Welcome to *Copper* #41!

The title isn't to announce a James Taylor retrospective---sorry to crush your hopes---but is just what I see in today's weather reports. The Pacific Northwest, where I'm bound for a long-delayed
vacation, is up in flames, along with many other parts of the tinder-dry US. Meanwhile, back in my former home of Florida...they've already had nearly two feet of rain, and Hurricane Irma is not even close to the state yet.

Stay safe, everyone.

I'm really pleased and excited to have Jason Victor Serinus back with us, with the first part of an intensive introduction to art song. Jason brings tremendous knowledge of the field, and provides plenty of recorded examples to listen to, and in the case of videos, watch. There are many stunning performances here, and I hope you enjoy this extraordinary resource. We'll have Part 2 in Copper #42.

Dan Schwartz is again in the lead-off spot with the second in his series of articles on encounters—this one, with Phil Lesh and crew; Seth Godin tells us how control is overrated; Richard Murison hears a symphony; Duncan Taylor takes us to Take 1; Roy Hall tells about a close encounter of the art kind; Anne E. Johnson introduces indie artist Anohni; and I worry about audio shows (AGAIN, Leebs??), and conclude my look at Bang & Olufsen.

Industry News tells of the sale of audiophile favorite, Conrad-Johnson; Gautam Raja is back with an amazing story that I think you'll really enjoy, all about Carnatic music, overlooked heritage, and the universal appeal of rock music; and Jim Smith takes another warped look at LPs. That Jim, always stirring things up....

We wrap up Copper #41 with another classic cartoon from Charles Rodrigues, and a beautiful Parting Shot from Vasilis Lakakis. Something Old/ Something New and Woody Woodward will both be back in the next issue.

Until then—enjoy!

Cheers, Leebs.
I wasn’t much of a Grateful Dead fan at first.

A neighbor said I should come to his house to hear *Workingman’s Dead*, and I thought it was OK. The next year, 1971, when *Grateful Dead* came out, I liked that quite a bit more (I particularly dug the rhythm guitar’s sound and approach).

The Dead avoided Philly, it was said, over some problem with the Electric Factory, which promoted all the shows. Whatever the truth of it, the band booked into our local hockey rink, the Spectrum (“home” of the Philadelphia Flyers), on September 21st of 1972.

They put out *Europe ’72* right around that time. I think I went to the show first, and then got the live, 3-LP set. Now I was convinced. I still am --- the album is a perfect set of mostly new songs in the style for which they’d become known, mostly by Garcia and Hunter, including a lot of their group improvisations, and, I was later to learn, studio-tracked vocals[1].

It wasn’t unusual to see bands with custom equipment back then, since a number of industries were just being formed. But the Dead clearly had something else going on; somebody somewhere was obviously masterminding their approach, and having now seen Hot Tuna 2 or 3 times, it was obvious that it was probably the same people. For one thing, their instruments were well beyond anything you would find in my Guild, Gibson or Fender catalogs, and their speaker cabinets all had tie-dyed grilles on them, the same thing I had noticed at Hot Tuna shows. (Add that to the amazing
instrument that Jack Casady had started to play, and well... something was clearly afoot in San Francisco!

Shortly after this, my father died. I was 15, the youngest of three. I have two brothers, one of whom is 10 years older and lives in the Bay area. A different kind of pressure fell on each of us. The following summer, my mother determined that I should take a break and go out to stay with him for a while. I was between 10th and 11th grades. There are pivotal moments in all of our lives, but they were coming fast at this time in life. One was about to happen.

I’d just gotten my first Guild Starfire, a sunburst ’67 SF-I for $175, bought sight-unseen from a guy at the Berklee College of Music. I was ecstatic about it, but also somehow disappointed --- I didn’t sound like Jack Casady. I’d seen a Guild M-85, otherwise known as a Bluesbird, and thought, "Hmmm – maybe that’s what I need!" On a Grey Line bus tour of Monterey, I wandered off by myself, went into an instrument store, and saw a Guitar Player magazine with an article listed on the cover, "The Dead’s Gear". It was an interview with Rick Turner, all about Alembic --- this is the first moment I’d heard of them, but these are the craftsmen I’d been wondering about.

The next day I hopped the train into the city, looked up Alembic in a phone book[2] and invited myself over. They were very nice people. I asked a bunch of questions, but Rick Turner wasn’t there. I was told he was on his way back from a crafts fair in Bolinas, where he was showing the first Alembic “standard” guitar and bass and to wait for him, he knows all. There were speaker cabinets with tie-dyed grilles all over the place --- just like the Dead’s PA system --- and instruments of all sorts hanging up. The very first instrument visible was a blond M-85, with an insane inlay and no strings. I was in love and lust and asking everyone there about it. A nice guy named Sparky Raizeine told me it belonged to his boss and he believed it was for sale. "Who's your boss?" I asked. He said, "Phil Lesh." And I thought, "Oh, shit. Well, that's that."

Rick arrived --- he couldn't be nicer and treated me not at all like some kind of geeky long-haired teenager from New Jersey. On the contrary, he was excited that there was bass player in the shop (3 & 1/2 years already - I was real good!); he had a bass he wanted people to play and give him feedback on. Plus, while I was waiting for him, everybody there was excited because the first JBL K151 18” speaker in San Francisco arrived --- they mounted it in a cabinet they had waiting and wanted to hear it. I was handed the bass, plugged into F2-B preamp, Mac 2100 and the K-151 in sealed box and told "Go, man! Let's hear it!"

I was so stunned by the tone --- the evenness, the roundness and fullness --- that I didn't even have a moment to feel on the spot. My second thought was, "So much for my Starfire..." I'm sure I gave him no useful feedback.

Eventually I got around to asking Rick about the M-85; he told me that Phil wanted to sell it when he put some kind of wiring back in it. How much? "Oh, probably $1000." Imagine $1000 then to a 16 year old. I wander off, my head in the clouds.

Come September, I was back in NJ and the Dead were playing Philly. I followed the seats of the hockey rink back around the stage to look at the gear closer up. I saw Sparky on the stage and yelled hello. He recognized me, and asked, "Did you ever get your bass?" I told him I was working on it and asked to come up there, and he actually brought me onto the stage. (Yes, I stopped for a moment to appreciate where I was.) We searched around in different cases looking for Phil's even-more-than-Jack's-highly-modified Starfire, but no luck. He said, "Come back between sets". I tried but stupidly went across the floor and never got there (although once I broke free from the floor I went running up the arms of the chairs, slipped and cracked my sternum). After the show I went back there again, and he invited me back again and took me backstage to meet Phil, who was
leaning on a limo with two very buzzed teenage girls, all giggles. (But did I let that stop me? Hah!)

So I walked up, introduced myself and started throwing all kinds of questions about active electronics at him: What does he think of this idea or that idea? This probably only lasted a couple minutes --- he had some serious shit going on and I knew better than to wear out my welcome. As I walked away I threw a question back at him: "Hey! Whaddaya gonna do with that Guild Bluesbird bass hanging up at Alembic?" He called back: "I can't use it anymore. They can have it. You can have it if you want it!" "For free?" He says "Yeah! I'll give it you!" I just laughed and left the arena. My friends were waiting for me outside the arena, and it suddenly hit me --- I said, "I think Phil Lesh just gave me a bass..." The next day I sent a letter to the Dead Heads P.O. Box, and one to Rick, telling him what happened, admitting I'm embarrassed to bring it up but maybe Phil meant it, and I'd be dumb not to look into it.

