Welcome to Copper #53!

Our very first issue appeared on March 7, 2016. It's hard to believe that we've been at this for two years now; we've come a long way since then, in terms of content, layout, and circulation. We've got big plans for the future, and hope you stick with us in the months (and years!) to come.

John Seetoo continues our look at the history of pioneering label Audio Fidelity. In this issue, John interviews Bobby Pulhemus, who recorded on AF as "Bobby Palomino", lead guitarist of the Beatles-esque NY group, The Teemates. I think you'll find the story of The Teemates interesting—and sad. In our other featured article, Gautam Raja brings us his thoughts on what it means to be a true non-believer.

Professor Schenbeck leads off the issue with the terrifying words, "Choose your parents carefully"—and goes on to tell us about musical daughters. Dan Schwartz tells us about playing in the Buffalo Springfield tribute concert with the Wild Honey Orchestra; Richard Murison goes off the rails—on cross-country skis; Jay Jay French remembers forty years of speakers; Roy Hall goes out to the middle of nowhere, for real; Anne E. Johnson tells us about the indie group Piano Club, which rarely uses a piano (?!?); Woody Woodward just gets started on the subject of rockabilly—and go, cat, go! Industry News brings news of changes at Sony, and the soap opera that is—you guessed it—and I write about fun, and oxymorons. Anne will be back next issue with another Something Old/Something New survey review.

Copper #53 wraps up with another classic audio cartoon from Charles Rodrigues, and a Parting Shot from Vasilis Lakakis. It may be a little fuzzy, but I found it amusing—I hope you do, too.

I'd like to thank all our readers for supporting us for two years, and to thank all our contributors, without whom we'd have nothing to share. A special tip of the Leebens Lid to those relentlessly-faithful writers who have been in all 53 issues: Dan Schwartz and Richard Murison. Duncan Taylor was in all 52 issues preceding this one; Dunc has left to pursue other interests. I thank him for all his contributions, and wish him all the best.

Enjoy our Anniversary Edition, and we'll see you next issue!

Cheers, Leebs
Choose your parents carefully.

That’s probably the best advice anyone can offer a young person who wants to become a composer. It helps a lot if your mom or dad is okay with you taking up a career that demands major training—the expensive kind—and no guarantees whatsoever of wide recognition, let alone financial reward. You have to love it, and you have to be really good at it.

Not just the notes-and-rhythms part. Also the believe-in-yourself part, the constant-self-promotion part, the make-influential-friends part, the can-I-sleep-on-your-couch-tonight part. Fortunately there’s more support now for struggling young composers than there was a hundred years ago. You no longer have to be the son of a court musician (Mozart, Beethoven, Richard Strauss) or the son of someone very rich. You don’t have to be anyone’s son.

Last month I got around to hearing more Icelandic music, which provided a further awakening. The young composers represented on Recurrence (Sono Luminus DSL-92213) are Thuridur Jónsdóttir, Maria Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Hlynur A. Vilmarsson, and Daniel Bjarnason. Yes, three of them are women, including the best-known of the lot. As Iceland’s patronymic naming tradition reminds us, they are daughters.

For the record, it’s a terrific record! I was particularly drawn to the tracks from Jónsdóttir, Sigfúsdóttir, and Vilmarsson. Right now, the cliché out there is that Icelandic music is All About Landscape. Maybe so, but each artist brings her own distinctive stylings to it. In his liner notes, Steve Smith of National Sawdust says that Jónsdóttir’s Flow and Fusion, “with its seamless blend of acoustic and electronic sounds, conjures the ineffable chiaroscuro of Iceland’s sky.” I prefer to think I’m hearing luminescent, fine-textured sheets of sound that continuously morph into new colors, interspersed with occasional crunchier interludes:
For Smith, “the barbaric jolts, judders, slides, and shrieks of Vilmarsson’s bd suggest the seismic forces that shaped . . . Iceland’s profile.” Well, I liked that it has a beat. Close your eyes, turn it up, see what these sounds suggest to you.

Vilmarsson played in rock bands and learned new tech tricks at the Reykjavik Media Lab. Sigfúsdóttir also has a “band,” amiina, and writes film and dance music. You will remember Thorvaldsdottir, at 40 not quite the Grand Dame of New Icelandic Music (Björk is twelve years older), from her album In the Light of Air. Hmm, maybe she brought The Dans to Reykjavik to record this collection in Sono Luminus’s usual glistening, spacious sound. Bravo.

Also from Sono Luminus: the Jasper String Quartet’s Unbound (DSL-92212), featuring seven works all written since the turn of the new century. I especially liked Missy Mazzoli’s Death Valley Junction (2010), her tribute to a strange little “town” on the California-Nevada border. One of its three residents, Marta Becket, restored a crumbling opera house there fifty years ago and performed one-woman shows weekly until her retirement in 2009. (She was 86.)

The Jaspers—two women, two men—focus on promoting and performing new music. Besides Mazzoli’s piece, Unbound includes engaging pieces by Caroline Shaw (Pulitzer Prize, 2013), Annie Gosfield (a Jaspers commission), David Lang (Pulitzer Prize, 2008), Judd Greenstein, Donnacha Denney, and Ted Hearne. The composers contributed their own unusually helpful program notes. Great sound, of course. If you’ve ever wondered why composers are still attracted to the string quartet, give this a listen.

Incidentally, Caroline Shaw was neither the first nor the most recent woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in Music; she shares the honor with five others—see a list here. She was the youngest person ever to win it, though. Her mother was her first teacher; she got her Ph.D. in composition from Princeton; she has co-produced several tracks with Kanye West, crafting remixes that highlight her vocals; her great-great-grandfather was Chang Bunker. Fun facts, right? (Somewhere an aging Princetonian is wondering why his brain hurts.)

Speaking of daughters, here are two more: Lisa Bielawa and Roxanna Panufnik. You may know Ms. Panufnik (b. 1968) through her collaboration with British violinist Tasmin Little. She contributed Four World Seasons, a concerto for violin, string orchestra, and Tibetan prayer bowl, to Ms. Little’s recent Chandos recording (CHSA 5175) of Vivaldi’s Four Seasons.

Ms. Panufnik’s father was the renowned Polish composer Sir Andrzei Panufnik (1914–1991), who defected to the UK in 1954 and shortly thereafter became conductor of the City of Birmingham
Symphony, among other things. Roxanna was the happy product of his second British marriage, to author and photographer Camilla Jessel (some family photos here).

Lisa Bielawa (also b. 1968) is the daughter of composer Herbert Bielawa (1930–2015), active in the Bay Area for many years; you can read about the community values Lisa absorbed from her dad here. Incidentally, like Caroline Shaw, Kati Agócs, Sylvia McNair, and the late Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, she’s a violinist/singer. Has that become a Thing? (Only if you’re good enough, I suspect.) Bielawa and composer Kati Agócs are both soprano soloists on a recent SACD from Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Kati Agócs: The Debrecen Passion (BMOP/sound 1046).

Lisa Bielawa got her own double-disc collection (BMOP/sound 1017) out of a three-season residency she held beginning in 2006. One disc is taken up by 15 Synopses, brief solo sketches made for and with individuals in the orchestra that explore the range and character of an instrument—and often the personality of the player as well. Each gets a six-word title inspired by Hemingway’s famous “For sale, baby shoes: never used.” Here’s I Don’t Even Play the Bassoon, written for violist Kate Vincent:

Program annotator Robert Kirzinger notes that Bielawa initiated the Synopses “as a way to enrich . . . her relationships with core members of the orchestra.” These were eventually folded into a culminating orchestral work, In medias res, where they served as “flashbacks” or concertino sections within a large-scale concerto for orchestra. Also on the other disc are Roam, a tone poem inspired by a passage from Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, and a Double Violin Concerto for the Silk Road Ensemble’s Colin Jacobsen and violinist/singer (!) Carla Kihlstedt. The process reflects Bielawa’s embrace of her colleagues as the “direct source of the contexts and content of her work.” She is a born collaborator, a nurturer of communities who translates her interactions into new music. It doesn’t seem wrong to add that, in doing so, she is playing a role more often associated in Western culture with women than with men. Here’s a bit of In medias res:

Whereas Bielawa typically builds musical sentences and paragraphs in steady, low-key fashion (the NY Times once described her work as “ruminative and . . . slightly tart”), her younger colleague Kati Agócs (b. 1975) draws upon a headier mixture of cultural references—she’s Canadian (born in rural Ontario), American (educated at Sarah Lawrence and Juilliard inter alia), and Hungarian (via her father’s family). The music on her BMOP collection is correspondingly more dramatic, spicy, and culturally specific.

