Welcome to Copper #62!

My daughter Emily believes that men in general are whiners when they're sick---and I'm not exempt from her judgment. What was a snuffle and cough has turned into a protracted bout with sinus infections/bronchial wheeze/what the hell is this?? >hack< >whine<
Yeah. Anyway: pardon me if my focus drifts a bit. Off we go----

Professor Schenbeck leads off the issue with another mess o' Messiaen; Dan Schwartz knows that his long-serving home audio system is almost, almost there; Richard Murison looks back at his Glaswegian roots (not to be confused with Norwegian Wood); Jay Jay French takes a long strange trip that ends up at Jerry Garcia; Roy Hall looks at a string of near-misses; Anne E. Johnson looks at Queen after the "70s; Christian James Hand picks apart the mega-hit "Go Your Own Way", piece by piece; and I look at a vintage audio dealer, and at clock radios. No, really.

Anne is back with Something Old/Something New, reviewing recordings of C.P.E. Bach sonatas; and Industry News looks at the sad fate of Geoffrey the Giraffe.

In our features, Larry Schenbeck takes a look at Edward Lear (and that damn Messiaen keeps popping up); and reader Tom Methans contributes a reminiscence of his first audio system.

Copper #62 concludes with Charles Rodrigues looking at the reality of speakers, and an extraordinary Parting Shot from reader Joseph Grogan.

Woody Woodward is still on sabbatical, and will return in a few issues.

Thanks for reading, and see you next issue!

Cheers, Leebs.
This column usually follows a fairly predictable path: first a few words about some music, then a brief clip illustrating the point. Today, let’s switch that around. Hearing the clip first might be more fun. (Don’t be afraid to turn up the volume.)

Now, to break things down: we heard orchestral brass only, emphasizing a specific color. Also, we heard a personal but consistent chordal language, further enhancing the color aspect. Such chords suggest neither the absolutist, atonal choices of someone like Schoenberg or Boulez nor the supererogated triadic system of a Wagner or César Franck. It’s not C Major, but it’s way not ugly. These sonorities help the chords glisten and vibrate without suggesting functional harmonic progression (as in Brahms) or angst-ridden psychological baggage (as in Berg). Not least, we also heard a palpable melody. It moves sinuously, arrhythmically, in phrases of varying length. This is a “chorale,” but one closer to Gregorian chant than to J. S. Bach. Altogether the effect is serene, pacific, welcoming.

Here’s another taste, from another movement:

Much livelier. Irregular rhythms and several new colors: strings, woodwinds, horns, lots of percussion accents. Repeated motives that seem oddly familiar, if a bit mechanical. (Here’s a clue. And another. And one more.)

So: we’re hearing birdcalls and possibly a mating dance. The composer witnessed this display and
was impressed by it, although it reminded him of the Betrothed of the Apocalypse, “adorned for her husband.” (Here and elsewhere, you may wish to ignore his sincere but deeply personal remarks.)

One more clip:

Of that movement, the composer wrote, “As the hart longs for the waterbrooks, so longs my soul after Thee, O God.” (Psalm 42)

Now let’s go back half a century and take in some chamber music, completed while our composer was held in a Silesian P.O.W. camp after the German invasion of France. He and three fellow prisoners gave the first performances in that camp. (Not that the composer had done anything especially heroic; following the abrupt surrender of their army, thousands of French servicemen were swept into makeshift holding centers, then sent off to camps like Stalag VII-A.) Here is the opening of the second movement, subtitled “Vocalise for the angel who announces the end of Time.”

Later there’s an even more ferocious outburst, a “Dance of fury for the seven trumpets.” (In a program note, the composer helpfully explained that “the first six trumpets of the Apocalypse attend various catastrophes . . . ”)

Regarding music like this, Guy Bernard-Delapierre, who had gotten to know our composer when both were P.O.W.s, wrote:

*It is precisely [his] love for nature, both for what is most obvious in it and for what is most hidden, that gives listeners that hallucinatory impression of making contact with the heart. . . . [His] Christian mysticism often expresses itself, side by side with purely contemplative melodies, in an utterly pagan violence, an abandonment to sensuality such as we no longer find except among “primitive” peoples. (1945)*

Obviously we’re talking about Messiaen again. The first work we sampled was Éclairs sur l’Au-delà. That translates roughly to Illuminations of the Beyond, although éclairs is better expressed as “lightning flashes.” We heard Simon Rattle conducting the Berlin Philharmonic (EMI/Warner Classics, CD or download). The second work was Quatuor pour la fin du Temps, or Quartet for the End of Time, a staple since (at least) the tie-dyed ’70s, when Tashi made their immensely popular RCA recording. Here we heard a new reading, also very fine, from a group including clarinetist Martin Fröst and violinist Janine Jansen (Sony Classical, CD or download).

These works are exemplary in more ways than one: virtually every other big piece by Messiaen partakes of the same musical techniques and spiritual viewpoint. (A possible exception is the Turangalîla-Symphony; see below.) The lovely Trois petites liturgies de la Presence Divine, for example, offers many Messiaen “fingerprints”:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRyn-gRp_p0

That performance comes from Myung-Whun Chung (DG, CD or download). Ludovic Morlot and the Seattle Symphony have released an equally fine, newer recording (SS Media, CD or download). (Check out the Seattle SO’s useful guide.)

One thing I learned from poring over Messiaen, a documentary biography from Peter Hill and Nigel
Simeone, is that this remarkable artist formed his identity early on and kept refining it throughout his life, rather than going through distinctive “periods.” (Throughout this piece I’m using Hill and Simeone as a source of quotations.)

It was in Grenoble that I realized I was a musician. I was seven-and-a-half and had just been given [a score of] Gluck’s *Orphée*, and with my present under my arm, I went into the park. . . . I went to sit on a stone bench in the large *Jardin de Ville*. . . . I [was looking] at the theme in F major from *Orphée’s great aria in the first act . . . when I noticed that I was “hearing” it. So I could already hear a score, and I had only been learning music for a few months.