About that same time, *Rolling Stone* ran a small feature called “Alembic: Sound Wizards to the Grateful Dead”, in which the people I had “discovered” were outed internationally, with an interview with Rick. And four months later, a very cold, very gray, January afternoon, I got a letter with the Alembic logo on it. It was from Rick, telling me that he talked to Phil and yes, it’s mine (MINE!!) --- but Phil wanted me to come get it, rather than it being shipped to me.
This all resulted in some serious ostracizing for a bit. First of all, I came back from San Francisco, the first of us ever to go the mecca, yammering about Alembic to every musician I knew. "Olympic? What?" Then I told a few close friends that winter about the letter from Rick, and all of South Jersey having recently converted to Deadheads, it spread like fire and everybody thought I was lying. In the meantime, I tried (and probably failed!) to keep from calling there too often.

But eventually I got a call from Rick. It was ready. My brother was coming east on business and Rick thought that was OK - him handing it to my brother was the same to him as me flying out and him handing it to me. It was Memorial Day weekend and I was on a canoe trip up the Delaware, but
when I got back Sunday night --- there it was. Beautiful. Mine. My brother said me that Jack Casady was in the shop when he went to pick it up and said, "I hope you'll be playing that around here --- that's a seriously karma-laden bass."

I later discovered that this was the instrument that Alembic came together over. Rick had met the Dead, his partner Ron Wickersham, all under the aegis of Bear, when Lesh commissioned the fingerboard inlay from Rick. And according to Ron Wickersham, quoted in the book on the Dead’s gear, it’s also the first active bass (an active instrument is just as it sounds, an instrument with some of the pre-amplification circuitry built in).

As I started using it I discovered why Phil gave it up. Gorgeous yes, but not as great sounding amplified as acoustically. But it was my fretless and I used it like that for many years -- and loved it. (In hindsight I think it was hampered by the lack of decent short-scale strings that we suffered through in the 70’s and 80’s. All my short-scale basses went into retirement until the 90’s.)

In '88, Rick was working at Gibson here in L.A. I handed it to him and said, "Rick - make this thing be what we know it can be please." Two years later, he called and left a message: "Well, 21 years I've been working on this thing, but it finally works!"

The first thing he did was remove the pickups (they are both now in my original sunburst Starfire) so it could come alive acoustically. Then he dumped the bridge/tailpiece. He devised a new tailpiece/bridge with his own piezo pickups as the saddles, and came up with a new string, a giant classical guitar string, non-magnetic, with a nylon core and bronze winding. Judge the sound for yourself: it's half of the Tuesday Night Music Club album, it's most audible on "We Do What We Can". And I used it on “I Was Watching You” on Rosanne Cash’s album, and on the Tonight Show with her.

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

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S56BXEPUBjU

And I’ve finally learned how to play that Starfire as well.

Addendum:

When I think back on that time, it’s astonishing to think of the events of that year: my visit to Alembic, the two Rolling Stone pieces, the gift of the bass, the Dead Head newsletter spelling out the intention behind their new sound system, and finally, the sound system itself. It was difficult to not feel involved --- and if I hadn't been a Dead Head before, I was one now.

[1] They did what many artists do, which is to record the vocals again in the studio, but with a difference. They set up the gear again in the Alembic studio, as if it were onstage, and ran the output of the separate tracks to their respective amps. They then recorded in front of it, to get an “accurate” bleed into the mics.

Show on Show on Show

THE AUDIO CYNIC
Written by Bill Leebens

The title is of course an allusion to "In the Bleak Midwinter". Make of that what you will; it just came to mind, unbidden, while thinking yet again about audio shows.

This is a subject I've written about perhaps too often, starting in our very first issue of Copper with "I Am So Over CES". A year later another CES piece, "Leaving Las Vegas" ran in Copper #25. In Copper #8 I wondered, "How Many Shows Are Too Many?"--and that's a question we're going to revisit today.

"Shows are good for high-end audio." "Shows are a waste of money and time." "Shows are saving the industry." "Shows are killing the industry." Talk to any group of audio pros or audiophiles, and you'll hear all the preceding sentiments, and more. And to a certain extent, all of them could be right.

If you're a manufacturer of custom-install, integrated, or in-wall audio products, CEDIA is likely the big wazoo for you. The CEDIA Expo just finished in San Diego, having run from September 5th through the 9th. Aside from the expected booth-space on a giant convention center floor, much like the main zoo at CES, CEDIA features training and certification classes, offered by CEDIA itself and by individual manufacturers. The intent is to create better-educated, more skillful audio professionals, and I'm all for that.

The problem is not with CEDIA (although it's seen some upheaval itself this year, as covered in Industry News in Copper #26), but in the bigger picture. If you're a 2-channel audio manufacturer
who works in the custom-install world as well, **CEDIA** is pretty much a must-do. But then what? Let's take a look at just the next quarter.

Imagine you're a sales or marketing guy who has to work the show, losing not only that weekend, but likely a couple of weeks' worth of sleep before the show, as well. And of course, if you do your job properly, there'll be plenty of follow-up to do after the show. So...after having worked **CEDIA**, how would you greet the prospect of **THE Show**, all of 12 days later? Or the even-bigger **RMAF**, less than a month later? (As this issue was being assembled, it was announced that THE Show was being **cancelled**, at least for this year.)

Imagine being in charge of shipping or logistics, and having to ensure that what may be tons of gear gets safely from one show to the next?

I say these things not to pick on any individual show, but to give you an idea of the decisions and dilemmas that face manufacturers and dealers who have to leverage the greatest ROI from their finite budgets. It's a decision-tree of sequential questions: Do we do shows.—period? If so, which ones? Can we ship from Show A to reach Show B in time?....and so on.

But wait! There are still a bunch more options, just this quarter.

The week after **RMAF**--- mind you, the very next week!---there's **TAVES**, in Toronto. Originally focused on just high-end audio, **TAVES** (once an acronym, now apparently just a name, like CES) has broadened its scope to include gaming and all types of electronic toys. That's probably prudent, from a commercial standpoint. Exhibitors include a number of dealers and prominent Canadian manufacturers like Totem, Bryston, and Reference 3a---but not a lot of US companies.

You'd probably think that November would be a dead-spot in the show calendar, what with the onset of the holiday season, the approach of winter, family travels for Thanksgiving....

Well, you'd be wrong. The **Capital Audio Fest** has moved from its former sweltering summer spot to the first weekend of November. And---here we go again!---the very next weekend has the **New York Audio Show** at its what, fourth? venue in its six years of life.

Both **CAF** and **NYAS** are smallish, although **CAF** has outgrown its DIY/tweak origins to fill just under 50 rooms, plus a headphone area and a central marketplace. It looks to be a nicely-balanced, manageable show. The **NYAS** website shows 28 rooms, including some yeoman troopers who are also showing the previous week at **CAF**.

December is the quiet before the storm of **CES**, coming up fast next January 9-12. An informal survey indicates that the presence of high-end audio at CES will continue the steep decline of the last several years.

So: depending on who you are and where you are, there is either a shortage of shows, or just too many.

You decide. Whatever the viewpoint, I'll keep reporting on what's out there.
Here’s a simple question: which is more fun to drive down a winding country road at 30 miles an hour? A new Bentley or a 1969 Jaguar?

Most car fans would pick the Jaguar every time. After all, you can hear it, feel the road, and most of all, it might blow up at any time. Every downshift is an exercise in hope over good judgment.

It’s possible to buy an amp that’s powered with dilithium crystals, that has three hundred extra watts to spare, with a power cord that could power Tesla’s lab. And you can use that amp to power speakers that are made of corbomite and platinum and are capable of playing loud enough to melt your house.

[An aside: Did you know the loudest sound on Earth comes from the blue whale? I, for one, have never been in a stereo store where someone came in hoping to get a stereo loud enough to be able to hear the blue whale the way it was supposed to sound... but I digress.]

Why, then, am I drawn to my four watt per channel amplifier, powering high-efficiency speakers that appear, at any moment, like they might just drop dead from exhaustion?

I think that’s precisely why.