Agócs’ album is available on YouTube, the first track and biggest work being Debrecen Passion. Just as Bach’s Passions use diverse textual sources (the Bible, old German hymns, operatic recitatives and poetically subjective arias), so does Agócs juxtapose the work of Hungarian poet Szilárd Borbély, a Kabbalistic prayer, a Medieval Georgian hymn, and other Medieval lyrics, including a joyful parody of the old Latin sequence Stabat Mater Dolorosa. (See complete text here.) But whereas a traditional Passion setting attempts to assign meaning to the suffering and death of Christ, Agócs goes for a mystic but universalizing celebration of ways in which life and hope are renewed, implicitly focusing on the work of bearing and raising children. This music is indeed spicy and dramatic enough to make her celebration enjoyable even if you can’t follow the texts—you’ll hear a mixture of Messiaen, Bartók, Ligeti, and Gregorian chant that somehow emerges as pure Agócs. It’s about 20 minutes long, so you may want to start with a highlights reel: begin at 3’20”, a colorful instrumental interlude that leads to 3’55”, the Stabat Mater parody, which builds to an ecstatic climax at 7’15”, which leads to “En nem tudok…” at 8’40”. Further along, listeners are rewarded with an even more ecstatic, loopy finale that shows off the vocal talents of the all-female Lorelei Ensemble in a breathtaking manner.
I could finish by telling you about one more daughter, Milica Djordjević (Wergo WER 6422 2), but we're over the word count already. It'll have to wait. In the meantime here's a taste of her "non-communication for solo contrabass," *Do you know how to bark?!*: 

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFzJv6vUqqM
Some friends of mine have been putting on a big rock show annually for the last few years, under the name Wild Honey, as a benefit for the Autism Think Tank. These are “tribute” shows, wherein local musicians and people who know, or in a couple cases were in, an old band gather on a stage to play the band’s songs.

Wild Honey has done a couple shows each of Fabs and Beach Boys albums, fan-favorite Big Star (with Jody Stephens playing in the band), last year they did the Band with Garth Hudson playing, and this year the lucky target was Buffalo Springfield, with Richie Furay playing quite a bit. Generally, these nights are for the obsessive pop audience in town, and for a large pack of musicians to get a chance to be around each other.
But I’ve only been to one show ("The White Album") and have never had an interest in playing in one --- until this year. What got me out of the house?

Claudia Lennear --- former Ikette, former Shelter Person (Leon Russell’s early band), allegedly the
reason for the song "Brown Sugar" (and featured in “20 Feet from Stardom”). It was a chance to play with her. Any song she wanted to do, I was in.

The rehearsals were long, and they were noisy, but come time for the show, at least what I saw side-stage, it was a pretty good show --- especially the 2nd half; the overall energy was more up (and the first half was plagued with tech problems, I’m told). Your host for the evening, music journalist Chris Morris, pulled me aside for a moment to rave.

There were 3 rehearsals: the first, just the band (stand-ins sang the lead parts) and the second two with Claudia. Aside from the long hours and all the waiting around, it was a lot of fun.

Here’s the set-list from the evening:

![Set-list image]

Some of these folks you’ve heard of, some you haven’t. Some were good, some great, and all were sincere as hell.

When our turn came--- for me, having never played on the stage and trapped behind a low wall of amps, things weren’t all that great. I enjoyed the rehearsals more. Other than the drums, and despite our volume, things sounded swimmy and vague.

But we soldiered on. My usual complaint about the immenseness of the stage applies here too --- but this time, it’s understandable. When, two songs later, everybody involved paraded out onto the stage
to sing behind Furay and Mickey Dolenz on “For What It’s Worth”, we filled the stage to the wings:

“Stop children
What’s that sound
Everybody look what’s going down”
A newbie wandering onto almost any audio website or forum might ask, after a brief perusal, "Jeez, why so serious? Why are they all so ANGRY??

"Is anybody having FUN??"

I know very well that we all have different concepts of "fun". I spent most of a tweenage summer vacation in a million-volume library, and I had tons of fun. Most would find that unbelievably boring, but I had a big ol' time. *Vintage Whine* this issue discusses the maybe-oxymoronic phrase, "serious hobbyist"; obviously, many folks devote a lot of passion and energy to their pastimes and projects. But how does that explain the often-vicious interchanges we see on special-interest discussion boards?

It's not just on audio boards. I've seen nasty outbursts on boards devoted to cars, engines, cameras, even graphic design. I won't even go near political discussion boards.

Why? Why does expressing an opinion open one up to vicious, personal attacks?

A favorite quote of cynics everywhere concerns academic politics. Often attributed to Henry Kissinger, but likely the utterance of political scientist Wallace Sayre, the line goes something like this: "Academic politics are so vicious precisely because the stakes are so small."

Several family members have been faculty or staff at schools, from grade-schools through graduate programs. My impression is that knives are out, much of the time--- for no real reason, with little to gain. My dentist dad---as straightforward a human as ever lived--- went from private practice to teaching at the university level, and was constantly bewildered and angered by the backbiting and
internecine feuding.

Is that the story with discussion boards? Do posters identify with their opinions, or their gear, so strongly that any question directed towards them is a threat? There's nothing, literally NOTHING at stake on the boards, unless one imbues one's positions or possessions with importance far beyond that which any reasonable soul would.

I don't pretend to understand, and I've been online for twenty years now. I've been attacked for being an expert, for not being an expert, for being American, for being UN-American, for being male, for being sympathetic to females...

You get the idea. Somewhere out there, there is likely someone who will take issue with not just your positions, but your person. Who will give you hell just for being YOU.

I think that's called bullying. And it's unnecessary and indefensible.

Rather than quote Henry Kissinger (or whomever), perhaps I should've misquoted the late Rodney King:

Can't we all just get along?
I expect all of you will be well familiar with skiing, that glamorous sport that involves hurtling from the top to the bottom of a snow-capped mountain, while dressed in an impossibly chic ensemble in all the very latest colours. And then there’s the après-ski, that exclusive mélange of cool parties, warm cocktails, and hot sex. That’s downhill skiing, and cross-country skiing is not at all like that. Cross-country skiing is what Russian snipers wearing white parkas do. [BTW, if a Russian sniper wearing a white parka is on your tail, you will never out run him. You should just sit down and await your fate. I saw a movie about that once.]

Downhill skiing requires a mountain, and, as you know, all mountains have snow on top of them. Mountains are everywhere, so downhill skiing is more or less everywhere … except Florida, because it has no mountains. Cross-country skiing, on the other hand, requires flat terrain and cold snow. Very cold snow. Lots of it. This is why the sport is unknown outside of those places that are under permanent snow coverage for three or more months of the year. Like Russia (with its white parka-clad snipers), Sweden, Norway, and the North Pole. Oh, and Montreal too.

Now, downhill skis are attached rigidly to your ski boots, which in turn grip your feet like a pair of John Gotti’s concrete socks. So your maneuvering is all done by subtle adjustment of your weight on the skis. And so long as you believe that to be the case you won’t need to panic too much. Compared to downhill skis, cross-country skis are much, much longer, and much, much narrower. So balancing on them is much, much more challenging. You attach them only to the toe of your boots. The attachment is not rigid like a downhill ski boot, but floppy, as though someone had tied your big toe to the ski with string. And your heel just sits loose. Also, if you were to fall over, unlike downhill ski boots, they won’t automatically come off. No, they will stay attached to your skis come what may. Nobody has yet found a way to detach a cross-country ski-boot from a cross-country ski.

