4 on the R&B charts.

But at its heart, this album is a tribute to Sam Cooke. Cooke, one of Redding’s greatest inspirations, was shot to death at the age of 33 a few months before *Otis Blue* was made. Redding included several of Cooke’s songs on *Otis Blue*, as he had on his previous albums. One of those is the powerful anthem “A Change Is Gonna Come.” This is a heartbreaking rendition. That’s Wayne Jackson on trumpet and Steve Cropper on guitar.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-M_wkYDE7PU

Redding’s success won him unprecedented clout at Stax; the label’s co-founder, Phil Walden, gave the singer part ownership in two related production companies, Jotis Records and Redwal Music (note the fragments of Redding’s name in each). But that didn’t slow him down in the studio. *The Soul Album* came out in 1966. Ironically, its only single, “Just One More Day,” did not reach the top 10.

Among the most interesting tracks on this album is a 1923 song by vaudeville star James Cox. “Nobody Knows You (When You’re Down and Out)” deals with how easy it is to lose everything
you’ve worked for and built in life. It’s a timeless message, as this aching, bluesy arrangement proves.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihA8xS1s_Z4

Another Depression-era song turned into one of Redding’s most celebrated tracks. “Try a Little Tenderness,” included on his 1966 album Complete & Unbelievable: The Otis Redding Dictionary of Soul, was composed in 1932. Up to Redding’s time, it was best known in a Bing Crosby recording from 1933.

Always on the lookout for great material, Redding was as open to the new as he was to the old. That same album includes his cover of Lennon/McCartney’s “Day Tripper,” which he turns into a ruthlessly James Brown-style romp, partly thanks to Booker T. Jones’ screaming organ chords.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xi6vtaZP-HA

No one could have guessed that King & Queen (1967) would be the final studio album of Redding’s life. This collaboration with Carla Thomas, known as the Queen of Memphis Soul (hence the album title), was a smash, hitting the No. 5 spot on the Billboard Pop chart. While the song “Tramp” outsold the other singles, it’s “Knock on Wood” that is best remembered today.

Bert Berns, who wrote such hits as “Twist and Shout,” “Another Piece of My Heart,” and “Hang on Sloopy,” composed the song “Are You Lonely for Me, Baby?” Thomas’ and Redding’s voice blend together seamlessly.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFz4z1fsaB8

On December 10, 1967, the plane carrying Redding and members of the Bar-Kays R&B band crashed on its way to Madison, Wisconsin. The only survivor was Ben Cauley, the Bar-Kays’ trumpeter. A few days before, Redding had recorded what would become his signature hit, although he wouldn’t live to enjoy the accolades: “Sittin’ on the Dock of the Bay” was presented to the world in 1968, first as a single and then on one of several posthumous albums containing mostly unreleased material.

While the title track of The Dock of the Bay (1968) represents a new avenue of British pop-inspired music-making that Redding had hoped to pursue – to the displeasure of Stax execs – the vaults also yielded another great recording of a song from an earlier era. “The Huckle-Buck,” by Roy Alfred and Andy Gibson, dates from the heyday of Tin Pan Alley, and enjoyed some fame thanks to Frank Sinatra’s version. Once again, Redding reaches into the past and claims the music as his own.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qQObj1EMRU

On the shore of Lake Monona, near the University of Wisconsin-Madison, there’s a marble bench and a plaque memorializing the music legend whose brilliant career was cut short in that body of water. The dedication reads, in part, “Otis Redding stands with Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, and Sam Cooke in the first rank of American rhythm and blues singers.” That’s some truth you just can’t
argue with.

*Header image courtesy of Wikipedia/Volt Records.*
“High Fidelity” is an ambiguous term. How much Fidelity is required to be considered High Fidelity? “Fidelity” in a listening system refers to its ability to reproduce sound that is true to the original event. In recordings, the original event is the actual performance of the musicians, but what actually reaches the listeners at home is a representation of that event, as it could be captured onto a suitable storage medium by a given engineer. The fidelity of the recording to the actual event is not always very high, but we can assume that the product that reaches the market is as intended by the producer. The home listener cannot influence the recording process and the creative decisions taken at that time, other than by preferring to purchase certain recordings over others, with the increased sales volume usually translating to more recordings done in a similar manner.

On the listening side of things, then, high fidelity means that the listening system will play back a recording as it was intended to be heard, which means that it should sound similar to what the producers heard in the studio. The more similar it gets, the higher the fidelity of the listening system to the original.

In Issue 120, Philip Newell stated, “it has been shown in various large international studies that the average [frequency response] of all domestic listening experiences is virtually flat.”

If we were to document a sufficiently large number of domestic listening system frequency responses to ensure statistical integrity, we would discover that although the responses of the individual systems are not usually flat on their own, the statistical average of a large-enough sample of responses would actually be flat.

If one system is a bit bass-heavy and another a bit bass-light, the deviations from flatness would
cancel out statistically and the average response of these two systems would be flat. This does not in any way increase the fidelity of either system, or render them more accurate.

By definition, being bass-heavy or bass-light represents a lack of accuracy. Neither of the two would reproduce the originally intended sound of a recording and would instead “color” all recordings according to their response errors.

A true high-fidelity system must demonstrate fidelity towards the original recording, so it must have a flat frequency/phase response as well as a flat dynamic response, so as not to impose its own character upon each recording. Any deviation from flatness, either due to the audio components and loudspeakers themselves, or due to their interaction with the domestic listening environment (the influence of the room acoustics), therefore reduces the fidelity of the system.

There is not much that can be done at the recording side to compensate for the large variety of domestic listening systems and their individual deviations from a flat response. Where the statistical average becomes important, though, is in reinforcing the argument for using accurate monitoring with a flat frequency/phase/dynamic response in all stages of production.

The listeners who do use truly high-fidelity systems will certainly be able to enjoy the intended sound as it was recorded and mastered, but also, those with less accurate listening systems who will not be able to hear the intended sound will at least hear something that is hopefully not too far off from the original recording as heard by the producer. The statistical average works out to a flat response because of the large variety in response errors in all possible directions.

If we were to work on a recording in the studio using reduced-fidelity monitoring, we would encounter two major issues: first of all, it would become very difficult to judge how much of what we were hearing was really there in the recording and how much was augmented or concealed by the individual response errors of the monitoring system. It could easily happen that the end, home listeners would hear things that the producers were not even aware of. Trying to “shape” the sound would be a rather futile exercise, as we would end up merely compensating for the errors of the monitoring system, which would not translate well to other systems with different deviations from flatness.