When Messiaen arrived at the Paris Conservatoire in 1919, age 11, he came with a score of Debussy’s complex, enigmatic opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* in hand, a gift from his first teacher. At the Conservatoire, music history classes fascinated him, not least because of what he learned about the ancient modes and non-Western music. He studied composition with Widor, then with Dukas, who inspired him deeply.

Messiaen seems to have led a charmed early life: his father, an English teacher, and mother, a celebrated poet, saw to his education and supported his creative efforts. His elders and peers recognized his talent and rewarded it. With few exceptions (e.g., Nadia Boulanger) he got on well with the establishment in spite of his avant-garde tendencies, and he secured good professional positions. Religious beliefs informed his music but were never an obstacle. Widor noted that, “in an environment [presumably the Conservatoire] where faith plays little part, he has commanded admiration and respect through the dignity of his lifestyle and [his] genuinely Christian warmth.” Neither of his parents were believers, but of his mother he observed that “poetry allowed her to explore the mysteries of faith in the same way as music.” He felt her spirit guiding him long after she had passed.

Debussy’s music remained a key influence, especially its emphasis on rich, non-functional harmonies and timbre as a component equal to pitch or rhythm. Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, and others were also exploring exotic modes and rhythms at the turn of the century; Messiaen sought to refine and codify their experiments. Whatever technical procedures he adopted were meant, as Hill and Simeone note, “to expand the emotional range and to enhance the expressive power of his music . . . ‘to allow the heart to overflow freely.’” The composer himself may have articulated his core philosophy best when he said

*Every artist needs to try, according to the words of [Paul] Valéry, “to enlarge our conceptions to the extent where they become inconceivable.”*

Exactly so. How could it be otherwise? To depict the transcendent, one must invent a language that transcends. Sometimes this invites ridicule; some people are never persuaded. In 1936 Messiaen’s supporter André Cœuroy illustrated the problem in an affectionate article for *Beaux-Arts*:

*The other evening at the Trinité, during an organ recital of [Messiaen’s] works . . . I thought I had found him out: I read, in the program, that “Les Anges,” one of the pieces from *La Nativité du Seigneur*, was “a sort of heavenly dance,” “an exultation of disembodied spirits”: in short, either drugged to the eyeballs or indescribably boring. Well, never have I heard an organ piece which had such a vibrant sense of jubilation or such powerful poetry, where there was, at the same time, such taste, such delicacy and such color.*

There it is: those whose art I don’t get are either charlatans or addicts, possibly both. Messiaen had attempted, perhaps not wisely, to combat this attitude via elaborate annotations that established (he felt) his music’s theoretical and theological legitimacy. But surely the best way for any of us to
overcome reactionary blindness (deafness?) is to experience more of anything we don’t quite get. Here are a few home remedies that worked for me:

La Nativité du Seigneur. Messiaen played and wrote for organ all his life; his first “organ cycle” is a set of nine preludes on subjects from the Nativity—angels, shepherds, the magi, etc. Look for recordings by Jennifer Bate, a trusted interpreter.

Turangalîla-Symphony. Centered on the legend of Tristan and Isolde, and thus with erotic love as an overwhelming, perhaps fatal force. These massive ten movements encompass birdsong, Asian rhythms and colors, and a swoony, swoopy ondes Martenot. Recommended: Hewitt, Hartmann, Lintu, Finnish Radio SO (Ondine, (SACD or download).

Vingt regards sur l’enfant Jésus. Twenty solo piano meditations, truly intergalactic, inspired by stars, planets, photons, bells, spirals, stalactites, the Gospels, and writings from various saints. Crystalline and apocalyptic. Recommended: Austbø (Naxos), Osborne (Hyperion).

Chronochromie. “The color of time.” Birds, mountains, canyons, rivers and more, set in a continuous form derived from ancient Greek choruses. It’s quite lively, though, with stunning counterpoint and profuse, constantly morphing orchestral colors. Recommended: Boulez (DG, CD) or Dorati (Angel, vinyl), the latter of whom appears “by permission of the Mercury Record Corporation.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6SVrHxGLsA
I think about my system too much. I mean, really too much.

As I’ve written many times, it was stable for more than 20 years. That’s a really long while in anybody’s reckoning. In those years, I don’t remember thinking about it so much. Of course, I also played on a bunch of records and was raising my daughter, and having a good stable system that I didn’t have to think about was a real blessing. I feel like I’ve only now just cracked the beginning of getting it to another version of stability.

I’m listening to David Sedaris talking about Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. To hear him talk about it, no, this is not that bad (though my daughter might insist otherwise.). I may not like trash by the side of the road, but I don’t have a compulsion to pick it all up. And certainly, most of my musician pals thinks I’m either crazy, or wealthy, or… well, they don’t know what. I guess the missing word is obsessed. I mean, who has a studio monitor system in their living room? (I feel like Rowan Atkinson’s character in Love, Actually: “But this is so much more than a monitor system…”)

When I wake up, I flick on the preamp (which after 20 seconds turns on the amps) so that it’s fully cooked by the time I put music on. I usually start with something relatively quiet). Just the fact that it’s become routine says something about my days — aside from never-ending yard- and pool-work and caring for ten rabbits (count ‘em! Ten!), I mostly try to figure out how to move this damn television project forward. So I have the mental space for this obsession.

It’s not that I think about it to the exclusion of other things. But when I’m home, the fact that I’m aware of it needing something plagues me. Wondering if it would have similarly needled me for the aforementioned twenty years is pointless — but I don’t think so. For the last month, I’ve had a BHK preamp (I put in a pair of 7dj8 tubes a couple days ago), which went a long way to resolving what bothered me about what I was hearing. I feel like it’s back where it was with the EAR G88 preamp, more-or-less. (As I’ve written, if I had to point to one thing, it turns out, surprisingly, to have been the low-end). OK, so… what? What is this obsession about? Maybe my daughter is more right than I’ll admit.