Real, proper, expert cross-country skiers will head out across the virgin snow pack, clad in Lycra
with a backpack strapped on. The purpose of the backpack is unclear, but from a distance it can look like a sniper’s rifle, which is probably the look they are going for. The Lycra, too, is strange, since the temperature is going to freeze their nuts off, but it remains the look of choice. I guess they cycle a lot in the summer, and favor the opportunity to assert bragging rights with their ‘Linford’s lunch-box’. Unfortunately, at 20 degrees below zero, Linford’s lunch-box is quite a bit emptier.

This -20 degree temperature aspect is quite important. The reason is that the snow becomes hard, compact, and quite slippery at this temperature. At warmer, more comfortable temperatures, it will be wet and slushy, and instead of gliding through it your skis will get stuck in it, much like they would in a field of cream cheese. This is not so much of an issue when careening down the side of a mountain, but is much more problematic on the flat. So cross-country skiing is done in Baltic temperatures, where you don’t have to ask if it is Centigrade or Fahrenheit, because they’re not much different.

For recreational cross-country skiing, there are trail parks offering ‘groomed trails’. These comprise pairs of ski-width trenches in the snow which look and function like railway lines. With one ski in each trench, you can shuffle off to wherever the track takes you.

Unlike with downhill skiing, where you hurtle along at ever-increasing speed until you either reach the bottom or hit something, with cross-country skiing you apply a gentle push with your poles, together with a not-too-aggressive push-off with your stationary ski, and you suddenly find yourself gliding smoothly along. You’ll glide for about a foot – maybe two if you’re real good – but will then come to a halt and will have to start off again. Real experts can time the push-off of one stride with the stop of the previous stride’s glide. It’s a lot like walking, only slower, and with many more opportunities to fall over.

The train-track metaphor is a good one (or it could be a good simile, I’m never entirely sure), because, as with a train, you cannot actually steer a pair of cross-country skis. They only go where the track goes. So, if the track goes round a bend, you go round a bend. The only real problem is when you come to a junction, because cross-country ski trails don’t have ‘points’ as such to switch you from one track to the next. You just have to hope both skis take the same fork, otherwise you’ve got a bit of a problem.

Speaking of falling over, this is something that cross-country skiers must never do. The reason is not at all obvious. Sure it seems pretty much self evident that it must be exceedingly difficult getting up again with two 6ft-long slippery poles attached to your big toes – and it most certainly is. But that is not the reason. The reason is that in minus twenty degree temperatures, and dressed in Lycra, your butt-crack freezes over and you can no longer bend over. So if you should fall, you will keel over like a mythological Greek adventurer staring into the face of the Medusa, and freeze to death where you land. Perhaps your arms will drop off, Botticelli-style. In any case, you’ll remain there until the spring thaw, when someone will pop over and collect the bits. So don’t – just don’t –
I might have implied that cross-country skiing takes place on flat terrain, but you would be mistaken. There are hills and valleys in cross-country ski parks, just like in any other park. The hills are impossible to climb. Every smooth glide forward, comes with an equally smooth glide backwards again. The solution to this conundrum is to apply the exact correct grade of wax to the base of your skis, which provides the grip necessary to ascend. Trouble is, there are different waxes for every different snow condition that you are likely to encounter, and you can be sure that you will be find out that you have applied the wrong wax to your skis. This can be a cause of great anxiety at the start of every skiing session, as you agonize over which of the 175 available waxes is the correct wax for the conditions. But it really doesn’t matter, because the right wax, even if you manage to identify it and apply it, will wear completely off within the first 20 minutes, and there will be none left by the time you actually need it.

So the only way to ascend the hill is to adopt a grossly duck-footed stance, with your feet (attached, let’s not forget, to 6ft-long wooden poles) in the ten-minutes-to-two position. Adopting this posture, you can work your way up the hill in 3-inch increments. Providing, of course, you don’t tear one of the dozens of tendons involved in this maneuver which, for reasons God himself only knows, are affixed right behind your private parts. Even if you make it to the top of the hill, you will arrive exhausted.

But what goes up must come down. And at the end of every uphill section comes a downhill section. This is where you learn that those gentle glides you initiate with a casual push on the pole don’t always come to a grinding halt 12 inches further down the track. No, with a bit of a slope to help, the glide will continue a little bit further. In fact, it will gain speed, and will do so relentlessly. At this point, you would doubtless find yourself reflecting on something you had probably picked up on earlier, but had not bothered to think too deeply about, because there hadn’t been much cause to do so: There is no way to slow down on cross-country skis. Nope. None. You just keep going, faster and faster.

This a particularly troublesome issue because of one of the immutable rules of the cross-country ski trail: At the bottom of every hill is a bend. Now, bends are not a problem, you will recall, because, like a train on a railway line, the skis just follow the track. And that would be true, if not for the fact that, like with trains on a track, it only applies up to a certain speed. If this speed is exceeded, all bets are off. And at the bottom of every hill, just as you reach the bend, this speed is most assuredly being handsomely exceeded. So why, you might ask, do they always put a bend at the bottom of every hill? And the answer is simple. It is to avoid that ****ing big tree that you would slam into if you were to go straight on.

So at last, your cross-country endurance marathon is almost over. You have managed to avoid falling over. You have successfully negotiated the bend at the bottom of the hill, and have even climbed the other side without doing irreparable damage to your marital prospects. All you need to
do is complete the last quarter-mile section which, although squirrely, has at least none of the major hazards which are now behind you. Your quads, thighs, calves, groin and glutes are all ready to throw in the towel. Even so, all you have to do is keep your skis in the tracks for five more minutes and all should be well.

But no. All of the skiers who have come before you have also had quads, thighs, calves, groin and glutes which have thrown in the towel, and in the process of dragging themselves to the finish line they have managed to totally obliterate what was left of the groomed trail, of which there is now no sign whatsoever. So as you approach that gentle downhill S-bend, knowing that all you need to do is focus on keeping your skis inside the tracks that lead home, and let your speed and momentum do the rest, it comes as something of a shock to observe that the groomed tracks have all been ground away to nothing, and that each of your skis is now accelerating in whatever direction they have a mind to head in. One ski wants to go left. The other wants to go right. And in between is a ***ing big tree.

Oh crap.
As I bring this “Climbing to the Audio Summit” exercise to a close I am not just taken aback by the total amount of gear that I purchased over the years but also in the responses that many of you have contributed.

Because of some of your incredible lists I also have recalled items that I had forgotten.

In the amp list I forgot that I owned a Quad 405 amp/34 preamp combination (1983) . I also owned both a Crown DC 150 and a Crown DC 300 (1978). While Crowns have been shown to be reliable in professional sound reinforcement use, they were utterly terrible in regards to high end audio reproduction.

Having now just about ending this exercise, I have this observation:

Just look at how much money and time we have collectively spent in pursuing an the elusive “absolute sound”. 
How much have we spent “lifting the veils”.

Wallowing in the latest “jaw-dropping” gear and tweak.

We just seemingly couldn’t wait to call our friends and have them come over to hear the latest awesome audio breakthrough.

And, while I have had fun remembering what I bought and when, I also realize that there are many other products that have not been cataloged in this exercise.

Items like CD Players, cassette decks, reel to reel tape decks, tuners, LaserDisc Players, isolation devices, compressors, expanders, Dolby devices, equalizers, dust bugs, fluids, sprays, pens, belts, record cleaning machines, record weights, isolation cones, sorbothane feet, power conditioners and power cables and, of course, speaker and interconnect cables.

Just casually listing all this ‘other’ stuff has my head spinning not to mention all the magazines that influenced us (and our buying habits) such as (to name a few)


Let me just quickly address some of the above gear which, most notably, also coincides with items that are (by and large) no longer relevant in the hi end pantheon (exception: reel to reel tape decks, like some insanely priced record players, appear to be rising like a very, very rare phoenix at the highest and most esoteric levels of hi end.

**CD Players:** First owned was a portable Sony Walkman (1984) and currently a Marantz SA-10

**Cassette players:** First owned was an Advent 201 (1974) and at the present time only have an ION tape to PC deck for archival purposes.

**Reel to Reel tape recorders:** Revox A77 mk. 3 1970

None owned at the moment

**Tuners:** Last one owned was a Sherwood. None owned at the moment.

Back to the list...