The second issue is directly related to statistics. If the monitoring system happens to be bass-heavy, a recording that sounds just right under these conditions may translate well to a similarly bass-heavy domestic listening system, but would be guaranteed to sound completely asthenic on a different, bass-light domestic system. Even worse, it wouldn’t even sound right on an expensive high-fidelity system. Actually, the statistical probability of such a recording sounding good on any system is in fact quite low!

By comparison, a recording produced using accurate monitoring would sound bass-heavy on a bass-heavy system, bass-light on a bass-light system and just right on other, more accurate systems. It would be unlikely to sound totally inappropriate on any reasonable reproduction system and the overall listening experience would tend to improve in direct proportion to the amount of effort and money invested in the listening environment, which makes logical sense. The listeners with the highest expectations will usually invest more in accurate systems and will be rewarded with a suitably refined listening experience.

So, why aren’t all listening systems accurate, then?

A truly accurate listening system is difficult to design and implement, tends to be expensive, large and heavy, and the room in which the system is operating is an integral part, but the requirements
for rendering a room “accurate” would rarely be considered acceptable in a domestic setting.

Even if we are to take a pair of loudspeakers of outstanding accuracy, when measured in an anechoic chamber or in a studio designed around them, simply placing them within a typical domestic living room will likely be enough to destroy their accuracy. The loudspeakers work together with the room as one system. One must complement the other. If uncompromised accuracy is the goal, the speakers must be designed for the room and the room must be designed for the speakers. Even the HVAC system and electrical installation must be designed as part of the total system environment. This is how world-class studios are designed, but rarely does anyone go to such lengths for their domestic entertainment.

But what if we did?

So, let’s assume that money and space are in ample supply, the entire family is in agreement and we have assembled an all-star team of experts to design our dream listening room, capable of truly accurate music reproduction. We begin with a large empty shell with a 24-foot ceiling height, only to end up with a much smaller sized listening room. The acoustic treatment necessary tends to consume enormous amounts of space. We haul in and permanently install gigantic loudspeakers, having first ensured that the foundations of the building can cope with the loading, which would normally only be encountered in heavy industrial facilities. Each decorative item, including furniture, must be carefully designed in.

After many months of work, our listening room is finally complete. We take a stack of records and expect to be completely blown away...only to discover that about 90 percent of the recordings we own actually sound rather disappointing. We start noticing all the little details we had never before heard. Breathing sounds, footsteps, clothes rubbing, rumble, a car honking in the distance, an airplane flying above, unintended notes, an unnatural frequency balance, obvious edits!

These are often a result of inadequate studio monitoring when the recording was made. Or perhaps recordings made under time pressure. Most listeners will never notice. Most domestic listening systems will never reveal such detail.

But while 90 percent of the recordings out there will probably not be very satisfying when all the detail is revealed, the 10 percent of the truly excellent recordings will be quite an experience! It then becomes a matter of hunting down that 10 percent, seeking thrill after thrill.

A truly accurate system cannot possibly make everything sound good. It cannot be flattering. It must be merciless in exposing every little flaw in a recording. This is a fundamental requirement in the recording side of things. But monitoring a recording is not done for pleasure. Domestic listening, on the other hand, is usually considered entertainment.

Quoting Philip Newell again, but this time from his book, *Recording Studio Design*: “Really, nobody in their right minds would want to hear an unintentionally bad sound for the purposes of seeking enjoyment.”

Is it entertaining to have all the flaws of a recording exposed?

This is largely a matter of personal opinion.

Will you choose the blue pill, or the red pill?

Do you really want to know what is going on under the surface, or do you prefer the pretty picture
which will allow you to sleep easier at night?

*Header image courtesy of Pixabay/CSTRSK.*
When Sam Rivers (1923 – 2011) was growing up in Oklahoma, he often heard his father singing gospel music. The elder Rivers had been a member of the celebrated Fisk Jubilee Singers, who toured the world representing African American music before many people understood what that meant. Young Sam decided to do his singing through wind instruments instead. He became an inventive master of the saxophone, flute, and bass clarinet.

When the Navy stationed him in California in the 1940s, he started performing with the blues singer Jimmy Witherspoon. As soon as he was able, he made the trip to New England, where he enrolled in the Boston Conservatory in 1947. He transferred briefly to Boston University to study composition, but the call of live gigging was louder than anything academia had to offer.

His big break came after he befriended teenaged jazz drumming prodigy Tony Williams. Not only did Williams encourage Rivers to experiment in free jazz, which would become his signature style, but he also introduced Rivers to Miles Davis. Rivers toured with the great trumpeter in 1964, and although the professional relationship was short-lived (they made one album together, *Miles in Tokyo*), it put Rivers on the map and helped him land a contract with Blue Note Records.

For Rivers, bebop was merely a starting point. He excelled at the practice of “going outside,” or experimenting with harmonic language beyond standard charts. In their obituary for Rivers in 2011, the *New York Times* called him “inexhaustibly creative,” and his improvisations “garrulous and uninhibited.”

Enjoy these eight great tracks by Sam Rivers.

1. Track: “Euterpe”  
   Album: *Contours*
Euterpe is one of the Muses, the ancient Greek goddesses focused on the arts – in this case, music. Those who weren’t prepared for post-bop harmony might have doubted that she approved of this sound, but Rivers found plenty of top-notch players interested in testing out new sonic waters. Besides Rivers on soprano and tenor sax and flute, there’s Ron Carter on bass, Joe Chambers on drums, Freddie Hubbard on trumpet, and Herbie Hancock on piano.

_Contours_, which was recorded in 1965 but not released until over a year later because of Blue Note changing hands, contains only four tracks, two per side. “Euterpe” opens side B. After a sultry bass solo by Carter, Rivers comes in on flute at 6:16. It’s worth noting that this album is known for the exceptional quality of its sound, which was produced by the legendary Rudy Van Gelder.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbRiSBafapZI

2. Track: “Effusive Melange”
   - Album: _Dimensions & Extensions_
   - Label: Blue Note
   - Year: 1967

Another Van Gelder production, _Dimensions & Extensions_ has a larger personnel list and a timbral change: no piano. Instead, there’s trombone added to the mix, and Rivers shares the sax and flute duties with James Spaulding, who covers alto.

But the bigger difference between this and the previous track is the level of commitment to free jazz. Gone is the mellow safety, the cushioned sonic room. This is the Beat poetry of music: non-grammatical, uninterested in protecting its audience, visceral. It opens with Rivers running frantic on tenor sax.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2aJ4-hi0oU

3. Track: “Exultation”
   - Album: _Crystals_
   - Label: Impulse!
   - Year: 1974

While Rivers plays only tenor sax and flute on the _Crystals_ album, he surrounded himself with multi-instrumentalists such as Fred Kelly (soprano, baritone, piccolo), Joe Ferguson (tenor, alto, soprano, flute), and Paul Jeffrey (tenor, flute, clarinet, oboe, bassett horn, and bassoon), plus he bolstered the sound with three trombonists and three trumpeters.