It’s a mystery to me why she doesn’t care. Ten years ago we were at Brooks Berdan’s shop, I made some crack about her not wanting anything of mine, and she said the only thing she wanted was my Moog synth (how things change). She listens on her computer, or to ear buds, and would be perfectly happy to hear the teevee coming out its completely inadequate speakers if that moved my system out of our living room.
So now it’s the amps: BEL 1001s. There is nothing wrong with the amps. In fact, they’re extraordinary. They were when I got them, 26 years ago, enough to convince me to give up VTL 500s. Since then, they’ve been through everything but the last bit of upgrade (one of the benefits of being a writer for TAS, which made a point, from ’92 on, of championing Richard Brown’s work before he died). I put on a spacious, beautifully-imaged recording and it’s all there, well beyond the edges of the speakers, everything in proper proportion when the playback level is correctly set.

So I think it’s the story I tell myself, about my system all being made by my friends, or the story we tell ourselves: a need to chase the current state-of-the-art. I think I won’t really be happy until I replace them. But...

Maybe it’s just some damned obsessive acquisitiveness.

Maybe it’ll take just one more fix....
Diminishing Returns (Or: The Clock Radio Dilemma)

THE AUDIO CYNIC

Written by Bill Leebens

While at the Munich High End Show last month, I saw portable audio gear the size of my hand. And, as I mentioned in my video, I also encountered systems that were decidedly un-portable, and would've required forklifts to move and which cost over a million bucks. As it turns out, I wasn't much impressed by those living room Stonehenge systems.

Why?

They just weren't that good. And you likely know what I mean: "that good" is shorthand for "not as good as I'd expect for that much money, and certainly not a million bucks' good." I expect any major system to create the sense of being in the presence of a live performance, and most did not. And of course, as the prices go up, so do the expectations.

When unrealistic expectations meet the law of diminishing returns, the law of diminishing returns wins, every damn time. Bet on it. It's as reliable as gravity. Maybe more so.

Some of those big-boy systems couldn't carry a beat in a shopping bag. Not to obsess in Brit-speak about PRAT, but it's important: I may not be able to boogie worth a damn, but I expect my stereo to make me want to boogie. Besides which--- to echo the constant refrain of mentor Paul McGowan---"there's NO BASS." The eye can sometimes fool the ear into thinking that what should be there actually is, but there were systems that had multiple mega-woofers that didn't deliver significant dynamic impact, and would've left E. Power Biggs saying, "now wait a minute..."

I've worked around talented audio folks for decades, but so far no one has come up with a magic
formula for what makes a system have the jump, the drive, of real live music. Some big systems have it; many don't.

The other side of the equation is...how is it that some super-simple, cheap pieces of crap are able to deliver that feeling?

My first personal audio system wasn't a system, but a simple, small transistor radio given to me by my grandma. Back then---early '60s---the single word "transistor" was often used to describe these tiny radios whose pocketability enabled them to provide the soundtrack for a generation. For me and millions of others, they were a way of carrying the secret of our music wherever we went.

Sure, those little guys had limits; having taken off the back, I knew that the speaker in mine was only an inch and a half across. It would take real systems to introduce me to the joys of bass ("holy CRAP! Paul McCartney's REALLY GOOD!" I exclaimed after really hearing his lines for the first time), but still, that little radio managed to convey rhythm and emotion better than many full systems.

How?

Flash forward to, oh, the late '80s. I think. My aged Sony clock radio finally crapped out, and I needed a replacement. Being a dilligent audio geek, I went to stores where such things could be tried out, and tested. Many of the units I played with sounded as you'd expect: thin, plasticky, with no rhythm, no highs, not much of anything, really. Intelligibility was barely good enough to follow an AM broadcast of a baseball game. Complex music? Forget it.

I finally stumbled upon a chunky clock radio from Aiwa---never a major brand, later a Sony subsidiary, still later non-existent. It didn't occupy a lot of table space, and had a low center of gravity---important for an unhappy awakener like me, prone to slamming my hand down on the snooze button. But the amazing part: it sounded good. Music played through it had drive, momentum, an indication of bass if not actual bass, and it didn't dissolve into murk when things got loud or complex. Huh.

I bought it, of course. I don't recall the price, but I think it was less than $20. In the years since then, I've replaced a half dozen televisions, several computers, even a few pricey bits of audio kit that went blooey. But the Aiwa keeps---well, not ticking, but keeping time, and the radio still works perfectly. The good news is that it's analog, so I can sneak up on weak stations and pull them in when they're next to a stronger station. The bad news is that it's analog, with a rather cheesy tuning dial and no presets, so if I want to listen to another station, it's a bit fiddly.

And it still sounds great. I can lay in bed and listen to music programs and actually enjoy them, not just kinda hear them.

I wonder if there's a converse to the law of diminishing returns---say, the law of lowered expectations (and no, not the dating site from MAD TV). Maybe when you don't expect much from something, and it exceeds whatever expectations you do have---that your perceptions of its performance are enhanced, and perhaps inflated? Surely, by hi-fi gear standards, this thing ain't great...and yet, I've enjoyed listening to it more than I have many very expensive stereo systems with great pedigrees and presumptions of greatness.

Maybe this is a subject we should spend more time examining. Maybe there are more ways to getting bang-for-buck than we've explored.

I don't know...but this cheap clock radio keeps working, no matter what. After violent attacks from
me, after assaults from two growing kids, after having been knocked off the table by dogs, after thousands of miles of moves...it just works.

There aren't many things in my life that I can say that about. How about you?
I was born in Glasgow, Scotland. At age 10 my family moved to Leeds, in England. Three years later we moved to Leicester ... my father and brother still live there. By age 22 I had graduated from University and accepted a job in in the high-tech laser industry in the sleepy holiday town of Paignton, Devon. By that time my Scots accent had long since been replaced by something relatively nondescript, more identifiably English than anything else, but without any obvious regional inflection. At age 33 I moved to Montreal, Canada, since when my accent has taken on a mid-Atlantic character which Canadians consider to be English, the English consider to be Canadian, and Americans usually assume is Australian.

Some time in the very early 1980’s my job required me to purchase a quantity of ultra-high purity Tin - 99.9999% pure, or better. Where on earth would you find that sort of thing? This was long before the days of the Internet, and so the best approach was that you would track down an appropriate trade magazine full of advertisements and send off for a selection of catalogs which in due course would arrive in the mail. This was made easy by the inclusion in the magazine of a tear-out postcard containing hundreds of check boxes, each one with a number corresponding to an advertisement in the magazine. So you would fill in your name and address, tick the boxes you were interested in, and post the card. Two weeks later a collection of catalogs would start arriving.