“It might not work” is of great attraction to humans.

At the jazz club, I’m well aware that Marcus Roberts’ crack band (13 people crammed into Birdland!) can easily handle the charts they’re reading from. Sure, it sounds good, the music is what it’s supposed to be, check the box. Sort of boring, actually.

But, and it’s a thrilling but, when someone stands up and starts wailing (which is different from whaling, for those keeping score at home) on the trumpet, things change. Marcus doesn’t know what’s going to happen, they might not have rehearsed this. The player might not even know what’s going to happen on the next bar or two. Will he get boxed in? How can he possibly top that last riff?
What if it all falls apart?

This brings us to **Just Roll Tape**, a fifty (!) year old lost recording done by Stephen Stills (the full story is [here](#)). A young Stills was doing backup vocals for his girlfriend Judy Collins. At the end of her session, he slipped the engineer a few bucks and recorded for two hours after everyone had left. Just Stills and the engineer.

This album cost a million dollars less to produce than some of the singular albums of the 1970s. How come, then, it’s so much better?

When we say, “just roll tape,” we’re inviting disaster. There are no overdubs, no chances to fix it in the mix, no retakes. It’s naked, and thus alive. It might not work.

This is the thrill of live music, of the low-powered system teetering on the edge, of the stereo that surprises us instead of merely keeping its well-engineered promise.

So, we have the paradox of modern stereo equipment. The scientific method, combined with the persistence of professional engineering, has gotten us ever closer to the perfect stereo. The stereo that reliably and consistently does exactly what it’s supposed to do. A stereo that measures well, that needs little or no care or tweaking, that’s correct.

For some of us, that’s same as a stereo that’s boring.

Give me tubes that burst into flames, speaker wires that need a wiggle now and then, a turntable that can’t possibly be as good as a CD player...

Even better, a stereo that has a sweet spot (which, by definition, means that there need to be sour spots as well).

Stuff that might not work.

Because when it works, it’s a miracle.

Miracles are a good reason for a hobby.

(Originally published in *Copper* #5. Painting by Klaus Wagger.)
What Is a Symphony?

QUIBBLES AND BITS

Written by Richard Murison

Most of you who do not make a habit of listening to classical music will have heard of a Symphony, and know that it is some sort of portentous orchestral piece listened to by highbrow types wearing appreciative frowns. But I suspect that a much smaller proportion have some clear idea of what a Symphony actually is, and why it is at all important. If you are interested to learn a little more, this post is for you. But be forewarned – I am not a trained musicologist, so if you like what you read here, don’t treat it as gospel, but rather as inspiration to read further, and from more authoritative sources.

The term “Symphony” actually has its roots in words of ancient Greek origin originally used to describe certain musical instruments. They have been applied to pipes, stringed instruments, a primitive hurdy-gurdy, and even drums. By the Middle Ages, similar words were being used for musical compositions of various forms. It is not until the eighteenth century that composers – most prominently Haydn and Mozart – began using the term Symphony to describe a particular form of orchestral composition that we find familiar today.

Beginning in the Renaissance, the wealthiest European monarchs and princely classes began to assemble troupes of resident musicians in their courts. Although churches had for centuries maintained elaborate choirs, and travelling troubadours have been mentioned in the historical record since time immemorial, it was really only in this period that the concept of what we would now identify as an orchestra began to take shape. Since orchestras didn’t heretofore exist, it follows that composers of orchestral music also didn’t exist either, and the two had to develop and evolve hand in hand. Court composers composed, as a rule, at their masters’ pleasure. They wrote what they were told to write, rather than what they were inspired to write. The purpose of the “orchestra” was mainly to provide music for social functions, although special pieces were often
commissioned for ceremonial occasions.

As music and musicianship grew, so the scope of compositions began to grow in order to highlight the advancing skills of the performers. Musical forms began to develop which would showcase these talents, and compositional styles emerged which would enable these performers to express their abilities in the form of extended playing pieces where they could elaborate both their own playing skills, and the composer’s evolving compositional ideas. Specialist composers began to emerge, leading eventually to Johann Sebastian Bach, who would codify many of the compositional and structural building blocks which continue to underpin all western music today. It might surprise many readers to learn that today’s pop & rock music adheres very firmly to the principles first codified by Bach (but based on much older traditions), far more so than do its modern classical counterparts.

By the late 18th century, specialist composers had fully emerged, brimming – indeed exploding – with musical ideas. Many of those ideas involved utilizing the seemingly unlimited expressive potential of the ensemble we call an orchestra, but there were few accepted musical forms which composers could use to realize these ambitions. What emerged was the Symphony. Musical forms did exist for shorter, simpler pieces. But what the new classical symphonists did was to establish ways of stitching together groups of smaller pieces to make an interesting new whole, which they called a Symphony.

Haydn and Mozart established that a Symphony could be constructed by taking a simple, but highly structured established form such as a Sonata (think Lennon & McCartney) and combining it with both a slower piece and a faster piece by way of contrast, and concluding with an up-tempo musical form which has a propensity to drive towards a satisfying and natural conclusion. Eventually, composers would learn to link the “movements” together using thematic, harmonic, or tonal elements. In any case, the idea was that the four movements would together express musical ideas that exceeded the sum of their parts.

In the next century, particularly thanks to Beethoven, the Symphony grew to become the ultimate form for the expression of compositional ideas. When a composer designates a work a Symphony, it implies both the deployment of the highest levels of technical sophistication, and great seriousness of purpose. Indeed many composers were (and are) reluctant to apply the term to compositions which in their minds failed to meet their personal expectations of what the form demands.

So what, then, does the form demand? As time has gone on, the answer to that question has grown increasingly abstract. In my view, what it demands more than anything else is structure, which sounds terribly pompous, so I need to describe what I mean by that. Structure is the framework upon which the music expresses its message.

I think the easiest possible way to explain that is to listen to the first movement of Beethoven’s 5th symphony. Everybody knows the famous 4-note motif which opens the piece – DA-DA-DA-DAAAAA!, DA-DA-DA-DAAAAA!! The entire first movement is all about Beethoven elaborating on what he means by that 4-note motif. The piece sets about exploring and developing it in different ways. We hear it in different keys, at different pitches, played by different instruments and by the orchestra in unison, at different tempi, as the main theme and as part of the orchestra’s chattering accompaniment.

It starts off famously as an interrogatory statement – three notes and then down a third with a portentous dwell on the fourth note. By the end of the movement the motif has modulated into a triumphant phrase – three notes and then up a fourth, with the fourth note punched out like an exclamation point. The opening of the movement has asked a (musical) question, then went on to
explore the matter in some detail, and finished with a definitive answer. This is what I mean by structure. By the time the movement is over, I feel I know all I need to know about the 4-note motif, or at least all that Beethoven has to say about it. While the foregoing is fresh in your mind, take five minutes to listen to it on YouTube - Claudio Abbado is conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn_s4YAAZHk

A symphony can be a mammoth piece – some are over an hour long. Four movements is traditional, but five or six, or even as few as one, are common. What is needed to make a symphony work is that its musical message must be properly conveyed across its whole. It needs to feel incomplete if any parts are missing. It needs to feel wrong if the movements are played in the wrong order. And above all it needs to give up its mysteries reluctantly; it doesn’t want to be a cheap date – it wants your commitment too.

A symphony is all about that structure, how its musical ideas are developed both within the individual movements, and also across the entirety of the work. These musical ideas may not be overt – indeed they can be totally hidden in such a way that experts have never managed to fully uncover them in over a hundred years. It may even be that the composer himself only fully understands those things at a subconscious level, and the resultant work is his only means of expressing them.