As with his previous albums, Rivers wrote all the tracks, although the intensively improvisational quality of free jazz means that the tunes are collaborative works that exist only in their moment. “Exultation” opens with a mass of individual sounds crammed together like a downtown corner on a hot afternoon. What’s being exalted is the supremacy of dissonance. Once the tune relaxes into a melody of sorts, you’ll notice the inspiring “feathered” basslines (plucked with the right forefinger flattened to diffuse the pitch slightly) by Gregory Maker.
In the mid 1970s, an Italian jazz label called Horo was founded, and Rivers was among the first artists signed to it. He made two albums in a series he called Black Africa!, capturing performances from two different festivals. The *Black Africa! Villalago* album, a two-LP set, was recorded live at the Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy.

*Black Africa!* was itself a large-scale composition, and the tracks are simply movements named after the instrument featured in each lengthy section. The best way to describe the experience is as a free-jazz jam. Rivers is always the main player, on not only his usual saxes and flute, but also piano. He’s joined by Sidney Smart on drums and percussion and Joe Daley on tuba and euphonium, an instrument that goes a long way toward counterbalancing Rivers’ solo wandering in this opening “Soprano Section.” Smart’s snare technique is breathtaking.

Rivers’ flute is the fire on this “Torch,” met with the high-energy work of Dave Holland’s bass pizzicato and Thurman Baker’s percussion. Daley is once again holding down the low end on tuba. It’s a strikingly different sonic landscape to have flute as the only melodic instrument, not mired down by a dissonant brass chorus. There’s a transparency and buoyancy that makes listening a significantly less intense experience. It also gives one a greater appreciation of Rivers’ mastery of the flute.

As is common in the jazz world, the Sam Rivers quartet was not a set group of musicians, but whoever he could get for particular gigs and sessions. On *Lazuli*, the only studio album by this foursome, Rivers had Steve McCraven on drums, Rael Wesley Grant on electric bass, and Darryl Thompson on electric guitar. This is an unusual instrumental grouping, compared to Rivers’ earlier works. Rivers co-produced the album with Wim Wigt, founder of the Dutch label Timeless.

“Sprung” is the album’s final track, a piece that could be described as retro, looking back to more of
a classic bebop sound. You can imagine Charlie Parker playing on this track, which has a clearer structure and chordal motion that Rivers’ usual free jazz output.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKVHQgajE_I

7. Track: “Bubbles”
   Album: *Culmination*
   Label: RCA Victor/BMG France
   Year: 1998

In the late 1990s, Rivers assembled a big band called Sam Rivers’ Rivbea Allstar Orchestra. *Culmination* was one of their albums. It’s an interesting stylistic blend, combining the tight orchestration required for such a large group with Rivers’ devotion to dissonance.

“Bubbles” adds in elements of funk (Doug Mathews tugs the group along with his mighty bass groove). With each successive chorus, the ensemble gives a greater and greater illusion of musical freedom, although they’re obviously working from a fairly detailed score all the way through.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD1EoxTcPss

8. Track: “Nightfall”
   Album: *Firestorm*
   Label: Rivbea Sound
   Year: 2007

*Firestorm* was Rivers’ penultimate record, made on his own label with a group billed as the Sam Rivers Trio. Recorded at various live venues in New York City around the year 2000, the sonics are so vibrant that you can hear the musicians’ chairs squeaking.

“Nightfall” lets Rivers demonstrate his significant piano skills. The bowed double bass is played by Doug Mathews. It’s a very French-sounding composition, with sweeping lines leading to dramatic extremes requiring great physical power. Eventually Anthony Cole takes over the keyboard and Rivers comes back in on flute and vocals that are shouted, even screamed.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dskif3ErGAk

*Header image courtesy of Wikipedia/Tom Marcello, cropped to fit format.*
Three Winners, and an Interestingly Odd Remake of a Classic

TO BE DETERMINED

Written by Tom Gibbs
John Coltrane - Giant Steps (60th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition - 2020 Remaster)

Giant Steps was recorded in May of 1959, right on the heels of Coltrane’s exit from Miles Davis’ first great quintet. Miles had his manager arrange for Coltrane to get a recording contract with Atlantic Records for a princely retainer sum of $7,000 annually (over $60k in current dollars adjusted for inflation!). Coltrane was unhappy with the initial recordings for Giant Steps, and eventually changed sidemen, bringing in Tommy Flanagan on piano, Paul Chambers on bass, and Art Taylor on drums. Only one song, “Naima,” featured a different cast; Coltrane was again unhappy with the results. In December he called on some of his Miles Davis’ Quintet cohorts to fill in; the resulting take that was used for the original release featured pianist Wynton Kelly and Jimmy Cobb on drums.

Giant Steps was well received by the public and critics alike, and was a commercial success, being rewarded with a gold record for sales in excess of 500,000 units. The Penguin Guide to Jazz has called Giant Steps “John Coltrane’s first genuinely iconic record,” and Rolling Stone ranked it no. 102 on their list of 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. Coltrane’s impressive contributions to the Miles Davis Quintet’s five Prestige label albums helped make Miles Davis a household name in the fifties, and Giant Steps helped him reach an equivalent level of success as a leader of his own group at the beginning of the next decade. Considering the challenging nature of some of the music, it’s also an extremely accessible album, helping a whole new generation of fans embrace jazz for the first time.
I’ve owned this album in multiple formats; stereo LP, mono LP, cassette tapes, multiple CD incarnations (including initial and remastered releases), and as part of LP/CD compilation collections. This one fact has remained pretty much true throughout several decades of record collecting: while Giant Steps is one of jazz’s most seminal albums, and a foundation recording for any serious jazz collection, the recorded sound has been consistently less than stellar. That is, until now; this new 60th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition is undoubtedly the finest sounding version of this album I’ve ever encountered!

While any information for this set I’ve been able to research has left me without answers, I’d swear this set has been remixed as well as remastered. Yes, John Coltrane’s sax is still hard left on all the tunes, but the entire album has a spaciousness and vitality that’s been seriously lacking on previous versions — and there’s a much greater sense of center-fill than on any prior versions I own. The level of realism is simply off-the-charts great — this is a Giant Steps for the ages. The album is being reissued as both double CDs, or two 180-gram LP sets, and they both include multiple takes, false starts, and bonus tracks not on previous reissues. And the LP sets will also include a large format booklet with a new essay and lots of photos, along with a 7-inch vinyl single with additional outtakes. I did all my listening through Qobuz’s excellent 24/96 digital stream, but this experience really got the old juices flowing — I’m ordering the LP! Very highly recommended!