Having consulted the catalogs, you would see who offered the product closest to what you wanted, and phone them up.

Far more interesting, though, was to fill in the card in the name of one of your colleagues. You would then randomly tick as many of the boxes as you thought you could get away with, and observe from a safe distance the deluge of a response that this would bring two weeks later. Even better
was to modify the name of the person on the receiving end. For example, my pal Paul Martin
became Professor Sir Paul Martin-Moo (managing director), and in this guise actually ended up on
some kind of mailing list. He received mail from all sorts of people addressed to Professor Sir Paul
Martin-Moo (managing director) for years afterwards. One firm even sent a deputation of executives
all the way from London (3-4 hours by train) to visit him because one of the boxes I had randomly
checked against his name apparently corresponded to “I have an immediate need to purchase a
large quantity of Office Furniture”, and they decided that they could best close the deal if they
arrived unannounced, in force, in person. Needless to say, they went home empty-handed, not to
mention red-faced.

Other aspects of technology were also simpler in those days, like telephones. You could take two
adjacent desk phones and unscrew both their earpiece and mouthpiece covers, which would allow
you to pull the actual transducers a few inches free of the handset while still wired up. You would
then mate the earpieces of each with the mouthpieces of the other, holding them in place with
elastic bands. Next, you dial two different numbers on each of the two handsets, and when the
parties answer they are effectively connected to each other ... and as a bonus you can hear the
conversation quite clearly. English people are usually very polite, and will rarely be so crass as to
demand of the other why they called. So the phone call can proceed for quite a long time, as the
parties exchange pleasantries while all the while waiting for the other to get to the point. The
challenge involved submitting two numbers to dial, with the winner being the person whose call
lasted the longest. And there were bonus points if the call ended with both parties still thinking the
other had initiated the call. Another fun game was to find two managers who hated each others’
guts (and boy, we had plenty of those), and connect those to each other. This served to raise their
smoldering resentment up another notch as each assumed the other was engaging in passive-
aggressive warfare. Still another was to announce as soon as the parties answered “Please hold for
Mr. Evans” (Mr. Evans being the name of a very senior manager), and see how long you could get
them to sit there, wondering if they were about to get a carpeting.

We enjoyed pranks that exploited some of the company’s Dickensian and archaic rules, one of which
was that the company would not permit outside telephone calls to be placed from within work areas
containing hourly-paid employees. But if you were senior enough to have a desk, you could place an
outside call from your desk phone. In my part of the factory we used clean rooms, which were
located quite a tedious walk from the desks, and once there you had to change into head-to-toe
bunny suits to enter. All in all, it was quite a palaver. So, from the safety of your desk, you would
make an outside call directly to the company’s switchboard, and ask to speak to someone who you
knew was in the clean room, and had preferably just arrived there. Obviously, they wouldn’t pick
up, and the call would bounce back to the operator, with whom you could leave a message
requesting the recipient to call a certain number. The operator would then page the person over the
intercom. Normal etiquette required a paged person to call the operator promptly and receive their
message. But having done so, the rules then prevented him from calling the number on the message
from inside the clean room. So he would have to exit the clean room, change out of his bunny suit,
and make the trek to his desk at the other end of the building. There, finally, he could make the call
from the approved confines of his desk, and would find himself connected to a public service help
line, offering useful pre-recorded advice on contraception, venereal disease, or dealing with
homosexuality.

All of which is quite beside the point. Where the hell was I ... ?

Oh, yes. So there I was, catalog in hand, phoning a company called Johnson Matthey Metals, and
found myself speaking to a salesman by the name of Savage, who spoke with a clear Scottish
brogue. I was looking for high-purity Tin, six-nines if he could do it, seven-nines if possible. Yes, he
could provide that for me. I only wanted a small quantity, was that OK? Yes, that was fine. What
was the price? The price was acceptable ... and he could deliver it from stock. Our business concluded, all I had to do was hang up and place my purchase order. But before we hung up, he had one last question for me.

"Mr. Murison, before you go, I was wondering if I could ask you a personal question?"

"That depends what it is!"

"I was just wondering whether I’m detecting a trace of Scots in your accent?"

"Actually, I suppose that’s quite possible. But I left Scotland when I was ten, and I didn’t think I still had any accent left."

"It’s just the way you say certain words. I just got the feeling that maybe you were also a Scot. If I might ask, what part of Scotland are you from?"

"Actually, I’m from Glasgow."

"That’s where I’m from. What part of Glasgow?"

"I lived in Springburn, then before that in Bearsden, and before that in Dalmarnock."

"Really? I lived in Dalmarnock too! Where in Dalmarnock?"

"It was a street called Ardenlea Street."

There was a stunned silence on the line ...

"That’s such an amazing coincidence. I lived on Ardenlea Street too. What was your address?"

I should point out that Ardenlea Street, like most of Glasgow at that time, comprised two rows of red sandstone tenements. Each tenement comprised a “close” which was a passageway with a staircase, off which you could access several different apartments. Only the “close” itself had a number. Ardenlea Street, I believe, was a short cul-de-sac.

"I can’t really remember the address. But it was the first close on the left."

"That’s number nine. I can’t believe it ... that’s where I lived. When were you there?"

"It would have been about 1955-58, that sort of timeframe."

"That’s exactly when I lived there. We must have played together as kids!"

"I suppose we must have done, then."

"So you must remember Kenny Dalglish. He lived there too. We all played together."

For those who don’t recognize the name, Kenny Dalglish is the most famous Scottish Football player (i.e. soccer player) ever. An absolute legend, known mostly for his career as player and then manager of Liverpool.