**Speakers I have owned since 1967:**

KLH 6 1967

KLH 5 1967

AR 3A 1968

JBL L88 1970

JBL L100 1970
Double Advents (Large)  1970

Ohm Fs 1971

Bose 901’s  1972

Acutex  1977 (mini’s)

Altec Lansing 15   1977

Bertagni  Geostatic panels  1977 (duct-taped above the Altec 15s, driven by twin Phase Linear 400s--crazy!)
B & W DM-16  1983
Acoustat 2+2  1984
Apogee Duettas  1985
Spendor LS35a  1986
Thiel 1.5  1994
Vandersteen 2C  1996
Thiel 3.6  1998
Monitor Audio Silver 7’s  2004
Genelec 8030A     2009 (for studio recording analysis)
Adam “Pencils”  2012
ZVOX Sound bar (for home video)
Peachtree Deep Blue (for home video) 2015
Audioengine 2+2 (for computer)  2016
Wilson Sabrinas  2017

Next up: Equalizers: why they should no longer be a dirty 10-letter word.
“You won’t find a hotel room anywhere for the next 300 miles.”

We had stopped in a town called Glasgow, Montana, to gas up. I hail from Glasgow, Scotland, and I was curious to visit the namesake of my hometown. It was nothing like home. Glasgow, Scotland, is a dynamic city with over a million people. The one in Montana has about 3,000 souls, and looks like many small towns across the West, rather run down and past its prime. It was founded as a railroad town in the late 1800s but before that the plains around Glasgow were known for extensive buffalo and antelope herds that fed the nomadic Native American tribes.

This was our third cross-country trip. You have no idea of the scale and magnificent beauty of America until you drive across its endless prairies. This trip took us from New York to Philadelphia to Eastern Ohio, to Chicago and up to Madison, Wisconsin. South of Madison we picked up Route 18, a back road that goes west for over 1,000 miles to Casper, Wyoming. Our destinations were serendipitous, usually decided by the number of miles we wanted to drive that day. We would choose a destination, find a hotel, book it, and head off into the horizon. Using this method, we spent a night in Mason City, Iowa. At first glance it is just one of many Midwestern towns sprawling across the cornfields, but on arriving downtown we booked into a fully restored hotel designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. In addition to the hotel, Mason City has quite a few examples of Prairie School architecture, a style developed by Wright and some leading architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A famous son was Meredith Willson who wrote, *The Music Man*, and modeled River City on it. Who knew?

We continued on to Casper, Wyoming, and caught a rodeo there. We watched “cowboys” (mostly college students) chase, rope, and truss a calf in less than eight seconds. Amazing! Onward from there we went to Jackson Hole, also in Wyoming, where we hiked in the Grand Teton National Park. From there it was over the Teton mountain range to Boise, Idaho, where we met up with a couple who have a ranch a few hours west of the city. On the ranch our friends raise organic beef cattle that thrive on the rich range grassland. One day when out riding, I asked my host, “Where does your land end?” She pointed to the horizon and said, “Somewhere over there.”

From there we went north up to the panhandle and the Snake River. We passed stores with names like “Survival Solutions” and “Survival Enterprises”. We stopped at one grocery store and were met with silence and suspicious looks. Perhaps our old Jaguar with New York plates and blacked out windows had something to do with this. While there I picked up a local newspaper, which apart from being badly written, had an article about the recent bombing at the Boston Marathon. It talked
about the search and capture of one of the brothers who had planted the bomb. There had been a manhunt and a lockdown while the police searched. The paper described them as “the jackbooted Boston Police” going door to door in their search. I realized that some of the people who lived there had no idea what life in the East was like. Conversely, we had no idea what their life in Idaho was like.

In the middle of the panhandle, we entered the Nez Perce Indian Reservation, a people who used to inhabit most of Idaho, Oregon, and Montana, but had been relegated to a small part of Idaho. We gassed up at a general store and noticed that everyone who worked there wore t-shirts with a likeness of Chief Joseph, a revered heroic figure who had stood up to the army but eventually, to save the remaining members of his tribe, surrendered and agreed to move to the reservation. This happened in the 1870s. It seems that memories are long in this part of the country.

We passed through eastern Washington state and into Montana. At one point our GPS mistakenly took us up a back road that soon turned to gravel and then to dirt. We passed a long-abandoned silver mine, and also some houses ringed with tall fences topped with barbed wire. Large dogs prowled the perimeter so we did a quick U-turn and got the hell out of there. It took us 200 extra miles to get to our next destination in Montana where we visited a friend of ours, Gary, owner of a hi-fi store in Scottsdale, AZ. He was single-handedly building his dream house in a secluded wood near Thompson Falls.

While gassing up my 15-year-old Jaguar in Glasgow, something happened to the pressure in the pump, and I got splattered with gas. After I cleaned up we started a conversation with the owner who told us that because of the boom at the Bakken oil fields down the road (150 miles away) in Williston, North Dakota, no hotels were to be found for hundreds of miles. We asked if there was anything in town. He sent us to a large hotel but there was a railroad convention in town and they were fully booked. (It had never occurred to me that there were enough railroads in the US to hold a convention). I asked the receptionist if there was anything available nearby. She sized us up strangely and said, “You look like you may like the Fort Peck Hotel which is about 20 miles from here.” I called them up and a very friendly woman said she did have a room with a shower if we wanted it. It seemed an odd way to describe the room but I told her we would take it.

The drive to Fort Peck was spectacular. We were on US Route 2, a back road that runs from Everett, Washington, to Duluth, Minnesota, a distance of around 1,700 miles. We had picked it up earlier after spending a night in Glacier National Park. While there we hiked to Gunsight Lake then took a boat ride on Lake McDonald with a guide who was full of facts about the park. As always the National Park Service employees are extremely knowledgeable and courteous. They are truly a national treasure.

Having driven over 3,000 miles from New York, we were now on the way back east. As we approached Fort Peck, we passed buffalo, deer, and elk. We also saw many different types of birds, and as we had done for most of the trip, admired the endless and breathtaking scenery.

In the 1930s the WPA (Works Progress Administration) decided to build a dam in Fort Peck. The WPA was set up by FDR in the depression to provide work and wages for the unemployed. At one time it employed millions of people and was, in large part, responsible for pulling America out of the depression. It focused on public works like bridges, dams, parks, but also gave jobs to artists, actors, musicians, dramatists, and directors. At one point over 10,000 people worked on the Fort Peck Dam, which, in damming the Missouri river created the Fort Peck Lake.

The Fort Peck Hotel was built in the late-1930s as accommodation for the dam workers. It looks like buildings you see in the Adirondacks: a brown wooden structure with a grey roof. On entering the
lobby we were warmly welcomed by the owner. The furniture was rustic and worn, but in a good way. There was a bar, a fireplace with a large seating area; the walls were festooned with taxidermy. All sorts of critters were staring straight at us. The owner explained that we were lucky to get a room because only that day she had kicked out all the residents, rowdy oil workers from Williston, for disrespectful behavior. They disobeyed the rules and used hot plates, which overloaded the old wiring in the hotel. They were now gone and the hotel was very quiet. Our room was tiny and basic: two single beds, a nightstand, and a lamp. A toilet and a shower (obviously later additions) were squeezed into a corner; other rooms had no toilet and no shower. The hotel had been a dormitory when first built, and now it was just one stage above that. We didn’t care as we now had a bed for the night, and were totally seduced by the hotel itself.

We went down to the bar and met the owner’s husband, Carl Mann, who was charming and talkative. Unlike many innkeepers you meet, he was genuinely interested in where we came from and what we did. We asked about his life in Fort Peck. He told us he was an outfitter. Where I come from this means a haberdasher, but out here in the West, this means a man who takes you hunting. If you want a deer or an elk, Carl is the man to help you get it. He was so interesting that we hung around the bar talking, and instead of going out to eat at the only restaurant in the area, we stayed and ate bar food instead. One of the tales he told was about a group of “gentlemen” from New Jersey. They had sent ahead cases of red wine, and every evening after the hunt they would eat enormous portions of food, and drink gallons of wine. Even though they were all rather portly, they were expert shots, and killed quite a few deer. The kill was taken to a local man who butchered, vacuum-sealed, and froze the meat. On the day they left, they put the meat in their suitcases and took it to the airport. If he thought this was strange, he never let on.