Rhino/Atlantic Records, 2 CD/2 LP (download/streaming [24/96] from Qobuz, Tidal, Amazon Music, Google Play Music, Spotify, YouTube, Apple Music, Pandora, Deezer, TuneIn)
Cat Stevens/Yusuf - *Tea For The Tillerman*

Cat Stevens, or Yusuf Islam as he’s currently known, is something of a polarizing figure in the music world: on the one hand, he’s written albums full of graceful, beautiful songs that captivated a whole generation. On the other hand, following his 1978 embrace of the Islamic faith, some of his public remarks have been perceived as incendiary. Certain British media outlets publicly declared him a supporter of terrorism, especially in the light of remarks he made in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the US. I personally haven’t really fully studied the situation; I regard Cat Stevens very much the way I regard a lot of musicians. I think they often speak without completely thinking about what they’re saying, and they often say things that are either completely misconstrued by the public, or are taken out of context. Anyway, while some of his albums are essentially “desert island” discs for me, when he stopped performing and recording, I pretty much lost interest.

Of his two albums that have received the most acclaim, 1970’s *Tea For The Tillerman* and 1971’s *Teaser and the Firecat* are the pair that most frequently get mentioned as his very best work. And are definitely among his most played records in my collection. There are extenuating circumstances; I was in love with a new transfer student in my sophomore year of high school — her name was Lesa (different spelling, I know!). She seemed kind of despondent after having to move from the big city (Atlanta) into the middle of nowhere. I played both the songs “Sad Lisa” and “How Can I Tell You (That I Love You)” countless times, trying to figure out how to break free of the catatonic state I
seemed to fall into whenever she came near. We did have a moment years later, but I guess it just wasn’t meant to be! Anyway, the subject of this new release is Cat Stevens’ (Yusuf’s) new take on Tea For The Tillerman, and it’s now entitled Tea For The Tillerman². Clever use of the superscript, but is a retake on a classic really necessary?

Most mornings, while I’m having coffee and catching up on the day’s headlines, there’s a nice little feature on the Mozilla Firefox browser I use called Pocket, and it’s a page that’s populated with interesting and unusual stories that regularly resonate with me. Recently, I came across a story that featured a writer for a northeastern newspaper who had a particular lifelong fascination with Cat Stevens. And who, like me, had basically lost touch when Stevens dropped off the face of the music world decades ago. Suddenly, it’s the 2000s, and Cat Stevens (Yusuf) is touring again — this guy got tickets, even though it had been decades since he’d last seen him live, and really didn’t know what to expect, at all. Shockingly, Cat Stevens was as charmingly entertaining as he’d found him all those years ago. A little grayer, and a touch more worse for the wear, but the essence of the music and the songs came through with the same intensity as so many years before, he was happy to announce. Reading that article was probably the first time I had actually tried to visualize Cat Stevens as a performer, other than through replay of his classic songs, in literally decades.

https://youtu.be/_jI0p6NHhYA

So that makes Tea For The Tillerman², in actuality, and for me at least, not such a stretch after all. I’ve listened to the Qobuz CD-quality stream of this record several times, and my takeaway is that the experience is probably not at all dissimilar to attending a current-day Cat Stevens concert. There are some bizarre embellishments to a couple of the songs; for example, “Wild World” is played at an unusually quick tempo, with a jazzy sort of accompaniment. Yusuf’s explanation is that he owns one of those electric keyboards that has midi-synthesized “genres” available; he started playing one named “Ragtime,” and started singing the words to “Wild World” to the oddly enjoyable (to him, at least) background. A crazy story, I know, but apparently how the song has evolved to its current state of existence. I really (despite my obvious baggage) missed the fact that songs like “Sad Lisa” are now no longer mostly acoustic-based; the astonishingly good grand piano of the original is now replaced by an electric keyboard of some sort. And the worse for the wear part of the story mostly applies to Yusuf’s voice, which isn’t as pristine as it once was — he’s in his seventies, after all — so I guess you can forgive the guy for suffering from a few voice cracks here and there.

Overall, this is a YMMV album — if you’re a huge fan, it’s a must listen. Otherwise, it probably won’t add much to the existing catalog for the majority of listeners.

UMC (Universal Music Catalog), CD/LP (download/streaming [16/44.1] from Qobuz, Tidal, Amazon, Google Play Music, Pandora, Deezer, Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube, TuneIn)
In the late 1960s, a Palo Alto High School (California) student named Danny Scher decided he was on a quest to bring some culture — and perhaps racial unity — to the mostly white southern suburb of San Francisco. The Vietnam war was in full swing, and both Bobby Kennedy and MLK had been assassinated, sparking some racial tensions with nearby East Palo Alto, which was mostly Black. He began to convince a variety of jazz acts to perform at the high school auditorium, among them vibraphonist Cal Tjader, singer Jon Hendricks, and pianist Vince Guaraldi. Buoyed by his string of successes, Danny set his bar a bit higher, and started plying the management team of his idol, Thelonious Monk, with requests to get his quartet to play there as well. At the time, the late sixties were seen as a somewhat less than productive period for Monk, and the record-buying public hadn’t been particularly kind to the string of resulting albums, classics like *Monk’s Dream*, *It’s Monk’s Time*, *Straight, No Chaser*, and *Underground*. Monk was in debt to the record company, and was hitting the road to raise some cash; he was on the verge of settling into an upcoming three-week engagement at San Francisco’s legendary Jazz Workshop. While at first, he didn’t take Danny Scher’s offer seriously, he soon decided what the heck, and agreed to play the high school date — he needed the dough.

The record company wasn’t involved in any way, and there were no plans to record the live performance. On the day of the show, Danny’s older brother Les (who had just gotten his driver’s
license!) drove to San Francisco to pick up Monk and his band, and chauffeured them to the high school auditorium. The high school’s janitor approached Danny, and asked if he could record the concert; if so, he was a piano tuner on the side, and would tune Monk’s piano for him in exchange. Danny agreed, and a few mikes and the tape machine were set up; they were able to capture all 47 minutes of the show on tape. The show went on as planned; Monk and his band were in excellent form, and the sell-out crowd left happy. Danny Scher eventually went to college, and ended up getting a job with big-time promoter Bill Graham for many years, but the live Monk tape basically languished in the attic of the Scher family home for almost fifty years. Until he stumbled across it a year or so ago, and contacted T.S. Monk, Thelonius Monk’s son; after being restored and remastered, the concert tape is being widely heard for the first time ever.