Many symphonies are programmatic – which is to say that the composer himself has acknowledged that it sets about telling a particular story – a fine example is the 11th Symphony of Shostakovich which describes the events of the year 1905 in St. Petersburg, with its “bloody Sunday” uprising. Some symphonies express acknowledged thoughts, emotions, and musical recollections evoking a particular subject – such as Mendelssohn’s Italian (No 4) and Scottish (No 3) symphonies and John Corigliano’s 1st symphony (prompted by the AIDS epidemic). Many entire symphonic oeuvres were inspired by profoundly religious (i.e. Bruckner) or existential (i.e. Mahler) emotions.

Some great composers wrote little of note outside of their symphonic output. Bruckner, for example, wrote a number of highly regarded choral works, but no other major orchestral works. Others never once over the span of long and productive careers turned their hand to the format – Wagner and Verdi spring to mind. There are a few who were unusually reluctant to approach the form – Stravinsky composed four symphonies, but pointedly refused to assign numbers to them. But in general, the most important aspect of a Symphony is that – with very few exceptions – they reflect the composer’s most sincere, and personally committed works. They are therefore often listed amongst their composer’s most significant, and most important works. And they are usually among the most performed and recorded.

You can’t talk about the Symphony without talking about the dreaded “curse of the ninth”. Beethoven wrote nine symphonies then died. Shortly afterwards, Schubert died with his own 9th symphony in the bag. As did Dvorak, Bruckner, Mahler, and the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. We can add the minor composer Louis Spohr to the list too. Arnold Schoenberg wrote “It seems that the Ninth is a limit. He who wants to go beyond it must pass away ... Those who have written a Ninth stood too close to the hereafter.”

Some composers went to great lengths to avoid writing a ninth symphony without getting the tenth safely in the bag immediately afterwards. These include Gustav Mahler whose ninth symphonic work he instead titled Das Lied Von Der Erde (Songs of the Earth). With that safely published he wrote
his formal 9th symphony ... and then expired with his 10th barely begun. But hang on a minute ... Bruckner’s symphonic output includes symphonies No.0 and No.00 as well as Nos. 1-9. And if you had suggested to Schubert or Dvorak that they had written nine symphonies they might have asked you what you were smoking. There appears to have been a tendency to try to arrange, after the fact, for a dead composer’s symphonic output to add up to nine. So the whole thing does not stand up at all to close inspection. Amusing though it might be, the “curse of the ninth” is an abject fallacy, but one which remains acknowledged by many contemporary composers as a superstition in whose eye they really don’t want to poke a stick.

I’ll sign off with a handful of Symphonies that might go easy on the ear of a new listener interested in exploring the oeuvre, with some recommended recordings:

Mozart: Symphony No 40 (McKerras, Prague Chamber, Telarc)
Beethoven: Symphony No 5 (Kleiber, Vienna Philharmonic, DG)
Rachmaninov: Symphony No 2 (Previn, London Symphony Orchestra, EMI)
Dvorak: Symphony No 8 (Kertesz, LSO, Decca)
Tchaikovsky: Symphony No 6 (Haitink, Royal Concertgebouw, Philips)

And another handful that represent progressively greater departures from the mainstream:

Vaughan Williams: Symphony No 5 (Boult, London Philharmonic, EMI)
Mahler: Symphony No 7 (Tilson Thomas, SF Symphony, SFS Media)
Bruckner: Symphony No 8 (Celibidache, Munich PO, EMI)
Nielsen: Symphony No 4 (Davis, London Symphony Orchestra, LSO Live!)
Corigliano: Symphony No 1 (Shimoni, Yomiuri Nippon SO, Avex)
“Hello, this is Robert Rauschenberg’s personal secretary. Mr. Rauschenberg wants to know if you would like to swap art for a pair of speakers?”

In 1981 I opened a factory at number 22 Bond St. in Manhattan. It was called Isobarik Corporation and was a subsidiary of Linn Products, in Glasgow, Scotland.

Ivor Tiefenbrun, the owner and I grew up together in Glasgow and we celebrated all of youth’s virtues together. (i.e. we drank and screwed as much as we could). In 1975 after spending four years in Israel, I passed through Glasgow on my way to the US. My wife Rita had been accepted by Parsons School of Design to study graphic art. While in Scotland, Ivor told me that he had always wanted to have a factory in the US and would I be willing to set up a company etc. I told him I loved him, that he was my best friend, I would do anything but work for him as he was the world’s biggest pain in the ass. Fast-forward six years.

After working for large retail organizations, corporate America and I decided that this wasn’t going to work out and the sooner we separated, the better it would be for all of us; to wit Bloomindales fired me, Macy’s fired me, Abraham and Straus were about to fire me but I hurriedly left for Bambergers who didn’t fire me but made my life so miserable I was ready to do anything, even work for Ivor.

A few months at the Linn Factory in Castlemilk educated me in speaker manufacturing. On my last night, Ivor visited me and wondered if I realized what a really hard job I had ahead of me. Premises had to be found and outfitted. I also had to find suppliers, purchase materials and hire staff. I never thought of this as difficult. I had gone through both Macy’s and Bambergers’ training programs. They taught me how to prioritize and execute decisions. Within six weeks I opened in the east Village and began producing Linn Kans, their smallest speaker. At one time I had two employees, a
Jamaican bodybuilder named Duane and an openly gay woman called Wendy. Duane was extremely religious and even though he was fond of Wendy, he was horrified by her lifestyle. This made for some fabulous arguments that were much more fun than building speakers!

Bond Street was interesting in the early eighties. It was dirty, unkempt and slightly dangerous. Most of the business properties were industrial. In the immediate vicinity there was a plumbing supply shop, a marble contractor and an industrial screw supplier. There I found dual spiral screws that really held the speakers together. Down the road, on the Bowery, was CBGBs. Diagonally across the street was a home for battered women and often I would hear men (I presume the batterers) yelling in the street. This was the time when there were thousands of people living in the streets. One evening, when locking up I saw a woman standing in the middle of busy Lafayette Street yelling at the traffic. She reached down, removed her sanitary napkin, waved it over her head and threw it at a car.

The back of my factory abutted a building that was leased by Rauschenberg as a warehouse, thus the request. I called Rita. “Have you ever heard of a guy called Rauschenberg?” (What do I know? I’m from Glasgow). Rita, the artist said, “What about him? He’s famous.” I told her about the phone call and the request and she immediately said, “Let’s do it.”

The next day we visited Rauschenberg’s house and studio. It was a 5-story town house at 381 Lafayette Street. Originally a mission that operated an orphanage, a fading mural with images of poor children advertising the orphanage was still visible on the side of the building. We entered the hallway, which was covered in wood paneling that had been recently cleaned and renovated. “Another barter” we were told.

We were led up to the third floor and entered a room that was filled with people and lots of flat files. I established the value of a pair of Sara speakers and we were shown some books with copies of artwork of comparable worth. Rita narrowed the selection down to five pieces and we went over to the flat files to see the originals. Rita settled on a print. It was an artist’s proof, #7 of 8, countersigned by Rauschenberg. His assistant recorded the transaction and we noticed that Jane Fonda had purchased the same print. Even though he lived upstairs we never did meet the artist.

It turned out to be a great deal. A pair of Linn Saras is practically worth nothing these days, but the value of the Rauschenberg has shot up since his death. It still hangs in our living room.
Continuing from Part 1, we'll look at more legacy Bang & Olufsen products in the city museum of Struer, Denmark, B&O's home for nearly a century. In the last issue, we looked at B&O products from the company's early days up through the pre-WWII era.

The small city's lengthy association with and reliance upon B&O means that the company's products are seen throughout the town. As I posted on Part 1, "...I was amused to be staying at the town’s only hotel, an austere place misleading called the Grand Hotel. The room was as unyielding and uncomfortable as most college dorm rooms, with a 2″ thick mattress and a shower that was little more than a hose and a drain.