He also is a big supporter of the Wounded Warrior Project and takes small groups of wounded veterans, from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, hunting. This affords them the opportunity to bond with other former soldiers, and helps in the healing process and the transition to civilian life.

One of Carl’s many skills was taxidermy; all the animals and birds mounted on the walls were shot and processed by him. My wife asked to buy a bird and we now have a stuffed Gambel’s quail sitting in our living room.

The next day, after a sumptuous breakfast we started driving east on Route 2. About 50 miles down the road, the vista changed dramatically. For two weeks we had been driving through some of the most exquisite scenery in America, and suddenly everything changed. It was like a James Bond movie where 007 goes over a ridge and suddenly an enormous industrial facility stretching out to the horizon comes into view. There were derricks and pipes and warehouses and RVs and pre-fab buildings strewn around at random. The rutted roads were full of large trucks. There were billboards advertising housing—one-bedroom apartments for $2,500 per month, this in rural North Dakota, not New York City. The devastation before us was the result of rampant fracking. The damage was so intense that we decided to leave Route 2 and head south towards Fargo, North Dakota. Because of the density of the traffic (most roads were just two lanes) it took us three hours to leave this tiny town.

Although I had grown up in an industrial city, the shock of witnessing the rape of previously pristine land after travelling for weeks through unparalleled beauty, depressed me profoundly. With heavy hearts, our wounded souls turned towards the East and headed home.
In *Copper* #52 we began poring through a collection of audio ephemera gathered by Dr. James McVay, the grandfather of fellow columnist Duncan Taylor. Dunc brought in a binder full of material from the ‘50s through the ’70s, and further complicated the sorting-out of things by bringing in a second binder. Of. More. Stuff.

Dr. McVay was seriously afflicted with audiophilia; like many audiophiles with scientific training, he set out to verify for himself the performance of a number of component elements of his system. He tested a variety of different amps and speakers, hand-plotting frequency response on semi-log graph paper, charting the differences made by crossover changes, different component values in the Williamson amp he built, and so on. There are a number of handwritten notes with detailed calculations for all the permutations; fascinating stuff until the fountain pen scratches become indecipherable—he was a doctor, after all.

We often describe a dedicated amateur as a “serious hobbyist”, which seems a bit oxymoronic, along the lines of “jumbo shrimp”. Origins of the word “hobby” are unclear, but there’s no denying its association with a hobby horse, the rocking horse-replica ridden by small children. How the leap was made from that to “a dedicated pastime” is unclear, although one etymological source theorizes that
the link is that both are "an activity that doesn't go anywhere". That seems to me to be cruel enough to be factual.

At any rate, Dr. McVay was indeed a dedicated amateur, a serious hobbyist. While he went through many different pieces of gear through the years, he held on to a Williamson amp that he built in the early '50s, and which Duncan still has today. The who, how, and why of the Williamson amp will likely be the subject of a future Vintage Whine or two, but in brief, the Williamson was a mono amp detailed by engineer DTN Williamson, described in a series of articles that ran in Wireless World in 1947, with revisions and addenda published in 1949. For many years the amp was a favorite of hobbyists due to its relative simplicity of construction and very low distortion.

These days, the Williamson's high levels of feedback has caused it to lose favor among valve aficionados---but for many years, it was king. It was so popular that Wireless World reprinted Williamson's articles in a booklet...this booklet:
As you can tell from the booklet’s condition, the price of three shillings, sixpence, and Dr. McVay’s signature---this has been around a while. The pages are rounded and dog-eared, some schematics have notations written upon them. It was clearly used and repeatedly referred to. Back in the ‘90s, *Audio Amateur* magazine reprinted the booklet; while presently out of print, copies of both the
original and the reprint can be found on Amazon and eBay.

At the heart of the Williamson amp were transformers designed and built by the UK firm Partridge Transformers Ltd. There was a brochure and letter from Partridges:

The Williamson amp was part of the system measured in 1951 (also seen in the header pic):

Similar graphs plotted the results of 1952 crossover experiments:
Even twenty years later, the Williamson amp was still in the picture, as component elements were checked to see if they were still in spec:
Systems come, systems go, and audiophiles rarely chart the changes. It was fascinating to me to see the documented efforts of a dedicated and painstaking audio amateur over the course of several decades. Thanks to Duncan Taylor for sharing this material with all of us.
Their lead singer and songwriter goes by the cool-cat name of Anthony Sinatra, so you know they take pop vocal music seriously. Still, Piano Club, which has been recording and performing in Belgium for over a decade—singing in English—hasn’t made a dent in the America market. Maybe that’s because, in the purest indie fashion, they’ve never had a record deal; the only way to buy their tracks is through Bandcamp.com.

Sinatra, who also fronts the Liège-based Hollywood Porn Stars, has a long-standing reputation in Belgium as writer, producer, performer, and music coach. The 2017 De6bel ---not a typo!---Awards nominee for musician of the year is obviously besotted with hits from his early childhood: the man loves every subgenre of synthpop, but he respects classic rock instruments and tropes, too.

Piano Club is aptly named for two reasons. First, the group is as much a club or collective as it is a traditional band, with some members stepping in only for a track here and there. The featured photo on the band’s website shows 11 people, but some live performance videos feature only four or five musicians onstage.

And then there’s the other definition of “club,” just as appropriate, as you can hear on their first full-length album, Andromedia, from 2010. That’s club as in nightclub. Piano Club makes music to dance to.

The song “Not Too Old” opens with a synthesizer fanfare in a ragged rhythm. You can just picture the strobe lights and the crowd of jittering bodies on the floor. It’s a high-octane sound that becomes even more intriguing once the verse starts and a tuba-like melody plays against the fragmented vocal line.

Clubbing is usually an escape from the cares of the real world. But this song is desperate, bringing the real world into the safe space. Specifically, it’s the desperation of aging. One source I found claimed Sinatra was born in 1979, so yes, that’s authentic stress in Sinatra’s lyrics as he watches middle age come rolling at him: “I can see the changes around me…I don’t want to be left behind.” As fun as they are, the textures and rhythms of this song are a little frightening.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYv6L7VpmK4

“Elephant in a Room,” also on Andromedia, has a more open and relaxed sound. This chord-based synthpop is an obvious nod to ABBA. This Piano Club’s most popular song (55,000 views on YouTube), and it’s not surprising, given how accessible every aspect of it is, including its “I’ll always
be there for you” message and toe-tapping chorus.

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

Much more interesting and daring is “The Lost Words.” It’s minor and dissonant in the verses, a conversation between Sinatra and a low synth line. Some Depeche Mode influence is not out of the question. The chorus opens into a major key with conventional chordal backing, which is odd considering the frustration in the lyrics: “I’ll never find the words you want to hear / I’ll never really understand how you feel.” I keep waiting for the next verse to bring back the creepy and compelling minor. The bridge at around 2:08 pits low against high, legato against sibilant in the synth:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbG_2qrGUDQ

Another of the band’s most popular numbers is “Ain’t No Mountain High.” (No, it’s not related to the Marvin Gaye / Tammi Terrell hit.) This song, from the 2013 album Colore, relies on a wistfully wobbly string-orchestra voice patch, accompanied by floating faux chorus. As is normal in the genre, the band avoids patches that sound like natural instruments; it’s all about waving that synth flag proudly!

Super-fast runs in the intro, a nod to the video game-inspired synth subgenre called chiptune, segue into the actual song and then return as a motif throughout. The nasal quality of Sinatra’s singing brings to mind Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d60RZ0LvV1M

“Esther” shows a different side of the band, partly thanks to a lead vocal by Lylou, another Liège-based indie artist. She doesn’t push the emotions of what seems to be a plea from an impatient lover to a recalcitrant one; she lets the minor key and the downward-dipping phrases bring out the darkness.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyjZeIG8GQI

Piano Club’s most recent full album is Fantasy Walk, from 2016. Their own press statement describes the song “Comets” as an “epic pop single.” I don’t know about epic, but it’s certainly a pop single, with a simple, head-bopping beat, breathy female voices (a new addition for this album), and barely sensible lyrics. What sets “Comets” apart from the most sugary of synthpop hits is the stereophonic guitar riffs passed back and fourth over that relentless pulsing, giving it a depth by acknowledging the existence of non-digital instruments.