History has been a bit more kind to the memory of Monk’s mid-to-late sixties quartet; it’s now regarded as one of his best, and the resultant albums are all considered undeniable classics. This new release, *Palo Alto*, captures Monk’s band featuring saxophonist Charlie Rouse, bassist Larry Gales, and drummer Ben Riley in top form. Monk’s health was declining, and the Palo Alto concert, along with the Jazz Workshop dates, would be among this quartet’s last performances together. This amateur tape — virtually unheard for almost fifty years — captures the quartet at the apex of their powers, and for one of the last times, in shockingly good restored sound.

https://youtu.be/tr1P6jWD2cU

The song selection is no surprise here; it’s mostly chestnuts from throughout Monk’s career, and the concert opens with a great rendition of “Ruby My Dear,” followed by a thirteen-minute blowout of the classic “Well You Needn’t,” which has a pretty great Ben Riley drum solo in the middle. The following tune, “Don’t Blame Me,” also features some nifty stick work by Riley. He is definitely one of the underrated jazz drummers of that era, or any, for that matter. Another really great fourteen-minute version of the classic “Blue Monk” follows; and the concert begins to wind down with Monk’s perennial set-closer, “Epistrophy.” Monk comes back out for a surprise solo version of the Rudy Vallee song “I Love You Sweetheart of all My Dreams.” And this one, as they say, was in the books.

The live sound is a bit variable in a few places (duh, it was recorded by the school janitor!); yeah, the highs (especially Charlie Rouse’s tenor) are a bit screechy, but switching over to a tube amp helped ameliorate that to a certain extent. Tubes definitely improved its listenability; but in terms of 1960s vintage live jazz recordings, it’s still shockingly good, and I’ve heard much worse from the likes of Miles and Coltrane. The 24-bit stream from Qobuz is great, and *Palo Alto* is very highly recommended!

Impulse! Records/Legacy Recordings, CD/LP (download/streaming [24/44.1] from Qobuz, Tidal, Amazon, Google Play Music, Deezer, Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube, TuneIn)
Gillian Welch was a California-born daughter to show-biz industry parents who indulged their daughter, sending her east to fulfill her desire to get into the music industry by getting an education at the Berklee College of Music. She immersed herself in songcraft while there, and when she and partner David Rawlings emerged in the mid-nineties with their debut disc, *Revival*, she was soon the queen of the alt-country/Americana genres. She sang songs of Appalachia and hill country folk that totally belied her SoCal upbringing, and captured the attention of everyone from LA to Austin, Nashville, and beyond.

Of course, mistakes would be made along the way, and in her haste to get recorded, she signed an early publishing contract (for songwriting only) — not at all unusual in the music industry. This one was for nine years, and unless she fulfilled a numerical obligation (she needed to provide the publisher with an additional 48 songs), she’d be bound for an additional period of time. With their first two albums beginning to make a big difference in how she and David perceived themselves as artists, she decided that within six months (the contract renewal date at the beginning of 2002), she’d provide the necessary songs. She and Rawlings pored over notebook sketches of a hundred or more songs, and over a single weekend, they recorded demo tapes for all 48 songs needed to cancel the contract!
The tapes languished in boxes in their Nashville home for almost two decades; during the aftermath of the strong tornados that ravaged parts of Nashville in March of 2020, they stumbled upon the tapes again. And in the ongoing pandemic, have revisited them and released them in a new “Boots” series; this album, *Boots No. 2 - The Lost Songs*, is the second of these excellent releases. For fans of Gillian Welch (the duo as they are known, not just Gillian herself), it’s a literal treasure trove of previously unreleased material — none of these songs has seen the light of day. The recordings mostly consist of simply the guitars and voices of Welch and Rawlings, with an occasional harp solo thrown in for good measure here and there. That said, the recording quality is superb for what are essentially home-studio demos, where they basically just set up a recorder, rolled tape, and played. The album is a remarkable document, and a stunning companion to their already impressive catalog of work.

https://youtu.be/JPBen9Ur2fs

The songs range from the straight fingerpicking of “Hundred Miles” to the more traditional folk of songs like “Rambling Blade,” to waltz-time classic country like “I Only Cry When You Go.” “Fair September” takes the soundtrack down a more folkishly ghostly turn, and “Wella Hella” has Gillian telling you that she “can really shake it” — if need be! The 24-bit Qobuz tracks possess a warmth and vitality that totally belies their nearly two-decade-old origins. The album only clocks in at a tad over 41 minutes, but listening to fifteen previously unreleased tracks of classic, mid-period Gillian Welch is literally miraculous. For true fans, and new converts alike, this is essential listening. Very highly recommended!

Acony Records, CD/LP (download/streaming [24/44.1] from Qobuz, Tidal, Amazon, Google Play Music, Deezer, Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube)
Unlike other scientific fields that are related to physics, the products that result from audio engineering can often be said to have an almost magical component that makes the fusion of acoustic principles and electronics art as well as science. The Audio Engineering Society (AES) has been a driving force in professional audio and its members offer a panoply of experiences and knowledge. As a result, AES has had to serve in many capacities, and continues to evolve.

The AES Show Fall 2020 will, like so many trade shows, take place virtually this year, from October 4 – 31. John Seetoo took the opportunity to talk with Gary Gottlieb, AES Eastern Region Vice President, and Co-Chair, AES Historical Committee and Conference Policy Committee. Gottlieb was also was one of the judges in the Student Recording Competition at the 132nd AES Convention in Budapest.

John Seetoo: From a historical perspective, in what ways has AES had to be a referee in settling disputes between factions? The disputes may have been over technical standards, practices, legal requirements or anything else.

Gary Gottlieb: Audio engineering bridges the gulf between the aesthetic and the technical, and while many observers suppose these two are in conflict, I actually believe they move in harmony.
AES serves those whose leanings are technical as well as those of us who lean towards the aesthetic aspects of audio. We started as a science-based organization and expanded over the years to embrace our artistic side. While we remain dedicated to the science underlying our art, we acknowledge that technology drives art as well as art driving technology. These philosophies work together to help all of us, and substantial conflict is rare. Where there is conflict, AES provides a forum for resolution.

**JS:** In a related question, in what ways has AES had to act as a watchdog?

**GG:** One of AES’s core functions is the development of standards. In that context we are always the industry watchdog as we set workflow-enhancing standards for equipment interconnection and best practices that benefit practitioners throughout our industry. Beyond establishing standards it is not AES’s responsibility to act as a watchdog, the one exception being that we are a civil, convivial group, and when hate speech of any type erupts, we deal with it effectively and efficiently. In conjunction with our Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and on social media, AES has had a strong voice in addressing human rights issues and supporting equality throughout all communities.