As I hung up the phone, I couldn’t help but wonder if I had been the subject of an elaborate prank, since, looking back on the call, he did appear to have led the conversation. Kenny Dalglish indeed!
So I called my mother later that day and relayed the conversation to her. I asked her if she remembered anybody called Savage who lived in our close in Ardenlea Street. Indeed, she did remember a Mrs. Savage who lived directly upstairs from us. And there was a Dalglish family too who lived two or three closes along. Very interesting, although neither Savage nor Dalglish are uncommon Scots names. But finally, some years later my brother reported seeing Kenny Dalglish on a TV show called “This Is Your Life” where it was confirmed that he did indeed live on Ardenlea Street. So no prank, then! And all because a salesman thought he recognized a hint of a Scottish accent.

I went back to Glasgow in 2012 to see some of the places of my childhood, and looked forward to seeing Ardenlea Street since, according to Google maps, it was still in existence, unlike almost the entirety of the Glasgow I remembered (which had been literally razed to the ground). I was going to raise a silent toast to Mr. Savage ... not to mention Kenny Dalglish. Sadly, I arrived to find that it had just been demolished to make way for an athlete’s village being built for the 2014 Commonwealth games.
I was going to write about my new fave guitarist Tommy Emmanuel but, in light of the comments made by several readers (both pro & con) regarding Jerry Garcia in the last column, I decided to riff on this.

To be clear, I don’t think too many of you have seen the Dead as much as I did between 1969 & 1972.

In April 1967 I totally got their debut album, although it was pretty mediocre garage rock with a twist (no pun intended!), Viola lee Blues was a taste of things to come.

I don’t care if you saw them 500 times since 1976 because you didn’t see them with Pigpen, you didn’t see them up close, face to face, ear to ear in venues at intimate as the Fillmore East, Capitol Theater, Manhattan Center or front row at the bandshell in Central Park on a Sunday afternoon at 2pm when they got off the stage at the Fillmore East at 5am (7 hours earlier) that morning.

I did, and many many more.

I saw the Dead for the first time opening for Janis Joplin in 1969 and again opening for Country Joe & The Fish a month later.
Wait… “You saw then as an opening band, Jay Jay?”

Yes, I saw them play for only 45 minutes… twice.

“What was that like?” you ask.

Simple. They came out, tuned up, noodled around and said goodnight…. twice.

Not what I expected until…

The night that they went on at 11:30 pm and finished at 5am…. whoa. This time, the acid took full effect and I saw God.

One night, while sitting front row at the Fillmore East, I dropped a tab of Orange Sunshine—onto the floor. Only at the Fillmore would an usher make people get up from their seats to scrounge around with a flashlight, on all fours, trying to find my acid.

Well, he couldn’t. At that moment the band sauntered on the stage and the usher, who knew Jerry, told him what happened. Jerry reached into his pocket and gave the usher a tablet. The usher gave it to me and yes, I melted with Jerry that night.

I loved Anthem and Aoxomoxoa.

I had all the posters and R. Crumb Comix. I loved S. Clay Wilson, Griffin, Shelton etc…

I traded tapes with other Dead Heads.

And I saw them 24 more times (on acid) for the next 4 years.

And then, I stopped doing drugs on Easter Sunday 1972. Cold Turkey.

No more.

You name it, I did it at levels most people would never attempt.

In October of 1972, shortly after becoming a glam fan, I saw the Dead for the last time.

Straight.

They sucked.

I walked out of Roosevelt Stadium and never consciously listened to them again.

Never saw them again.

So, about Jerry. I never liked his tone.

His playing just bored the heck out of me over time.

Most of my hippie friends back in the 60’s hated the Dead because they thought that they couldn’t play. I defended them for years.

So, yes, I have strong opinions.
I’m allowed. So what. People think I suck. That’s they way of the world, but know this:

As great as the Dead were/are to many people, I was surprised to learn from Michael Ahearn (RIP), the former production manager at the Fillmore East, this story about why the Allman Bros. and not the Dead, closed the Fillmore East in 1971.

He said that, as much as the Dead played there and established a fan base, the night that the Allman Bros. played there the first time (opening for the Dead and I was there that night), The Allmans were just a far superior band with real guitar players and really great singing.

And when it came down to a vote among the Fillmore East staff, it was unanimous that the Allmans close the venue on the final night.

Lastly, I have gone on record, in our NETFLIX documentary *We Are Twisted Fu*cking Sister* that I saw the Dead 26 times on acid and it was the greatest band I ever heard. Then I saw them them straight...and it sucked. The story, as I tell it, is pretty funny.....

And So..

Three things happened over the last several months.

1. An old friend gave me a Dead DVD “From Anthem to Beauty” and it really brought back great memories.
2. I met Bob Weir at a guitar store in NY and he couldn’t have been nicer.
3. I get this email from Justin Kreutzman.

Hmmm...the name kinda sounds familiar. It went something like this:

*Hey Jay Jay, this is Justin Kreutzman. I think you know who my dad is, the drummer from the Grateful Dead. Anyway, I just saw your Twisted Sister documentary and heard what you said about my dad’s band. That was pretty damn funny!*

*I really loved your doc, watched it 5 times! One day we should meet.*

*Best*

*Justin*

There is no denying that the Dead was a profoundly important band in my life because they taught me about cult worship and having fans consider you a lifestyle choice and, in many ways, a religious experience.

When I get fan mail that tells me that we do the same thing to our fans, I believe that the spirit of the Dead does flow through me....

However, Jerry’s tone still sucked...
“Line up against that wall” said the Captain to my uncle Fred. “Platoon. Get ready, take aim…”

Act One.

On one of the numerous attempts to escape Germany in the late 1930s, my father and some friends paid someone to drive them to the Belgian border. The driver said he had arranged for a smuggler to help them cross over into Belgium. When they arrived at the border, a German patrol was waiting to arrest them. Apparently the driver had double-crossed the group of young Jews by informing the authorities of their plan. After he was arrested, my father was transferred to Aachen prison to await his fate.

While in prison he was put in a cell whose occupant was a shepherd (a German shepherd!). He was in prison for making love to a sheep. While doing the deed a German patrol passed by and as he had placed the hind legs of the sheep in his boots he couldn’t extricate himself in a timely manner and was arrested and brought to Aachen prison. In the few weeks my father shared a cell he was more scared of the shepherd than he was of the Nazis--- having failed to consider that not being a sheep
made him unattractive to his cellmate.