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

Sinatra’s subtle and ironic sense of humor is on display in “Crocodiles,” which reminds us in a lively, reggae-inspired tune, “As soon as you are born, you start to die.” While his English diction might
lack consonants at times, Sinatra knows how to craft an interesting melody and sing it well. This particular video demonstrates just what a big team effort is required to create a Piano Club song. I love the fact that there’s an individual playing each layer live, although they could easily have prerecorded most of these sounds and performed as a small group to a backing track.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3GShru2v5w

Piano Club’s latest effort is the 2018 EP *Think for Yourself*. The title track features a talented and original Belgian rapper called Blu Samu. For the first two minutes, this is just a mellow disco number. Then Blu Samu drops her rhymes neatly into the funky beat. Synthpop rap? It was the obvious next step, I suppose.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv-Ezcc_h6o

While Piano Club might not have a profound message driving their songs, they do have a musical announcement for anyone who will listen: Keep an ear tuned into the Belgian indie scene.
Dave turned onto 13th Ave that runs west out of Ames Iowa, and into the farm country for a Sunday drive with Penny. Dave’s dad had recently bought a ’56 Chevrolet Bel Air hardtop, India Ivory over Nassau Blue. Dad ordinarily would not have loaned Dave his new baby, but he liked Penny, and Dave had recently gotten a job at the mercantile on the corner of 9th and Wilson showing the first signs of responsibility. Pop was feeling magnanimous. Both parents had high hopes that when Dave and Penny graduated high school the following summer Dave would follow his dad into the feed business, marry Penny and settle into the sweet life of Ames.

Dave’s parents had a right to worry and do all they could to make Dave happy and get him grounded as he approached adulthood, which in 1956 Iowa came at 18. Dave did not have the educational skills to go to university, and that was fine. 75% of the people who grew up in Ames never went to college and had for 150 years settled into the sound life of farming and farming support in Ames that had been good enough for generations. But Dave was not happy and Mom and Pop hadn’t a clue as to why. Neither, by the way, did Dave.

After the war the US had exploded with opportunity and wanderlust. Dave’s generation was the first of teenagers that realized there was a huge world out there and all you needed was a car. Breaking out from your parents’ world suddenly didn’t seem impossible and started to become necessary.

Dave had a friend at Ames High who’d bought a 1954 Ducati Gran Sport and was planning to take the bike out to California when they graduated. Spit Winkler, who was given his nickname because he earned it, was pretty wild and a year older than Dave because they kept him back in the second grade when Spit let the air out of Mrs. Desmond’s tires on her ’42 Studebaker.

But the idea had captured Dave. As he drove out into farm country, with the wind through the open
window blowing around strands of Penny's hair, Dave went over the plan in his head for the 473rd time. He would work at the mercantile until graduation, which was in 8 months. Old Mr. Owens would let Dave work as many hours as he wanted because his kids were worthless trouser shitters. He gave Dave a really good wage of $1.80/hr. He would have to quit football (which would cheese both his parents right out) but he could probably do 25 hours a week working 12 on Saturday. In 8 months he could amass a fortune close to $1000 which would be enough to put him on some boss wheels. He would have to become a monk, and he would have to lose Penny (another cheesy moment). She was sweet and a great girl, but she was expensive. This bird expected presents on Flag Day.

"A penny for your thoughts, honey." This was her favorite joke.

"Nuthin Babe. Just daydreamin."

Let's see. US 69 would take me all the way down to the 66 east of OK City and just south of Muskogee. Then. Then Penny turned on the radio and Dave's brain was dancing to Chuck Berry. Suddenly the soft summer afternoon embraced them both with the sun turning the sky from Nassau Blue to cloud born patches of Matador Red. The image of Route 66 became blurred when Penny asked him to pull the car over between some fields.

The music of the 40's and early 50's had begun to morph into what would become known as rock, or jump blues or rockabilly, starting believe it or not, with Hank Williams in the late 40's. I spent a considerable time looking for the early guys and it's a very murky period in music history. I'm going to put first this Williams song from 1947 because the kids born in the mid 30's that would become the stars of rockabilly would have heard this song on the radio when they were in early teen years. From 1947, 'Move It On Over' with a vanguard guitar solo that had rockabilly written all over it. Zeke Turner on guitar.

http://youtu.be/-Lza3NVH6Ig

Ok all you Texas Swing guys just sit back down. I get it. But dude. That guitar solo.

Music would go 4 years before turning in a rock tune written by Jackie Brenston and Ike Turner with Ike's Kings of Rhythm band. That's right, that Ike. I know, I know, the argument about the first rock song/band is fraught with idiots and jester philosophers with their claims and boasts. Remember my threat of a posse in my last piece. I submit this because there's a great story and it was early.

And, enter Sam Phillips. This is how shit happens.

In their haste to get to the studio in Memphis the band had an amp fall out of the back of the trunk. When they got in the studio the amp appeared to be broken, emitting the fuzzy distorted sound of a busted speaker cone. Philips went to a diner next door, got some paper and stuffed it into the cone, resulting in the sound we have here. Soon Everybody wanted to know how to get that sound. And the band played on.

Appropriately enough named for a car, from 1951 'Rocket 88'.

http://youtu.be/GbfnhIoVTk0
Um, sorry about the cuts to the girl getting dressed. [OMG! Bettie Page!!---Ed.] Ok maybe not as sorry as interested. I thought MY g-g-generation invented that weird irrelevant video shit.

By 1954 there were bands and guys all over experimenting with this sound and there was a groove around Memphis called Sun Studios that was sucking in Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, BB King etc. Here’s another ‘this is how shit happens’ story. It is truly amazing how many of these stories involve flippin Sam Phillips.

In July of 1954 Phillips had put together a backup duo for a young kid named Elvis Presley. Presley had recorded a ballad for Sam to give to his mama, and after some ‘convincing’ from a secretary (of course) tried Presley with a local guitar player named Scotty Moore who brought in a bass player from his band, Bill Black.

The session was not going well and they were about to break it up for the night. To paraphrase Scotty Moore because I lost the flippin quote:

“Elvis started cutting up. We were all tired and Elvis just started goofing around, playing an old Big Boy Crudup blues tune but up tempo. Bill joined in slapping his bass around. The door out of the studio must have been open because Sam stuck his head into the studio and said, ‘What are you guys doing?. We said we didn’t know. Sam said, ‘Well back it up, find a spot, and start again’.

What happened, and again Bill Black is probably not the first, but a true rockabilly sound with that ticking slap bass. Keep in mind here; there are no drums. Elvis and Scotty on guitar, and Bill Black slappin the willy out of that double bass. Moore called it ‘rhythmic propulsion’.

From 1954, ‘That’s Alright (Mama)’.

Scotty Moore guitar, Bill Black rhythmic propulsion bass

http://youtu.be/NmopYuF4BzY

Now all hell broke loose. Especially from Mom and Dad’s point of view. By 1955 everybody was recording and releasing this unbelievable sound. I could go on forever (right Lees?) but I’ll trot out a couple of real influences.

In researching the next guy I was trolling Youtube looking for this tune and there was a comment from one of the listeners. I’m not sure from what time period this guy was from, but it really doesn’t matter.

“I had just started junior high in Highbridge the Bronx, 7th grade I was 12 and on leaving school there was a crossing guard who stopped traffic and a car full of teenagers was stopped with radio playing “Maybelline” ancient to me seven years old but I loved it instantly, the crossing guard yelled at the teenagers to turn the radio down, and they cranked it up all the way, I loved it all!!! Nobody wanted to back down but the teenagers gave the crossing guard the finger and he finally gave up, I loved it, teenagers were people to be avoided but I thought God Damn I’ll be one some day too! ”

By the way the original recording of this at Chess has Willie Dixon on bass. More on dat dude later.

From 1955, Chuck Berry’s first hit ‘Maybelline’.

http://youtu.be/8RAfxiyMKAk
Chuck Berry was swimming in a pool of talent with names like Little Richard, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran, Duane Eddy, Jerry Lee Lewis; the list is endlessly gifted. But Chuck was certainly an influence in the genre he called "a music of teenage wishes fulfilled and good times (even with cops in pursuit)."