**JS:** In what ways has AES needed to adapt to new technological breakthroughs? Please cite the instances when AES was a leader and when it was a laggard, and how AES rectified its slow reaction in these instances.

**GG:** Since so many of these breakthroughs have involved AES members, we are typically ahead of the curve. We are usually aware of new technological developments and we frequently have the chance to preview and influence early prototypes of upcoming technologies at our conventions and conferences. When it comes to the tech side of our industry I cannot think of a time when we lagged behind.

**JS:** In the early days of AES, were engineers who specialized in music recording viewed as rivals to engineers who specialized in film sound recording and to those in broadcasting and in live event sound reinforcement? From my experience during the 1980s, music engineers, film sound engineers and live venue engineers all had a tendency to stay in their respective fields with little crossover.

**GG:** Today’s AES has successfully brought audio professionals with diverse specialties together under a big tent.

**JS:** Given the unique skill sets involved in each different sector, what were the opinions that each held towards the others in the past?

**GG:** There were some groups of audio professionals who were included into the organization more slowly than others, although I do not believe this was intentional or based on any preconceived differences between groups. When I joined AES in the 1980s I had friends who ran sound in the theatre district. They had never heard of AES, and now they are members. It was because of isolation, not animosity. Over the years, many groups beyond music recording and production, including those involved in sound reinforcement, remote recording, broadcast, home studios, forensics, archiving, preservation, and education have all come together to share our skills and celebrate both our commonalities and our differences.

**JS:** Was there a perceived pecking order that may have stemmed from industry pay scales, the difficulty of working in one field versus another, or other factors?
GG: I have never been aware of a pecking order based on pay scale. Certainly, within any given discipline there are the stars and there are the grinders. I defer to my friend with 22 Grammys. I do not sense any jealousy or other hierarchical issues within groups, although I am certainly sympathetic to how tired my boom operator friend’s arms must get.

JS: At what point did the skill sets merge and producers expected engineers to provide an overlap of different job sector requirements that still met professional standards?

GG: This is an interesting question. I have given talks on the evolving and merging roles of producers and engineers. In the 1980s the two were more distinct, with the producer responsible for money and artistic control and the engineer responsible for all technical elements, typically with artistic influence. Due to the democratization of technology in the 1990s when every producer bought software and learned how to be an engineer, engineers also stretched to absorb more of the producer’s roles. As far as meeting professional standards, AES strives to educate all parties to ensure that we can all work on any aspect of the production. Over the past few decades, audio pros have also needed to develop video and internet media distribution skills to better serve their clients.

JS: With the resurgence in vinyl, the popularity of streaming, and the entrenchment and continued support for compact discs, SACD, analog tape, downloads and other formats, what are the current challenges faced by AES in terms of the fact that listeners are enjoying a wide variety of media?

GG: Technology has always been a moving target, and it always will be. Luckily, AES members include those who are creating innovation, whether it is for emerging technologies or in better ways to archive and reproduce older formats. These challenges are embraced by our members. By providing a platform for the incubation of new technologies, by shaping it through work on establishing technical standards and by providing education, AES fuels our membership’s passions.

JS: Are equipment manufacturers cooperating in adhering to such specs or have there been maverick inventors that have gone “off the reservation” in their pursuit of idealized sound quality?

GG: There will always be those among us, especially in the audio community, who strive to create a more perfect piece of equipment or a quieter and more stable medium for recording. I revel in this drive for improvement. I am unaware of anyone I would regard as a renegade. Professional audio manufacturers are fundamentally science-based, with room for accommodating subjective preferences on the creative side.

JS: Has the lower sound quality of compressed audio such as mp3 versus CD, for example, created a resurgence of interest in older technology like tube amps, as well as newer innovations, such as Class D amps (which allow for drastically reduced size and ease of portability) and high-resolution audio?

GG: There has always been a variety of audio formats and a variety of quality levels. When I was younger, we had cassettes as a portable option. They did not sound as good as the albums we listened to at home. To an audiophile, the question runs deeper than mp3 vs. CD, since CDs are only 16-bit/44.1kHz resolution, which is far from their ideal. The battle between convenience and quality is a consumer choice.

AES is a proud proponent of quality audio. Our job is to provide everything in every format with the best possible quality within the parameters of that particular format. A lot of older technology has always been lauded and highly regarded; however, that is only one small and often misleading part
of a much larger discussion.

**JS:** How do you see the resultant domino effect of the ubiquity of digital technology in creating an explosion of recordings made in home studios, and what changes do you find that AES members have made to accommodate this trend?

**GG:** I mentioned the democratization of the recording process. In other words, home studios are now affordable for many people who were previously frightened off by the million-dollar price tag of a major studio. On the one hand, a talented engineer can create a Grammy winner at home. On the other hand, those of us who have trained for years can be undersold by kids with computers in their bedrooms. I love the sheer amount of art that is being created as a result of this situation, although we do need to continue to work hard to ensure that quality remains a primary consideration. The AES and our members recognized the validity of this community of home recordists years ago, and we have embraced them as audio professionals and offer education tailored to their needs.

**JS:** What do you see as trends in headphones and speaker design?

**GG:** I find headphone and speaker design to go in two distinct directions. While I will not mention any particular manufacturers, some have worked hard to continue to improve technology and provide a rewarding experience to the listener, while others have focused on offering bragging rights for the listener rather than quality. Most professionals want flat, transparent reproduction, while consumer gear is often designed for a sonic signature that would mislead a mix engineer. While there is a staggering number of manufacturers and models and competition is fierce, quality is generally up.

**JS:** Publications and education are important priorities for AES. What are some highlights from AES’s publications and seminars? Also, which AES programs do you think are among the most successful, and why?

**GG:** There have been so many landmark events at AES conventions that it is daunting to try and isolate a few. Every year there is something groundbreaking: new technologies, new methodologies, or different views of our industry’s history, spanning the introduction of vinyl formats to the compact disc to mp3 to digital audio networking. As far as the most successful endeavors of AES, I am partial to those which connect the past to the future. As such, I hold both the works of the Education Committee and the Historical Committee in the highest regard. The comprehensive technical program at our conventions amazingly just keeps getting better, letting attendees learn from the best minds in the industry, from those driving innovation across all audio specialties. Recent AES events that have addressed topics like audio for augmented and virtual reality, audio applications of machine learning, headphones and automotive audio. The *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society* is the world’s leading publication for the presentation of the latest audio research. We’re pushing 20,000 articles in our e-library, representing the sum total of audio knowledge. We’ve also just launched the revamped AES Live: Videos archive with a modern user interface and more content. Those publications and AES Live are fully available to all of our members as a benefit of membership.