"BUT: every room had a giant, beautiful Bang & Olufsen television. There wasn’t much to watch, mind you, but by God there was a beautiful picture."

You gotta love a company town. Having grown up in the home of Spam, the blue-and-yellow cans of which were everywhere---give me B&O, any day.

But I digress. Let's take a look around--and again, sorry for the fuzzy pics. iPhone 4 images don't always blow up well....
I've written before of some of the changes and missteps B&O has experienced in recent years. While some of their products of late have been more striking than attractive---like the **BeoLab 90** shown above---the recent launches of the **BeoLab 50** and **BeoVision Eclipse** give me some hope that future products can once again be innovative AND attractive. While they may not be up to the level of some of Jacob Jensen's masterpieces, today's product-briefs are rather more involved than those from the '60's and '70's.

---Yes, I suppose I am cutting them some slack. I'd like to see the brand become relevant and world-leading, once again.

One last thing: if you have the slightest interest in B&O, past or present, the British website **BeoWorld** is a must visit. It is endlessly informative and rigorously comprehensive.
British singer-songwriter Antony Hegarty now uses a “spirit name,” Anohni. She also now prefers female pronouns, although she has always considered her gender to be fluid. As she told the Guardian, “I don’t feel emphatically female. It’s more subtle than that.” Subtle is a good word for her music, too. And strange, but in a most intriguing way.

Her first professional group, Antony and the Johnsons, had a long run that started with the 1995 EP Behold the Lamb of God. The instantly distinguishing feature is Anohni’s voice, a tenor-contralto with a fast yet wide vibrato and a deep, rich essence. The voice is not quite of this world. Nor are Anohni’s songs.

Right out of the gate, Anohni establishes her world view as one of sweet, tortuous melancholy. Antony and the Johnsons was also unusual for its use of acoustic instruments in an era besotted with electronica. The lush arrangements are just short of sugary, like Anohni’s voice. “It’s true I always wanted love to be...hurtful,” she sings in “Cripple and the Starfish”:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2IOHGXIMv4

The 2005 album I Am a Bird Now was a point of maturing for the band, especially in terms of critical response. It won the 2005 Mercury Prize. As the album’s title suggests, its songs focus on transformation. It also offers proof that fellow artists – even major ones – jump at the chance to work
with Anohni: this album includes collaborations with Rufus Wainwright, Boy George, and Lou Reed, and others.

“Fistful of Love,” opens with Reed’s unmistakable tuneless sing-talking. Then his cameo is done and Anohni takes over. This particular song isn’t in some undefinable style; it’s straight-up soul (yeah, baby), first smoldering and then bursting with the pain of romance. Love – or the lack of it – is Anohni’s favorite topic, which makes the originality of her lyrics all the more remarkable.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbAjI5edjgY

Anohni is also a visual artist, and the 2010 album Swanlights was released with a 144-page book of her paintings and collages. The song “The Great White Ocean” from that album is a primer in less is more. The melody would work for a nursery song, and the accompaniment is just a couple of acoustic guitars. Yet the listener is left with a profound but not unpleasant hollowness, like a slow-motion catharsis.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtBAGQ7HNnA

While Antony and the Johnsons were still in operation, Anohni was approached by the American DJ Andy Butler about his new electronica project, Hercules and Love Affair. Perhaps the extreme change of style appealed to Anohni; she sings five tracks on the band’s self-titled debut album in 2008, although she never performed live with them.

“Blind” was the first song Anohni recorded for Butler. The voice is unmistakable, but the change in context makes me think of a Persian house cat dropped into a back alley in the rain. Not only does the complex texture of Anohni’s voice jar against the electronic music’s unforgiving coldness of timbre and rhythm. There’s also a major step down in the quality of the lyrics:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RsfGJsax9E

Antony and the Johnsons were together for about 20 years. Their last album came out in 2014. Since then, Anohni has been working on solo material. Her album Hopelessness, from 2016 on the Secretly Canada/Rough Trade, shows a change in attitude if not style. Despite what the title might suggest, there is more anger than sadness in it, with politics brought to the forefront.

The opening track is “Drone Bomb Me,” and its video has made some waves. It features model Naomi Campbell in an empty room, lip-synching the entire song. If you can manage to pay attention to those lyrics in spite of the distracting images, you’ll find an unrequited love song couched in terribly violent imagery. And Anohni has figured out how to use a less harsh style of electronica in a way that melds better with her voice:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUEoic7ro_o

The politics on this album is very specific, mostly related to Anohni’s uncompromising pacifism and human rights activism. “Obama,” a chant sung on a three-pitch melody in Anohni’s lowest register,
excoriates the then-president for the incarceration of whistle-blower Chelsea Manning and pleads for her release:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVD50Q114-s

2017 saw the release of Anohni’s solo EP *Paradise*. “Jesus Will Kill You” is a scathing criticism of the establishment war machine. In the midst of frantic Japanese-influenced flute runs and taiko drum beats, she questions -- “What’s your legacy?” -- and she accuses – “You’re a mean old man.” Her musical outrage grows as the world spins into chaos.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q89xHXju5ik

As is true of all the most interesting musicians, Anohni has huge respect for other songwriters. She has made some fascinating cover recordings. Whatever she sings becomes a different song, very much her own. Here she is with a mesmerizing performance of Leonard Cohen’s “If It Be Your Will”:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MDlMdu2gjw

I could think of a hundred songs I’d love to hear reshape with that haunting touch.
Bill Conrad and Lew Johnson were government economists who happened to be dedicated audiophiles—dedicated enough to build their own gear. In 1977 the pair introduced a vacuum tube preamplifier whose champagne casework and lower case conrad-johnson logo brought to mind early Marantz.

Keep in mind that at the time, the only tubed electronics made in America for the audiophile market were those made by Audio Research and Atma-Sphere, both built in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. -- Okay, I think Julius Futterman was still alive and building amps one at a time, and there may have been other companies that are now long gone, and long forgotten by me. But ARC, Atma-Sphere, and c-j are all still here, 40 years later. Pragmatic economists Bill and Lew were realistic enough to keep their day jobs for some time, until their company was well-established.

Through the years, c-j’s Premier, Art and GAT lines kept the brand at the forefront of tube electronics, and were consistently well-reviewed. Stereophile’s Sam Tellig had a long-running, occasionally-contentious relationship with the brand and its products. Sam, in fact, brought to my attention a low-key story in The Audio Beat which told that Bill and Lew had sold their company to longtime employee Jeff Fischel, the GM of the company and contributor to many recent product designs. There was no press-release announcing the change in ownership, perhaps reflecting the quiet way in which c-j has always done business.

Lew was a mentor to me some years ago, and I wish him and Bill all the best. We'll have more details on the direction of the company in future issues of Copper.
Imagine John Cleese with a red dot on his forehead, wearing a *lungi* and sitting on stage, playing Indian classical music on an alto saxophone. Carnatic musician Kadri Gopalanath looks so much like the comedic British actor (at least, I think so), that I half expect Terry Gilliam or Michael Palin to walk on stage behind him as his *mridangam* player, and the concert to end hilariously with a trifling flesh wound.

I first saw Mr. Gopalanath at a saxophone double bill in my home town of Bangalore, India. The local German cultural center, Max Mueller Bhavan, had brought across an octet of German jazz saxophonists for the first set, and Mr. Gopalanath and his accompanists played the second.

The octet featured Adolphe Sax's entire family, from a soprano to my first sighting of a bass saxophone. Yeah, a slightly gimmicky concept, but at least all eight were brilliant musicians. Yet after the intermission, when Mr. Gopalanath took the stage and breathed just two notes into that sole alto, he blew the entire octet away.