Ultimately he contacted my grandmother, who managed to obtain his release by bribing a prison guard.

**Act Two.**

My grandmother on my mother’s side was a Bolshevik. She was a firebrand communist activist in the pre-revolution days and lived in a shtetl (small town) in Belarus. Her father was the town baker and had some status in town. One evening the chief of police, a friend of my great grandfather, paid a visit and told him that the authorities were coming the next day to arrest my grandmother for anti-government activities.

That night, she packed her bags and fled the country, ultimately ending up in London where her sister lived. In London she settled into the East End, which was full of like-minded communists who had also fled the wrath of the Czar. While there she met and married my grandfather, who was a lefty from way back. An ardent pacifist who hated war, he left his small town outside of Kiev, Ukraine to escape conscription into the Russian army.

When World War One started he registered as a conscientious objector. Facing a tribunal and inevitable arrest and imprisonment, he decided to go into hiding. This was a capital offense and had he been caught he would have been executed. My aunt told me that as a very little girl she would visit him in an attic but she had to promise her mother never to tell anyone that her father was alive. So until the end of the war when amnesty for deserters was announced, he was a fugitive and, de facto, a refugee.

**Act Three.**

My father-in-law Benno escaped Germany in 1935. A tall handsome man who was quite well to do, he was a butcher in the successful family business. An avid sportsman and great swimmer he was chosen to represent Germany in the first Maccabiah games (Jewish Olympics) held in Palestine in 1932. He found Palestine interesting but not enough to want to live there so he returned to his life in Germany. As a good-looking bachelor, he had lots of girlfriends, many of whom were not Jewish.

In 1935, Hitler passed the miscegenation laws officially called the “*Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre*” (Protection of German Blood and German Honor Act) that forbade marriage and extramarital sexual relations between persons racially regarded as non-Aryans and Aryans. When Benno heard this he said, “If I can’t shtupp the shikshas (can’t have sex with non-Jewish women) then I’m out of here.”

He packed his bags and left for Palestine. On the train out of Germany one of the passengers in his compartment was an elderly, religious Jew who had spread out newspaper on the table in front of him. His lunch was pickled herring, which was messy and strong smelling. When the train arrived at the border, the German guards inspected every passenger and their luggage. They were looking for contraband and currency. At that time you were only allowed to take 10 Reichmarks (approximately $20) out of the country. When the inspectors came to the old man who was busy eating, he pointed to his bags, which they removed and examined, steering clear of his fish-smelling person. The search revealed nothing and the train was allowed to leave. After they had crossed the border into Belgium, the old man rolled up the newspapers, smiled at Benno and revealed hundreds of dollars and Swiss
marks that had been hidden underneath.

**Act Four.**

My uncle Fred managed to escape Germany with some friends who made their way to the British lines in France. They encountered a patrol of Senegalese tirailleurs (riflemen) who were assigned to the French army. They explained to the sergeant in charge that they were Jewish refugees but he didn’t believe them and thought they were German spies. He decided to execute them and lined them up against a wall. As they were about to get shot, a British Major on a motorbike happened to pass by and stopped the execution. Not knowing whether or not they were spies, he had them arrested and shipped off to Pentonville prison in London. While there he contacted my mother to let her and my father know he was alive. I loved Uncle Fred but he was a schnorrer (sponger); in this first letter he asked my mother to send him money.

By this time the British had a surfeit of refugees and spies so they decided to ship them all off to Canada for processing. In Southampton dock, there were two transport ships going to Canada. While waiting on line to board one of the ships Fred heard his name called from the line boarding the other ship. It was a friend of his from Berlin. His friend encouraged him to join his line and as the guards weren’t paying much attention, Fred crossed over, boarded with his friend and sailed to Canada. On arrival, he found out that the other transport, the one he was assigned to, had been struck by a German U-Boat and all hands were lost at sea. He was ultimately sent back to the UK and joined the British Army and served alongside my father until the end of the war.
So: what does a professional audio nerd do on a day off? Check out an audio dealer, of course! I’d seen Craigslist ads for Electric City in Westminster, Colorado, for months--and finally went the 30 miles or so to check it out. One of the things that separates Electric City from your average Craigslist seller of vintage gear is that they’re a service and repair company---and everything they sell has been checked out and brought up to original spec.

The store has everything from portables to full systems. I was taken by this homemade jambox---the audio equivalent of folk art, no?
This shows the range of gear you’ll find at Electric City---from a funky '50s Philco console with separate stereo speaker to ‘90s B&O Uni-phase speakers.
Several rather worn tube console radios shared space with the unmistakable Philco Predicta. Hmm--how do I make it hi-res?
A little bit of everything on this rack, from a Perreaux preamp to a cute Harmon-Kardon tube combo.
Anyone want a Crown DC-300 for $199? It'll sound like broken glass, but it'll last forever!
Some interesting-looking Knight tube amps (with cages off) atop who-knows-what '50s speakers.
There are reel-to-reel decks all over the shop.
The enclosures are obviously Karlsons--but what on Earth are those drivers with the Darth Vader/Electrolux horn?
Back in the day we talked about receivers with a high "KPD" factor---knobs per dollar. Here’re the speaker equivalent, massive '70s 6-ways? 7-ways? from Kenwood.
A wide range of cassette decks, including a Nak and a big Pioneer.
A couple very nice Tandberg cassette decks.
I'm not a big Pioneer fan, but this rack full of silver faces was pretty impressive.

I'd never seen a Nakamichi System One in the flesh/metal before. From the top down, the DS-200 Program Timer, that allowed you to program recordings off the air from FM; the 630 FM Tuner/preamp; the 600 Cassette console; a System One bridge adapter and a pair of bridged 620 power amps. This is a rare variant of a rare system: most had a 610 control preamp and only one 620 power amp. Priced at $2,000, it doesn't strike me as totally outrageous. According to the 1977 *Audio* Annual equipment Directory, the 630 tuner/pre was $630; the 600 cassette was $550 in matte black; and the 620 amps were $630 each. That's $2440 in 1977 dollars, and doesn't include the rack, timer, or bridging adapters.
When they officially formed as Queen in 1973, the four skilled musicians in the band – Freddie Mercury (vocals, piano), Brian May (guitar), John Deacon (bass), and Roger Taylor (drums) – agreed on a policy that defied the prog-rock movement that many lumped them in with. “No synths,” it said on their album covers. And they stuck with that slogan...until they didn’t.