In the same year Bill Haley and the Comets released a song and became international stars. It’s hackneyed, but I include it here because of the guitar solo alone.

The guitar on the original is Danny Cedrone who died in a fall down a stairway in 1954 so he never saw his solo become one the classics in rock. Classic coolness.

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

By 1960 rockabilly had morphed into doo wop and early rock and the rockabilly guys were eking out a living on the nostalgia circuit. In the late 70’s the genre was revived within a style incongruously called New Wave. At least we thought it was New Wave.
Sony CEO Steps Down; More Challenges for Gibson

INDUSTRY NEWS
Written by Bill Leebens

Sony Corporation laid out major management shifts in a recent press-release. CEO Kaz Hirai, widely credited with the company's return to profitability, began his career at CBS/Sony Music, worked through the video game division, and in 2012 replaced Howard Stringer, Sony's first non-Japanese CEO. In spite of a few successes such as the incredibly popular series of Spider-Man films, Stringer's tenure as CEO was problematic and saw major losses for the company. Hirai's tenure as CEO saw the company consolidating divisions and updating vital video game products; after a series of tough years, 2017 saw the company forecast and produce its highest profits in two decades.

This month Hirai stepped down as CEO, but was named "Director Chairman"---essentially, Chairman of the Board of Directors. The company's CFO, Kenichiro Yoshida, was named CEO to replace Hirai. Hirai attended the American School in Japan and later attended school in Canada, and was viewed as more youthful and in touch with Western culture than his predecessors---ironic, as Stringer was British. Hirai's preppy style and often-wry Tweets marked a major difference in style from his buttoned-down predecessors.

The appointment of the CFO Yoshida as the new CEO is viewed as an attempt to extend the company's streak of profitable quarters by imposing financial rigor on an organization that has at times been...impulsive. Yoshida is credited with implementing corporate restructuring that contributed to the company's turnaround.

It will be interesting to see how Sony progresses.
Watching the story of Gibson Brands' woes unfold has become more reality television than reality.

At the same time that music magazine *Paste* heads an article, "Gibson Guitars is About to Go Belly Up", *Nashville media* quote a credit officer at Moody's as saying, "Gibson is running out of time---rapidly", and we reported the departure of the company's CFO---Gibson Brands CEO Henry Juszkiewicz issued an "all is well" statement regarding the half-billion dollars in notes rapidly reaching maturity.

Nothin' to see here. Keep moving. Except, this just in,...according to a report in Bloomberg, bondholders who hold more than two-thirds of Gibson's debt are pushing to take over, and oust Juszkiewicz.

Film at 11.
J.S.: What was your background growing up, and what led you to become a musician?
B.P.: I had a very disturbing upbringing, to say the least. Alcohol played a large part, as both original parents were heavy drinkers. Things got so bad that authorities awarded custody of myself and 2 sisters to my father. As the years went on, his drinking and violence increased. His work as a house painter became sporadic which soon led to the entire family relying on welfare as a means of income.

We wound up living in a two story, four room house which lacked heat, water, and sanitary facilities. Two pot belly stoves provided heat. We cut down trees from the nearby forest to use as fuel. Water was provided by a small cistern in the rear of the house which was gathered in buckets. An outhouse 25 feet away from the building was the toilet.

As I grew into a young adult, physical violence upon me and my siblings was not uncommon. School was 2 miles away and meant walking in the dark of winter. In summary, it was a classic “Tobacco Road”. We lived in Rockland County. It was very rural in those years, providing a summertime refuge in for city dwellers to retreat in the summer. School was a nonstarter for me. I started working at a Nyack luncheonette as a dishwasher after my sophomore year, leaving school permanently in the fall of 1958.

Dad had a stroke in 1959 which incapacitated him permanently. In 1962, my mother (I always addressed my step mother as Mom) was forced to move and relocated the family to Spring Valley, NY. We found ourselves a five room railroad flat and this would become the bedrock of my entrée into the music world.

Oddly enough—the very day my father suffered the stroke was also the day Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens died in that tragic Airplane crash.

It is a long story but it is that background history that became the foundation of my character today. Knowing hardship, and experiencing abuse from caretakers is the lowest rung of humanity, in my view. That is a major factor in why and how I consider myself a winner and a survivor when I entered the world of social interactions.

J.S.: Who were your influences as a guitar player in the 1960’s?

B.P.: American Bandstand brought my world into a new realm as Rock n’ Roll entered the world in the Mid Fifties. My mother was a big fan of country music, so it was those early country musicians who influenced me most. Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Lefty Frizzell, amongst a few. Having secured a plastic Gene Autry Emenee Guitar my mother found in a thrift store, I taught myself to play in every spare moment I could find. My obsession was so intense that aside from eating, working dishwashing jobs was given over to learning the chords of all the oldies I heard, in addition to Johnny Cash and country music. Then came Chuck Berry, who became my greatest influence of all. The gift of music was a natural for me and to this day, I cannot read or write music. I never learned the true math of music creativity other than recognizing chords and being born with perfect pitch and rhythm. It would be my singular best ability to master rhythm patterns regardless of the math involved.

J.S.: How did you wind up forming the Teemates?

B.P.: I had worked in various local Rock n’ Roll bands over the course of a few years in my hometown of Spring Valley, NY. My first and favorite band was with my pa, I Sonny Belovich. Playing local teen clubs, the village park, and private parties, we had become quite popular. However I concluded that remaining with that band (The Sunliners) would take me nowhere. I hooked up with other bands, rehearsing in garages and basements of their parents’ homes.
One such band took us to enter a local Battle of the Bands contest. My band won the first contest but lost in the final face-off. Apparently, there was a person at the contest who liked the way I played guitar and the presence I carried onstage.

I, however, was still hurting from the loss, so I boarded a local Spring Valley to NYC bus. Arriving in Greenwich Village, I met others similar to myself. I remained there for about three weeks playing for tips in the various cafes and coffeehouses that were in abundance. Having emerged from a dank, dirty, poor past, I had always felt lesser than amongst not only my peers but people in general. These new musicians I was meeting shared the same through their prose and songs they wrote. As it got colder in late October of that year, I returned to Spring Valley. My mother gave me the phone number of the person who had called saying he wished to manage my talents.

Joseph Shefsky had apparently attended the contests and had engaged a few other musicians whom he hoped could help him put a musical score together for a play he was writing. He was the one who had liked my stage presence and guitar playing. In early November, because I did not drive, he had one of the musicians, a drummer by name of Bryan Post, pick me up for a rehearsal at Joe’s home. Joe was young, very conservative looking, close cropped hair with gleaming blue eyes, who delivered dry cleaning from his parents’ cleaning store in Nyack, NY. He was married and had three small children.

We got right down to business. There would be no pay, so I would have to retrieve my former stock boy status at a local supermarket.
The lyrics Shefsky presented to us to put to music was, for me, almost a joke. I discussed this with Bryan on the way back and he agreed. The next rehearsal, Shefsky had brought in a kid from Waldwick, NJ who would become the group’s lead singer and bass guitarist. We rounded out the group by bringing in another guitarist whose dad had helped me purchase my Fender Jaguar guitar. Over the course of the month, slowly but surely, Joe’s interest in his songs grew dimmer as he began to realize the potential of the rock n’ roll songs the group played during breaks. We had even managed to put music behind some of the silly lyrics he gave us, which he was quite impressed with.

By the second week of December, Joe gave us a name. The T-mates. He would purchase band uniforms for us, which was merely a jacket with the name “T-mates” sewn onto the lapel. We all wore dark slacks, a white shirt, and slim, black ties. In late January, Joe announced we would be headed to the 1964 World Fair, which would be taking place that year in Queens, NY. Our venue would be the New York State Pavilion.

In February, The Beatles arrived in New York, and quite suddenly, all of our existing music ceased as we began learning and rehearsing these new Beatles songs. By spring, we had managed to perform almost to an exact copy many of the Beatles’ releases. In addition, we had all begun to allow our hair to grow longer with Joe’s approval. Soon, local neighborhood girls began gathering in the backyard looking through the glass sliding doors during our rehearsals. There were a few and those few became more.
Securing the name the T-mates became a legal issue. Without hesitation, Shefsky sought out legal advice and within a few weeks, the name, The Teemates was secured legally. The Teemates were born in late May, 1964.