Some Carnatic purists sniff at Mr. Gopalanath and his choice of instrument (even though the violin is all but native to the form), but I was awe-struck by his control over it, one he has apparently modified to handle the microtonal demands of Indian classical. Even if you don't identify with the arcane art forms of Hindustani or Carnatic, the requisite lifetime of rigorous training is always...
apparent from a musician's first notes of the *alaap*, the Indian classical music version of the *amuse bouche*. The mix of control and improvisation shown in those arch studies of the notes to come make me imagine what it would look like if a roller coaster was to somehow freestyle: rock solid, yet soaring.

Sadly, videos of Mr. Gopalnath's later concerts online have so much reverb on the sax, they sound unbearably cleesy--- sorry, cheesy. But the first few seconds of this track from the album Southern Brothers should give you an idea of what I'm talking about:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1-NFjqaugs&list=PLfdFK371pBbcZOsuj2I-OrfSSwWsQT_pn

To my regret and even shame, Indian classical is an alien art form to me; yes, a person who has grown up in India. I lived in an urban social and cultural milieu often described by Indians as "Westernized" (except we spelled it with an “s”, and not the letter we call “zed”). The word was often used pejoratively, but we never thought of it that way. At 19, my hair went halfway down my back, and I wore jeans that were holes and white threads held together by denim. I persuaded my then-girlfriend to paint me a Judas Priest “Devil's Tuning Fork” patch, and asked my grandmother to sew it into a ragged gap in those badlands trousers. On the streets of my South-Indian city I stood out like the Yeti in a Walmart cosmetics aisle, but fit right in when gathering with friends.

We were proud to be Westernized, and wore it like badge and costume. Rush and Dream Theater were passwords to inner circles (and Cannibal Corpse and Napalm Death to inner-inner circles). Though ours was a city of seven million, when we went out, we'd know everybody in the places we frequented. We were a tiny percentage of Bangalore's population, but this was our world.

It was only after moving to the US that I felt regret at not having seen what was in front of me. Instead of hunting down traditional concerts by world-class musicians in the old neighborhoods of south Bangalore, I’d be in the cantonment area listening to college bands play the thousandth shaky rendition of “Welcome to the Smoke-on-the-Water Jungle, Sweet Paranoid War-Pig Child of Mine”.

Instead of doing the LA-to-San Francisco journey from Bangalore to Chennai for its legendary annual Carnatic music festival, I spent my money on overpriced drinks at one of Bangalore's many pubs, making sure to be cool enough to pick the ones that played classic rock, but never “Winds of Change” or “Hotel California”, the worn anthems of nights on the town in my city. Instead of tracking down a *nadaswaram*, an oboe-like instrument whose sound I loved (and played by Mr Gopalnath's father), I dreamed of an unattainable imported electric guitar.

Don’t think I’m suggesting that one form of music is more authentic than another. Or that rock couldn’t be authentic just because it's played in a South Indian city. I’m just saying the ground around me was so fertile, it was criminal I never found roots in it. Twenty years later, I think a lot about roots that might have been. My move to the cultural compass point known as the West made me confront and acknowledge my East in a way I never had to (or thought to) in India. As Westernized as I was, I am Indian in superficial and deep ways I never anticipated, from how happy spicy food makes me, to finding Americans bafflingly open with their lives yet closed with their doors.

As I miss certain cultural handholds, one of many things I question is my relationship to material goods, especially that warm pile of electronics in the living room. My doubts are not for the days I sit lost in wonder in front of it, listening to track after track, album after album. These days, those are so few and far between (I've always thought this tired phrase sounds like a Led Zeppelin song), that
there are times the audio system weighs heavy on me, like a car that's rarely driven, or the box of leftovers in the fridge I know I'm not going to eat, but will keep until cutely fuzzy so I can legitimately throw away.

Since I'm among friends, let me speak my truths about my audio hobby/passion/lifestyle/call-it-what-you-will:

1) Sometimes I sit down to listen to music, not because I want to, but because I want my expensive, complex audio system to have been put to use that day.

2) While I tell myself I have acknowledged the politics of acquisition, the times I most want to upgrade, are the times I feel the lowest about myself.

3)... well, 2.5) I sometimes dream of an audiophile Walden: my only audio set-up being a little music player and two bookshelf speakers, actually set up on on a bookshelf, and nothing more.

I apologize that these truths lead to a well-worn groove: the reflection that my search for high fidelity is about so much more than fidelity to master tapes, or live performances. But sometimes it needs to be said aloud. Every passion has at least the pretense that it connects to something bigger than itself. Motorcycles and freedom. Grilling and the history of humankind. Knitting and... I don't know. I'll let you know if I ever it take up.

Why else is a system never finished? Why else is there price-level upon price-level of cable, if not for the fact that if a man's reach is doomed to forever exceed his grasp, he'll simply shrug, say, “To hell with heaven”, and buy speaker cable from the electrical aisle of Home Depot?

But a funny thing happens to me on the way to bed, on those days I stop to listen to a track or two simply out of a sense of duty. Because I have no expectations, and I'm not there to test anything, I simply pick music close at hand, and don't overthink a thing. Those moments become the lightest and most authentic of my day—up there with the swooping descent of Glendora Mountain Road on my bicycle, or the mandrake-scream of my chilli-loaded chicken wings.

So be it then, that Kadri Gopalnath is my entry point to Carnatic music, just as it might be for someone who isn't from India. A familiar instrument and sound, played in an utterly unfamiliar way, even before the first note... when did you last see a saxophonist essay from the floor? I don't feel a raga in my gut, the way a blues scale talks to my viscera. With a mother who loves The Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel, and a father who can croon word-perfect any Sinatra or Dino you throw at him, and friends who listen to pop and rock and EDM and metal and hip-hop, I can't erase the fact that the soundtrack of my life was from the musical Westernized.

Thousands of choices led me to that moment of authenticity in front of the audio system, whether as immediate as speaker placement, or as storied as the lifetime that made me own and appreciate a particular track. It's so easy to forget that the power of that button press from the sofa is that whatever plays, plays for me. And I don't mean “me” as against you or anyone else, but “me” as in the entire history of who I am. The narrative that brought me to this moment is only inauthentic when I choose to apply other contexts to it. The view from the sweet spot is always truthful, and the lesson for any grail chaser is that perfection is utterly irrelevant if you can't hold imperfection in a compassionate embrace.

Welcome to the smoke-on-the-water jungle... ah, you know how it goes
The magic of classical song springs from the fact that it requires a singer and accompanist to construct an entire emotional universe in a very short amount of time. You cannot hold onto a song, as you can sit as you ponder details in a painting, sculpture, or other visual creation. Nor, unless the performance has been recorded, can you replay it other than in your mind. Once the notes are sounded, and the words enunciated, only a song’s impact remains.

Art song demands that artists paint an emotional canvas so rich and meaningful that, in just a few minutes, they convey feelings and truths about human existence that other musical forms can take hours to express. The soprano playing Cio-Cio San (Madama Butterfly), Mimi (La Bohème), or Violetta (La Traviata) has an entire evening in which to express the tragedy of falling in love, separating, and dying much too soon. Contrast that with the challenge facing the singer and accompanist who attempt to create the three characters - father, child, and Earl King - in Schubert’s dramatic song, “Der Erlkönig” (The Earl King) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziqOWmqjys0.

Those artists have only four or so minutes in which to re-enact the desperate dialogue between loving father and clinging child that is punctuated by the child’s visitation from the beyond, and then ended by the child’s death.

That art song has declined in popularity, certainly in the United States, is due, in part, to the language barrier. While there now exists a substantial body of English language art songs (Purcell, Dowland, Britten, Quilter, Copland, Barber, Rorem, Heggie, Hoiby, Gordon, Bolcom), art song first flowered with the creations of 18th and 19th century German (Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven to Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, Brahms and Strauss), French (Gounod, Fauré, Debussy, Ravel, Hahn, Poulenc, Messiaen, Dutilleux), Spanish (Falla, Montsalvage), Russian (Mussorgsky, Shostakovich), and other European composers.