One of the many unusual things about Queen was their willingness to change with the times. That included both musical and performance style. The same band that shifted from defending its classic rock instrumentation to spotlighting synthesizers also changed out of its flowing white satin costumes and into tight jeans and (in Mercury’s case) a bushy mustache.

The year 1980 saw the release of two Queen milestones: the soundtrack to the movie Flash Gordon and the studio album The Game. Brian May, a science fiction fan, spearheaded the Flash Gordon project, which consists largely of May playing electronic keyboards. No synths became all synths, and there was no going back.

As for The Game, it was their biggest seller in the U.S. Its two chart-busters, “Crazy Little Thing Called Love” and “Another One Bites the Dust,” gloriè in Mercury’s new macho image and were driven by a new focus on Deacon’s funky basslines. But those songs were retro right out of the box: “Crazy” is a nod to the 1950s, and “Dust” has a disco beat at a time when that style was declared dead. Little did Queen know, these would be their last two big American hits.
The Game is a solid album overall, but one of its most interesting songs was not released as a single. In fact, Queen never performed it live. Brian May wrote “Sail Away Sweet Sister” and subtitled it “To the Sister I Never Had.” It’s a strange but captivating (and maybe a bit creepy) song about a young man watching his sister come into womanhood. The fact that May sings lead vocals on this track, something he rarely did even for his own songs, is the deciding factor. His unsure, unpolished voice is the right sound for delivering the text’s awkward sexual undertones. Mercury sings the bridge.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAlnsrtLv0o

Despite the success of The Game, legions of Queen fans turned against the band because of the Hot Space album (1982). “People are saying we’ve lost our rock and roll feel,” Mercury famously complained from the stage during a 1982 show. “It’s just a bloody record.” To be fair, there’s some painfully poor stuff on here (“Dancer,” “Back Chat,” “Action This Day”), but it’s also the album that brought us the wonderful “Under Pressure” duet with David Bowie!

You have to dig around a bit to find a Hot Space cut worth special mention, but “Life Is Real (Song for Lennon)” fits the bill. Mercury’s memorial to the assassinated former Beatle is among the first such tributes to be released by a major artist (Paul McCartney’s “Here Today” and Elton John’s “Empty Garden” also came out in 1982). The short lyric lines and simple melody and rhythm evoke Lennon’s no-nonsense songwriting style.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wl20NGS3VF8

Hot Space was made during a period when the band members were ready to claw each other’s eyes out. That’s hardly rare among rock bands, but they handled it in a rare manner: Instead of splitting up, they took a little break. By 1984 they were ready to make the album A Kind of Magic, tour it to great success (they didn’t bother with the U.S.), and return to London in 1985 to blow the lid off the Live Aid charity music marathon.

Queen was back in full stride. They double-dipped in 1985 with the album A Kind of Magic, which included a number of songs also destined be used in the soundtrack for the 1986 movie The Highlander. Among the songs intended for the film was John Deacon’s “One Year of Love,” much less famous than his single “Friends Will Be Friends” from the same album. I’ve always thought a late-career Elvis would have enjoyed covering this sweepingly romantic waltz:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wq2Y8cn24Is

After another hiatus, The Miracle came out in 1989. It’s a very weak album, derivative of the worst of late-’80s pop styles. One wonders why Queen bothered. The only decent song is “I Want It All,” which hardly counts as under the radar, considering it’s been used in Coca Cola Co. ads as recently as 2016. So, we’ll move on to better things.

The final studio album that Queen completed while Mercury was still alive was 1991’s fascinating Innuendo. The richly symphonic title track is a nod to the “Bohemian Rhapsody” tradition, a long, complex, multi-sectioned number that’s definitely worth a listen. But the best thing about the Innuendo album is its little gems (literally [] there’s even one called “Bijou”).
While there are plenty of examples of Freddie powering through loud numbers like “Headlong” and “The Hitman” despite his frail health – he died of AIDS the following year – it’s the quiet songs that merit attention. My favorite is May’s “Don’t Try So Hard,” featuring philosophical lyrics, a delicate Mercury falsetto that he hadn’t used in over a decade, and a heart-wrenching guitar solo by May. It’s also a succinct example of the balance the band had finally found between classic rock instruments and synths. Such a tragedy that time ran out for them before they could explore that balance further!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_cyFO26spE

After Mercury’s passing, May, Deacon, and Taylor were determined to release one last studio album with all four of them. *Made in Heaven*, released in 1995, uses Mercury’s voice mainly from two sources: songs that had been recorded but not used for other albums and new songs that May helped Mercury record from his sickbed in his final days. There’s also the title song, in which the vocal track Mercury used on his solo album *Mr. Bad Guy* (1985) finally gets a proper Queen arrangement.

The song “Let Me Live” was a discard from *The Works* album in 1984. Queen kept Mercury’s vocal track, added vocals by May and Deacon, and edited out a potential lawsuit-magnet in the arrangement that too closely resembled Erma Franklin’s “A Piece of My Heart.” The eerie result is Mercury singing a plea to “let me live” – in strong, healthy voice – from beyond the grave.

Here’s the original arrangement, before it was altered for the lawyers, that was accidentally released in a promo version of the album:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUS4n5n0IPA

Post-Mercury Queen continues to adapt to the changing times. In 2018, they’re still filling stadiums worldwide in shows featuring original members May and Taylor, a variety of session musicians providing bass and piano (and synths!), and Adam Lambert on lead vocals. Talk about big shoes to fill!
Go Your Own Way

HAND PICKED

Written by Christian James Hand

Feb 4th 1977 was the day that saw, amongst a BUNCH of other stuff I'm SURE, the release of Fleetwood Mac's 11th studio album Rumours. Little did anyone know that it was going to go on to be ABSOLUTELY MASSIVE! Few albums have become as monolithic as this one--- Dark Side Of The Moon would be one that immediately jumps to mind.