J.S.: What were your gigs like and where did you play?

B.P.: In late spring of 1964, the Beatles released the Movie *A Hard Day’s Night*. By then, the Teemates name had become synonymous with the Beatles, evidenced by the huge crowds the group drew at various high school auditoriums, along with a few appearances in the New York area. Those shows included being on the same bill with groups like The Shangri-las, Freddie Cannon, and famed Deejays. Every appearance had the girls in the audience shrieking and screaming as we performed Beatlemania tunes like, ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand’ and ‘And I Love Her” to name a few.

By the time the previews of the movie, *A Hard Day’s Night* hit Rockland County, who else but The Teemates, would be (chosen as) the band to perform a show in or outside the theater before the movie? The appearance at the World Fair cemented the Teemates into New York stardom, as the chaos that ensued during our gig was totally unplanned for. I had seen hordes of girls entering the venue as we set up, but little did I expect nearly one hundred of these young teenagers to rush the stage. Neither did Security. By the time we retreated to the dressing room, Richie’s shirt and jacket were nearly shredded, and there were major tears in both Gary Mercury’s and my jackets as well. Our physical appearance may not have represented the physical images of the Beatles themselves, but the stage presence we presented was straight out of the Beatles’ play book. I would be John. Shefsky determined after that show Mercury would not fit the picture he desired and was replaced by Robbie Lundius (RIP), a rip roaring hell of a lead guitar player well ahead of his time. It was he who not only helped boost the energy level at our appearances but gave (us) clear virtuoso guitar leads as well.

‘Moving Out’ was a song Joe wrote the lyrics for after the World’s Fair show. Because we ended our sets with ‘Shout’ (The Isley Brothers), he wanted an original of our own which could move the audiences to dance in the aisles. To just copy the chord changes of ‘Shout’ did not sit well by me. It was then that I created the run up the neck chord to reach the pitch and open the vocals.

That summer, we were the house band at Long Pond Inn. The venue also featured top name acts on weekends, many of whom we backed up musically, such as Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats Domino, and The Ronettes.

The top Deejays on New York radio also loved us. We played at Scott Muni’s (WNEW-FM DJ) east side Manhattan disco called The Rolling Stone, where many celebrities partied and where I got to meet Jeff Beck of the Yardbirds. The Teemates also would play at Cheetah, Trude Hellers, Peppermint Lounge and The Metropole Café, on Seventh Avenue off 48th Street, where acts such as Gene Krupa, Maynard Ferguson, The Dukes Of Dixieland, and Cozy Cole, to name a few, were the star acts.

Amazingly, we would become the first Rock n’ Roll band to perform on its famous stage set. But that did not mean we were the stars. What came with the territory would be 6 day matinees with Sunday both a Matinee and an evening stint. Weekends were long, gruesome, tiring and frankly; this was not my kind of fame at all.

[John Seetoo’s interview with Bobby Pulhemus will conclude in *Copper #54*---Ed.]
Agnostics are often assumed to be wishy-washy—that they dither and um when asked about greater things. But actually, an agnostic has a firm belief: they do not have enough information to conclusively be either a believer or an unbeliever.

I’ve found it instructive to approach audio (and most things) agnostically; believers tend to spend a lot of money, and unbelievers miss out on some amazing moments. I like being agnostic. It makes the field of view rational and fathomable, but leaves the peripheral vision mysterious and unknowable.

And so, when I hear about the amazing things a product or technology can do for an audio experience, I need to ask, “How?” All I want to know is that the claim is possible in our physical universe. After confirming possibility (versus probability) I am happy to tend toward belief. Yes, I’ve been told I trust too much. Let’s take the example of digital cables. When I first heard about “audiophile” digital cables, I scoffed like a man choking at a Denny’s. After all, a digital signal is either there or not there, right? Can one digital signal be better than another?

However, the problem with asking “how?” is that it’s the same question asked by the people so wedded to their beliefs, that not even blowtorch and crowbar will do them part. As a result, even if you’re careful to not make it sound like a “But... how??”, many industry people get defensive, which, funnily enough, results in a shaky defense of their product. Audio people, it seems, have had so many experiences being buttonholed by aggressive electrical, computer, and self-professed engineers that they can be as skittish as prey animals when asked for underlying concepts. I have to assure them I that I’m asking because I want to believe, not because I want to claw their world to shreds.
And so, when you patiently tell me that a digital cable doesn’t know it’s digital only, and can pick up noise that may not affect the signal, but is piped straight into your audio circuits, at least I have a “how”. When you explain that digital signals are far more complex than the picture in my head of a line of pulses marching down a wire like little soldiers, and when you remind me that a music stream exists in a time domain, I’m happy to have a “possible”, even if I don’t yet have a “probable”.

I once read an impassioned review of audio Ethernet cable that proved—QED, Bitches!—that all audiophile digital cable is a raging scam. The test? To send a data signal down a few feet of no-name cheapo cable, and then down a few feet of audiophile cable, and check the received packets. Both cables transmitted their data perfectly, and so, concluded the article, you’re an idiot to buy your cable from anywhere but a big-box home improvement store.

Even as a then-disbeliever, I knew this wasn’t a fair test. My Ethernet cable goes from my NAS in a cupboard, into the attic past furnace and wiring, out again over the tops of the kitchen cupboards, past several fluorescent lights, across a wall and then down to the system—a run of about 50 feet. Surely a better test would be to run regular Ethernet cable and then an audiophile cable along the same path, and then check for data packets? After all, there’s no receive confirmation with UPnP—if your streamer is not hearing the signal every so often because of a burst of EMF from some device near your cable, it’s going to either drop, or do God only knows what. And that’s just the first test. Surely you should sweep each cable for noise at all reasonable frequencies, and see if the audiophile cable is less noisy? I’m not even going to mention a listening test.

Apart from forgetting to look at cable in the context of an entire household versus just the march of voltages down a wire, many “digital is digital” rants and reviews forget that a music stream has time as part of the signal. Seventy-four minutes of audio on a CD has to stream into and out of a DAC in exactly 74 minutes, but can be transferred as data in seconds from a hard disk, minutes from an internet server, or just under 90 years by a man on a mountain with two flags by day, and two torches by night. (Assuming non-stop bit-by-bit transfer at 2 bits a second). All four offer the same data, but certainly not the same musical experience.

About a year ago, I had a demonstration that a digital circuit can continue to receive and process an audibly distorted digital signal. We had a DAC in the store that had a problem with its USB input. We were playing a Michael Jackson tune, and it started out okay, but slowly became a mess, with drum beats at the wrong places, and Michael’s voice sounding like he’d been knotted up at the end of a PVC pipe. This gradual build up of error was repeatable with different sources, but only on the USB input, S/PDIF was fine. If such gross distortions can get through, what other more subtle artifacts are passing through your pristine “bits are bits digital is digital it’s either 100% or 0” audio stream right now?

I am guilty, like so many, of generalizing this “it’s either on or off” bit-level view of digital to every aspect of digital design. I assumed that the digital side of a DAC, for example, was either going to work perfectly or not work at all, and levels of quality can occur only in the analog section or in the resolution of the music files. This is untrue, as I learned last week when I went back to Copper #1 and started reading my way through Richard Murison’s “Quibbles and Bits” column—something I’d promised myself I’d do when I was slapped by the term “ladder DAC” just after RMAF 2017.

Reading the column and pretending to understand how a Sigma Delta Modulator works (the weak link being me, and not Richard’s clear and cogent text), I realize how much wing, spit, and prayer there is in digital circuit design. If like me, you’ve made an “impossible” upgrade to your system’s audio quality (such as when I deemed my DIY isolation platform too ugly to be on the main audio rack, and idly placed it under my NAS), then the agnostic in you should rest assured that digital may be rooted in binary, but is most certainly not black and white.
I...Buried...Paul....

FEATURED
Written by Charles Rodrigues
"If you’re into monitoring satanic messages recorded backwards by certain rock groups, this left-handed turntable is right up your alley, sir."
Playing Through

PARTING SHOT

Taken by Bill Leebens