As the large wave of Europeans who emigrated to the United States from the late 19th century through WWII has aged and died off, so has the number of people who can understand what artists are singing about without aid of translations decreased dramatically. In an age of instant
gratification, where a single Snapchat, “like,” photograph, or 140-character tweet takes the place of extended conversation, the notion of constantly moving one’s eyes between printed translations and the artists onstage has become far less appealing.

Regardless of its popularity, the fundamental beauty and communicative power of art song remains intact. Rarefied though it may seem to some, song remains the supreme avenue by which a singer can demonstrate their ability to reach beyond the confines of the stage or recordings and touch the listener’s heart.

What Is of Value

My initial foray into art song was by way of opera. I was 11 years old when my father brought home a three-record reissue set of tenor Enrico Caruso, and put on the sextet from Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14tdvxUvxFU

When I exclaimed, “Daddy, I’ve heard that before!”, he replied, “Yeah, you broke it when you were two.”

I had no idea of what Caruso and his co-artists were singing about; all I knew is that I could feel the passion and suffering in their voices. The way they used their instruments to convey emotion and tell stories touched me in the center of my being. From this came my bottom line as concerns the communicative power of the human voice, and its ability to transmit emotion through sound. The singing must touch my heart or gut in ways meaningful to me.

When, less than a decade after reconnecting with Caruso, I began browsing regularly in record stores, I first encountered the songs of Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. Immediately, I listened for which singers touched my heart.

Soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf initially impressed me with the sheer beauty and fluidity of her sound, and the myriad colors and expressive gestures she crated with her voice. She was, in many ways, a supreme artist, whose early mono recordings of Mozart’s Exsultate, Jubilate: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q87ixCMAXnw

---and Bach’s solo cantata, Jauchtzet Gott in allen Landen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDyjGtvxqU ---both reissued on a single Seraphim LP, I carried with me from coast to coast.

I discuss both recordings in their latest remastering in a review for Stereophile, found here.

What to listen for

Before long, I discovered other sopranos – specifically Lotte Lehmann: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne7nNKCWFyM

---and (later) Elisabeth Schumann, in German repertoire:: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPM6yJCdRE
Even if I didn’t have translations for the songs these women sang, I sensed that they believed wholeheartedly in the music and words, to the point that the feelings they expressed radiated from the depth of their being. Their singing was so emotionally expressive that it felt as though their voices were windows on their souls.

Emotional and spiritual truth are, for me, the bottom line. As with politicians, it’s a case of whom I believe. Listening carefully, you can discover what feels like a genuine response to the material at hand, and what feels like artifice.

Some singers pay a huge amount of attention to the sounds and meanings of certain vowels, consonants, and syllables; others chose to put the majority of their attention on the arc of the vocal line. Some do both.

More important than what a singer chooses to emphasize is if their singing comes from the heart rather than the head. As much as the mind is at play as a singer develops their response to a song, what is essential is that voice and interpretation remain true to feelings directly inspired by the song at hand.

Equally important is the spiritual resonance of the artist. While far from every song is about spirituality or faith, virtually all communicate elements of spiritual truth. Whether someone is singing about love, pain, or smoking a cigarette, their performance, if great, speaks to the humanity within each of us, and our relationship with each other and, ultimately, the planet.

Finally, there are vocal limitation to take into account. Some singers capable of long inhalations are capable of sustaining long-held notes, as well as complete lines of text, without breaks. For those who must breathe, the question must be, do breaths come in appropriate places that do not interfere with musical flow and meaning?

Singers also have expressive limitations. Some singers are sweet human beings who, even when they express anger and rage, maintain their sweetness. It is hard to imagine such singers playing bloodthirsty roles. Other singers have no problem whatsoever in letting go, and altering their sound accordingly. Yet others have such an inherent sense of suffering and pain, or are so stuck in attached to one emotional way of being that their lighthearted singing fails to convince.

Then there are the singers with special gifts:

--- The radiance and impeccability of Elly Ameling [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYbomphH-lM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYbomphH-lM)

--- The golden light, charm, devotion, and disarming depth of Elisabeth Schumann [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6_qSBvX8rw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6_qSBvX8rw)

--- The vocal profundity and uncommon sensitivity of basso Alexander Kipnis [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pikf4oGW5HI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pikf4oGW5HI)

--- The elegance, tenderness, caress, and impeccable enunciation of baritone Gerard Souzay [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLx8gHxnGKQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLx8gHxnGKQ)

--- The extraordinary depth, sweetness, dynamic range, and insights of baritone Matthias Goerne [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MH1lD819h9Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MH1lD819h9Q)
The smooth sensuality of Susan Graham

The sincerity, honesty, beauty of voice, and sacred faith of Janet Baker

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson

...and Kathleen Ferrier:

---The downward portamento, sadness, exquisite phrasing, and surprisingly pure top that rises out of the depths of Maggie Teyte

---The passion, thrill, nostalgia, wisdom, vibrancy, and heart of Lotte Lehmann;

---And the gifts of the other singers mentioned in this introduction come immediately to mind. Need I say that they all have very different, often astoundingly beautiful voices?

I am hardly a proponent of YouTube as a source of vocal music. The sound quality is inferior, and far too many of the audio and video performances posted on the site are ripped off and posted illegally. Nonetheless, the place is a goldmine, both for first-listens that can lead to subsequent acquisitions in better sound, and for rare material that is available nowhere else.

Hence, to YouTube we shall head once again to discover how much poetic depth the great bass-baritone Hans Hotter and pianist Gerald Moore share in this set of seven Schubert songs (lieder):

Hotter was 40 at the time he recorded these in 1949, and had already been singing professionally for 19 years. His great Wagner recordings with Keilberth and Solti were yet to come.

Although Hotter is best known to opera lovers as the supreme embodiment of Wagner’s thunderous god, Wotan, he pares down his huge voice to begin with Schubert’s sacred hymn to music, "An die Musik".

Below is the translation of the song. (Translations for the remainder of the songs in Hotter’s set, as well as for other songs discussed in this article, may be found online through simple Google searches.)

Du holde Kunst, in wieviel grauen Stunden,
Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt,
Hast du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb' entzunden,
Hast mich in eine beßre Welt entrückt,
In eine beßre Welt entrückt!

Oft hat ein Seufzer, deiner Harf' entflossen,
Ein süßer, heiliger Akkord von dir,

---The向下滑动的港amento，悲伤，精致的韵律，和令人惊讶地纯洁的顶部，这来自于Maggie Teyte

---The passion, thrill, nostalgia, wisdom, vibrancy, and heart of Lotte Lehmann;

---And the gifts of the other singers mentioned in this introduction come immediately to mind. Need I say that they all have very different, often astoundingly beautiful voices?

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Hast mich in eine beßre Welt entrückt,
In eine beßre Welt entrückt!

Oft hat ein Seufzer, deiner Harf' entflossen,
Ein süßer, heiliger Akkord von dir,
Den Himmel bessrer Zeiten mir erschlossen,
Du holde Kunst, ich danke dir dafür,
Du holde Kunst, ich danke dir!

You, noble Art, in how many grey hours,
When life's mad tumult wraps around me,

Have you kindled my heart to warm love,
Have you transported me into a better world,
Transported into a better world!

Often has a sigh flowing out from your harp,
A sweet, divine harmony from you

Unlocked to me the heaven of better times,
You, noble Art, I thank you for it,
You, noble Art, I thank you!

As the set continues, Hotter intersperses soft and lyrical songs with others far more declamatory. In the span of 20 minutes, we discover that the man who could rage like the best, and then imbue his voice with extraordinary compassion, can bare his soul without restraint as he conveys a vast range of emotions, some of which are quite intimate.