**JS:** In the past, there was a time when the separate camps of audiophiles and audio engineers held each other in disdain. The gaps between the two on preferences in sound quality, knowledge of acoustic physics, and other topics have closed in several ways, but the division still seems to exist on some fronts. What is your take on this topic, and what do you think the role of AES has been in its
GG: Audiophiles and audio professionals are two different groups. Audiophiles are discerning listeners who are more adept at dissecting what they hear. Audio professionals are practitioners. I have never experienced disdain from or felt disdain towards audiophiles. I appreciate all consumers, since without them my industry would not exist. If there are gaps beyond the obvious ones, they certainly are closing as information about audio becomes easier to obtain.

Information about Gary Gottlieb can be found here: http://www.aes.org/aes/garygottlieb

Header image: a recent Audio Engineering Society convention. All images courtesy of AES.
Everyone wants to be cool. But what the heck is cool? “What is Hip?” Tower of Power asked us. “Tell me tell me, if you think ya know.” See, even they couldn’t figure it out.

Scientists may never be able to define the state of being cool. To paraphrase Sir Isaac Newton, “If you have to ask, you’ll never know.” But we do know quite a bit about the circumstances that can lead to cool. I’m going to take you through two of my experiences to explain how to achieve cool – and why cool can’t be held for long.

Please note that I’m not speaking here of being cool because you made a deal with the devil at a crossroads or lit your guitar on fire at Woodstock or invented recorded music. This is not about Humphrey Bogart telling Dooley Wilson to play it. Let’s keep this on the level of the rest of us mortals.

**Case Study 01: Motion in the Ocean**

Return with me now to Boston in the summer of 1978 (in my memory, “youth” means “summer”) and a club on Commonwealth Avenue called the Paradise. My age: younger than the kids I work with now. The occasion: A show featuring a new band, the B-52’s.

At that show, in the middle of “Rock Lobster,” when the B-52’s sang, “Everybody had matching towels,” I was one of the people in that little club waving matching towels. Mine were white with a red checked pattern, though I might be remembering the kitchen towels my Mom had at the time. I probably bought them that morning at Goodwill.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz65vonktMA

Of course, I hadn’t considered what I was going to do with them after I waved them. I’ll bet no one else thought of this, either. The towels ended up kicked into the corners. I hope the club donated them all to Goodwill the next day.
At that moment I had achieved all of the following:

1. I knew about a great band before they became popular.
2. I knew the lyrics to their best song and, as with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, I knew what I had to do while the lyrics were being sung.
3. I executed flawlessly.

And yet I wasn’t completely cool. The missing element: I was alone. I had gone with some people from work, but they weren’t my best friends or my romantic partners or potential romantic partners. I had no special person to experience my coolarity with me. Close, but no crustacean.

The B-52’s are still touring today. People bring their grandchildren.

**Case Study 02: Beat This**

It’s 1979, we’re in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and my girlfriend and I, along with my best friend at the time and his girlfriend, went to see the Beat, a power-pop quartet from LA. The venue was a boxy brick space near the Central station on the Red Line that was called the Box or the Square Brick Thing. Someone from Cambridge who was there in 1978 will have to help me out here.

The Beat came on late, after the local favorites we had originally come to see. They were raw, vulnerable, biting, aggressive, love-sick, and swaggering. They lit each song off the last one like a chain smoker. We were transformed. I felt as if we had discovered them, the four of us, and that, like Jon Landau on first hearing Bruce Springsteen, we had discovered the future of rock and roll.

At the end of the show, I walked out of the Square Brick Thing with my ears ringing and the cold air hitting my flushed skin and feeling as if I’d been to the moon and back. I’d like to report that my girlfriend and I had sex in a car in the parking lot (in someone else’s car). We didn’t, but I can report that this show was so good, she actually considered it.

Unlike the previous case study, this time, I was cool. I was in the right place with the right people and I had witnessed a performance so transcendent that the Beat were vaporized while reentering Earth’s atmosphere.

The Beat were not the future of rock and roll. These days they don’t even exist on oldies radio. But the energy pulse they generated that night continues to spread outward. In two million years it will reach the Andromeda galaxy. That will be cool.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUyvYtSelqU

**Passport to Cool: Revoked**

When I was younger, I was ahead of the musical curve. Now I am older, and stuck on a musical off-ramp. Fortunately, young people don’t care. If, in talking with my young co-workers, I demonstrate that I know the difference between Oasis and Blur or Mos Def and Mos Eisley, my young co-workers will think I’m adorable. And if I stumble while trying to demonstrate this, they will think I’m adorable.

If I had danced with Rio on the sand in 1982 or jammed with Sheila E. in 1984, that would’ve been cool. For a while. Today, young people might not know what I’m talking about. At a family dinner I attended in 2010, a fight broke out over Sting that ended only when my 12-year-old niece asked,
“Who is Sting?”

Tower of Power warned us: “What is hip today/might become passé.”

(Goodbye to Tower of Power’s Rocco Prestia, who left us on Sept. 29, 2020. Your bass playing on “What is Hip?” will never become passé.)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pfim3SKTNkw
“That voice!”

I had just posted the newly released video of “La Sitiera” from The Mavericks’ new album *En Español* on one of the forums I visited that day, and this was the reply that stood out to me.
That has stuck in my head ever since. Not because it was any new revelation to me, but that even a music lover not familiar with The Mavericks and especially the soaring tenor voice of Raul Malo immediately recognized one of the strengths of the band, which celebrates its 31st anniversary with its latest album, En Español.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prPn7DRi69w

As the title promises, En Español is an album recorded entirely in Spanish. Such an album seems unlikely from what started as a Miami-based country band that racked up a string of top 40 country hits, beginning with the hit record “What A Crying Shame” and culminating in perhaps their most popular song: “All You Ever Do Is Bring Me Down,” which features Tejano legend Flaco Jimenez guesting on accordion. Starting with their following album Trampoline, the Mavs would bump up the Latin music influences with each new release, demonstrating how the flexibility of the band and Raul Malo’s musical vision refused to keep them pigeonholed in the narrow confines of Nashville’s predominantly country music leanings.

After a run of albums, the band went on hiatus (with a brief regrouping in 2003). Malo released a series of solo records that further stretched his musical interests, and took part in other projects such as Los Super Seven. Upon regrouping in the early 2010s, The Mavericks made up for lost time with the In Time album, a reintroduction to the band that showed them at the top of their game. They would then release a string of themed albums that combined and expanded upon their wide-ranging interests. Mono was a pop music recording mixed and mastered in monaural. Brand New Day touched on a few topical subjects such as equality (the title track), the joys of marijuana (the delightful Tejano-flavored “Rolling Along”), and a Cuban-influenced jab at current events with “Easy
as It Seems.” *Hey! Merry Christmas* serves up some wonderful new holiday tracks along with two covers of familiar tunes.