Hotter’s set concludes with two of Schubert’s settings of poems by Goethe, “Wanderers Nachtlied” (Wanderers Night Song) I and II. Hotter recorded both songs – especially “Wanderers Nachtlied II,” on multiple occasions, with every performance differing in tempo, phrasing, and word emphasis. His conclusion to the second song, where he sings of the peace that comes with surrender, sleep, and death, is as mesmerizing as it is profound. This is great artistry.

In Part Two of this introduction to art song, we’ll listen to multiple interpretations of the same song, and then discuss one of the leading exponents of art song in the latter half of the 20th century.
Always Be Closing

FEATURED

Written by Charles Rodrigues
"... Yes, I'm the one who sold you that $185,000 'ultimate stereo system' in October... I was wondering if you were interested in upgrading...?"
Is it truly superior if it has not one, but two iterations of eq; an extra gain stage; a signal-to-noise ratio that is definitely not so superior; inner-groove distortion; variable performance; and it is especially prone to errors in set-up?

The reason I ask is that – despite the issues above and many more below - many LP lovers present the sound from their LPs as the ultimate in reference quality playback. But is it?

Please note – this article is NOT about vinyl not being worthwhile or anything comparable. But hey - since it’s most likely that a number of Copper readers are vinylphiles, I thought it’d be a good idea to make them angry. NOT! ☺

However, I do want to say a few things that might make some readers unhappy. So please consider this a thought piece – another viewpoint.

**Cringeworthy?**

In my travels, attending and participating in shows, dealer events, and countless voicing sessions, including those going back for over 35 years, I have almost never encountered a turntable that I thought was set-up as well as it could have been. That’s right, I’ve hardly ever heard one that I thought was delivering all of the music!

This includes all audiophiles’ turntables, as well as those set up by most dealers, manufacturers, & reviewers, and yes - tt set-up gurus. Although, to be fair, I’ve not heard a complete turntable set-up by all of the acknowledged gurus, including Michael Fremer.
I realize that somewhere in audioland, there have to be some turntables that are performing as well as they should. It’d just that I haven’t encountered them.

The bad news is that — in my experience (over a thousand tts), almost all of them could have been better. Some ‘tables needed just a bit of help — and sadly, some required a lot. The good news is that — at least in recent times (thanks to more knowledge & equipment available to effect proper mechanical set-up) — typically, it didn’t take much time nor effort to bring about a significant improvement.

When I had the opportunity to experiment, it always proved to be the case that I could make that vinyl-playing-rig sound better. And it often didn’t take long to do it.

Maybe that’s why I cringe when I see audiophiles claiming their ‘tables sound so good. They might sound OK, but are they playing at the level that they could? Probably not.

To be fair, who knows what our vinyl replay is really supposed to sound like? The truth is, none of us have that information, and (with a few notable exceptions) that may include the mastering engineer.

**Turning it up to 11**

1) Most of us fancy ourselves as purists who wouldn’t sully our rigs with EQ – analog or digital. I can recall very few audiophiles ever answering YES to this question: “Would you use a full-range equalizer in your system?”

Yet every time we play an LP, the sound has gone through not one, but two levels of EQ! First, the RIAA mastering curve is introduced to the LP itself, and then we must play the LP back through a phono preamp stage that contains (hopefully) the mirror image EQ to get us back to “flat” response.

This situation assumes precisely mirror-imaged curves (recording & playback), which, truth be told, occurs less frequently than we might think. Different labels introduce slightly different emphasis. Earlier, pre-RIAA recordings used their own “in-house” EQ curves. So we have two levels of the dreaded EQ, and they may not be accurately EQ’d for some of our recordings anyway.

2) Most audiophiles pay attention when they see a design that has managed to dispense with an extra gain stage, but for some reason, we give the additional – relatively high-gain – phono-stage a pass. Additionally, especially if we have moving-coil cartridges, then we may opt to purchase a high-quality outboard phono-preamp. Same EQ concern, only now we’ve introduced even more variables - probably even more gain required, plus we’ve added additional cables and connections into the equation. Of course, this is totally against what we attest to believe is best – fewest gain stages, fewest connections & cables, but, hey, this is analog, so fuggedaboutit!

3) Sadly, no engineering breakthroughs have occurred that significantly reduce inner groove distortion – it’s simply a part of the vinyl LP package.

4) You do know that no two phono cartridges ever sound the same, right? Question – is the one that you own the best of its breed? Have you compared it to other cartridges of the same manufacturer and model number? Just asking... 😊

5) The varying thickness of LPs will mean that you often will not be playing your LPs at the optimum SRA. In other words, variable performance is guaranteed. Are you going to readjust for every record, or simply live with the resultant degradation in sound? There is a way to address this issue, but do you know about it?
6) As someone who has made hundreds of master recordings - both 30 IPS analog and digital – this needs to be said: The tape master ALWAYS makes the LP sound broken – lacking in dynamics, presence & tone. As an example, consider the well-deserved reputation for excellence that Peter McGrath’s digital master recordings always receive at various audio exhibits.

No turntable – at any price – can bridge the inherent gap between the master tape and the mastered LP. It is HUGE – and *that comparison assumes the use of a correctly set-up turntable/phono-stage rig.*

7) These days, anyone who is willing to go to the effort and expense of playing vinyl LPs should have managed to properly execute the basic mechanical aspects of setting up their turntable. And now, there are a number of useful tools that make the mechanical aspect of the task achievable. When I mention that I still encounter turntables that fall short, it’s rarely from the mechanical set-up side – overhang, azimuth, etc. That’s good news indeed. The one mechanical aspect that often can still be addressed is turntable isolation.

8) One more mechanical aspect that can sometimes be addressed would be the variable-ratio-of-moment-of-inertia of the tone-arm counterweight and cartridge (when the option is available). An important aspect, yet rarely discussed.

9) The areas that seem to consistently benefit from a bit more work are phono cartridge loading (for moving coils), vertical tracking force, VTA/SRA, and anti-skate. I do NOT feel that gauges can get this job done – you need to LISTEN to the effects of all of them. And they are inter-related – as is room temperature(!)

10) If the main system hasn’t been dialed in to properly “play the room” how can the vinyl lover possibly know if his/her adjustments are going in the right direction? This reminds me of a few *RoomPlay Reference* clients who come here, and at some point, ask to hear their CD, because – as they say – they “know it”. IMO, they almost certainly do NOT know it, but I try not to say that – at least not right away.

11) Finally, need I mention LP surface noise?

*A finyl word*

When a digital system is done right, or at least *pretty well*, the music can flow and pluck your heartstrings. Although I love to listen to my vinyl, I haven’t in several years, preferring for a number of reasons to pursue making my digital archives the medium of choice.

FWIW – many *RoomPlay Reference* visitors who come here assume – *and often mention* – that one reason the sound is so listenable here is that I am playing “Hi-Rez” digital, but no, it’s simply 16/44.1 material. This news usually comes as a big surprise to them.

No one ever complains or expresses a desire to hear vinyl. Most say it is the best sound they ever heard, and more than a few are vinyl enthusiasts. Maybe it’s just an unusually polite crowd, who knows?

It would be nice if some audiophiles would stop and think before declaring that their vinyl playback is the *superior/more accurate/higher resolution* music playback medium. Maybe it is - *IF* they have overcome the 11 issues listed above.

*Finylly*, many of the current digital product offerings are definitely worth the effort of exploring, if for no other reason than archiving your beloved analog LPs. And yes, in some cases, *better sound.*
There, I said it.

Surely, everyone agrees, right?

[This is an edited/updated version of an article that Jim wrote for *Copper #26*. That piece provoked so much comment that I asked him to take another look at the subject of vinyl playback. You can also read more of Jim’s writings [here](#). ---*Ed.*]
The Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco

PARTING SHOT

Taken by Bill Leebens