Their 2019 album, *Play the Hits*, gathers up cleverly arranged cover tunes that influenced the band throughout their career. Changing things up and avoiding familiar rehashes of these familiar songs, Malo and company turn Bruce Springsteen’s “Hungry Heart” into a lazy horn-driven shuffle with some Duane Eddy guitar seasoning, add a Tejano flavor to the Patty Loveless hit “Blame It on Your Heart,” and update the old Dale and Grace chestnut “I’m Leaving It Up to You.” In addition to a reverent cover of the Marvin Gaye and Mary Wells tune “Once Upon A Time” as a duet with Martina McBride, Raul brings the house down with his heart-on-the-sleeve rendition of Freddie Fender’s “Before the Next Teardrop Falls,” accompanied only by guitar and accordion.

That same restless musical spirit and wide variety of song choices manifests itself with this latest album, *En Español*. According to Malo, this is an album he has wanted to make with The Mavericks for quite some time. Granted, his voice is so front and center on this album that you might mistake it for one of his solo recordings. Yet you could not ask for any better band behind him than The Mavericks, and he envisioned this album with the band in mind. Not only is there the familiarity of their trademark sound behind him, the band members are flexible and open-minded enough that they are the perfect ensemble to back el maestro on this outstanding set.

The idea for an all-Spanish album was in the works for years, but the seeds began to grow in earnest when Malo, a first generation Cuban-American whose parents left Cuba around 1960, was the subject of the PBS production “Havana Time Machine,” where he visits Cuba for the first time. He performs with local musicians, meets the members of the Cuban rock band Sweet Lizzy Project (who he would later assist in bringing to the US and mentor), and performs with The Mavericks. Following that, the idea blossomed and grew into what became this album.
Not content to make this an all-Mariachi, all-Salsa, all-Cuban or all-Tejano album, Malo manages to touch on many varieties of Latin American and Cuban music throughout the album. The stunning cinematic opening track sets the tone for the set, the grand arrangement a far cry from the version waxed by Cuban bandleader and singer Abelardo Barroso decades ago. Likewise, the album’s playful closer, “Me Voy a Pinar del Rio,” dates back to a 1956 recording by Cuban singer Celia Cruz with the group Sonora Matancera.

Two other tunes I’ve known for most of my life are “Sabor a Mí” and “Cuando Me Enamoro.” The former, composed by Mexican singer and composer Alvaro Carrillo, was originally popularized by Trio Los Panchos with Eydie Gormé, with Mexican singer Luis Miguel making a hit out of it again in 1997. The latter was originally written in Italian (as “Quando M’Innamoro”) and sung by Italian singer Anna Identici as well as the American vocal group The Sandpipers (where I first heard it), but has been covered in many languages over the years; the most popular English rendering is likely Engelbert Humperdinck’s “A Man Without Love.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UhwR0rREIM

Somewhat newer, “Me Olvide de Vivir” is a tune that touches closer to the heart – originally sung by Julio Iglesias, the tune was a favorite of Malo’s grandfather, and was played often around the household. It is another of those freely-flowing tunes that has a cinematic feel with Raul’s soaring tenor and a touch of strings.

Among these and other classic tunes, Malo co-composed five new tunes with collaborator Alejandro Menendez Vega who assisted with the Spanish lyrics, making use of an old Argentinian rhyming
dictionary to help with the verses. One of the new songs, “Suspiro Azul,” was also co-composed with Lisset Diaz and Miguel Comas of Sweet Lizzy Project. These new tunes fit the rest of the album perfectly, thanks to the touches the band applies to these tracks. The originals “Poder Vivir” and “Recuerdos” were the first two single releases from the album; the latter adds a nod to Mongo Santamaria’s “Sofrito” in its coda.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9Vybu_9oNM

One great thing about this album is that even if you don’t know a single word of Spanish, the album is welcoming and listenable. The band members’ considerable talent and familiarity with each other make the presentation a very cohesive whole - their chameleon-like ability to adapt to any of the musical styles presented here, yet still sound only like The Mavericks, is commendable. Co-founding member Paul Deakin still keeps up a reliable backbone on the drum kit, and longtime keyboardist Jerry Dale McFadden provides supple keyboard lines throughout. Guitarist Eddie Perez, who joined circa 2003, doesn’t get a chance to shred here, but becomes an essential supporting musician in the fabric that the band provides behind Malo’s vocals. Kudos to the rest of the Mavericks band for their contributions as well!

Don’t let a simple thing like a language barrier get in the way of enjoying this excellent album. Beautifully performed and executed, it is one of this year’s best albums. Apparently, the music-buying public agrees – it debuted at number one on the Billboard Latin Pop chart. Not a bad accomplishment for a band that started playing country music over three decades ago in Miami!

The album is available in CD and download versions (you can get the hi-res version from Qobuz), and on two 2-LP variations - a standard black, or a marbled blue vinyl version available only from local record stores. The limited edition signed version pictured here, pressed on blue/pink/black splatter vinyl, sold out quickly. The album’s packaging includes English translations of the lyrics.
A Brief Public Service Message:

The Mavericks and Raul Malo have been active on social media, promoting themselves and the band as often as possible. Malo has even released a long-running series of “Quarantunes” ranging from solo pieces recorded in his Nashville home to studio productions featuring The Mavericks. Via Nugs.TV, they have so far hosted two one-hour video on demand presentations. With all this and the new album, they have kept interest up and, despite these challenging times, were still able to produce an album for us.

Unfortunately, they cannot tour for *En Español* this year - any “live” performances are being done in-studio without an audience. The lack of touring this year has pinched The Mavericks and every other band and artist out there who depends on touring. Even more disturbing is that the support staff - the roadies and truck drivers, the tour managers and engineers, instrument technicians and personal assistants - have had no work at all during this pandemic. Being such a specialized field, these are not jobs that are easily replaced by changing employers.

By supporting your favorite bands and artists during these difficult times, you can help ensure that when they return to the road, they will be able to rebound that much faster when they are able to bring their music to your towns. What really helps is if you buy directly from their own sites - the profits from the sale go directly to the band. It might cost a few dollars more, but it’s well worth it, don’t you think?
Images courtesy of The Mavericks' management.
Social Distancing

PARTING SHOT

Taken by James Schrimpf

Inside Lee's Liquor Lounge, Minneapolis, Minnesota, now closed.