The story of the record is as rich and absurd as the record itself. When you see the track listing it is almost a Greatest Hits of songs that weren't hits yet. The singles alone were "Go Your Own Way", "Dreams", "Don't Stop Believing", & "You Make Loving Fun." But you can't ignore the "Album Tracks" that also got on-the-air "The Chain", "Second Hand News", & "Gold Dust Woman." Seven of the eleven tracks saw high radio play and drove the album to total worldwide sales of 40 MILLION RECORDS!

40 MILLION!

In Feb of 1976 The Mac were coming in off of the huge radio hit "Rhiannon" which had allowed them the freedom to really think about what exactly they were looking to accomplish on the next record. It was considered a smart move to look at honing a much more "Pop" sound to continue the trajectory that "Rhiannon" had started. With that in mind, the band decamped to The Record Plant in Sausalito, CA. The original title for the pending record was Yesterday's Gone. Indeed it was, their lives would never be the same after it's release.
Ken Caillat---yes, Colbie's dad--- was drafted to engineer the record and everyone relocated to Nor Cal for what ended-up being a full year of writing and recording. The ladies lived in two condos down by the water and the lads stayed at the lodge adjacent to the studio. By all accounts the partying was at Olympic level! With the actual recording not starting until late into the evening and extending throughout the night the band barely spent any time together outside of the studio hours, but those went on forever. Ken C. wrote a brilliant book called *Making Rumours* that gives you every detail you would like to know about the making of the entire record. Here I'm going to focus on the hit single "Go Your Own Way."

[Christian breaks down "Go Your Own Way" track-by-track here--- enjoy!---Ed.]

https://soundcloud.com/theklossessions/fhf-go-your-own-way

The track starts with Lindsey Buckingham's instantly recognizable guitar riff, followed by his vocal, and then, on the weirdest count imaginable, THE DRUMS! As soon as it went to radio the DJ's all complained about the strange timing of the intro and demanded from the label some sort of edit that would make more sense. Clearer heads prevailed and no such travesty was permitted. Mick Fleetwood has stated that the drum part was something he struggled to accomplish and that it "capitalized on his ineptness." The late, great, Jeff Porcaro of Toto claimed that he could never make sense of the bloody thing and MF puts the weirdness of it down to his dyslexia. Whatever the reasoning the drums are a perfect counterpoint to the rhythm of Lindsey's acoustic strumming. You can't imagine any OTHER drum part being played.

What is there to say about John McVie's bass playing on this song? And EVERY Fleetwood Mac song? He's one of the most under-rated bassists in music history. It is easy in The Mac to be overshadowed by just about everyone, but, luckily, McVie is a bloke who lets the instrument do the talking for him. The bass part on this one is absolutely magical. Counter-melody, counter-point, slippery, groovy, granite-slab rock...it's everything he does brilliantly in one part. If you need FURTHER evidence of his genius all one has to do is drop the needle on *The Chain*, naturally. THAT thing is a thing of beauty.

His, soon-to-be, at the time, ex wife Christine provides an organ track that, if you read my Bob Seger blog in the last issue, you'd know, brings us into the same realm as Payne's does on "Hollywood Nights." We're off to church! And it is flawless. Christine also sings the beautiful track "Songbird" on this album and should never be over-looked when it comes to FM's success. You'd be hard pressed to find a band today that has as many epic musicians as Fleetwood Mac has had in its ranks. These 5 are all fantastic at their assigned tasks and her keys playing and singing is an arrow in Fleetwood Mac's quiver. There's no dead weight in this band.

Lindsey Buckingham is also criminally under-appreciated as both a rhythm and lead guitar player. On this song he dispatches all of the guitar tracks with his usual panache and precision. His acoustic track provides the groove that Mick builds on, his electric playing brings us the moments of drama as the song moves from verse to chorus, and his lead is a thing of beauty! From single notes sustained for days, riffs, licks, and as many different tones as one can cram into a radio hit, it's as if Buckingham has something to prove to the lover that has jilted him who, let's not forget, is standing to his left on-stage just about every night! There's vitriol in the thing. The last 1:30 of the song is pretty much resting on him WAILING in the background, shouting above the din of the command for her to leave him. Unbelievable art.

Buckingham/Nicks have always, as that is how they started, been capable of perfect lyric, melody, and performance. This song is one of my favs of theirs. The harmonies are quintessential Fleetwood
Mac. With Buckingham's pained main vocal front-and-center there is a softer, more innocent ache in the vocal than he allowed in his lead playing. Stevie and he were in the middle of breaking-up, as were the McVie's. Mick's wife had run off with his best mate and he and Nicks were "rumoured" to be sleeping together during the making of the record. All of this emotional turmoil went into making the album and you can HEAR the angst and anger in the main vocals on this one. One of the greatest "Kiss Off" songs in music. Stevie fought Buckingham on the inclusion of the lyric "Packing-up/Shacking-up's all you wanna do" considering it spurious and in concert footage of the day it isn't a shock to see her shooting daggers with her eyes at him as he sings it. Imagine making a record in that environment! And then it being Rumours! They don't make 'em like THIS anymore.

The tracking and mixing of the album took a full year. As Chris Stone, one of the owners of The Record Plant put it, Fleetwood Mac was "excess at its most excessive". From the all-night recording sessions to the boat-loads of cocaine consumed during its making, from the emotional turmoil to the technical wizardry it took to make it, Rumours is a record that comes along once in a lifetime. Or possibly EVER. I, for one, can't believe that it hasn't been made into a Broadway Musical yet. If you decide to write it, I get half for having the idea! Deal?

If you haven't listened to it in a while, do yourself a favor and do it now. Rumours really is a perfect album. And "Go Your Own Way" is a perfect Pop Song. Written to accomplish a goal that not even its authors thought would go as stratospheric as it did. Give it a spin. And pick up Ken's book. It's a great summer read.

Until next time,

cjh

PS: Take a look at my project, The Session.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQh7JYwOJg0
Clavier-Sonaten für Kenner und Liebhaber (Keyboard Sonatas for Experts and Amateurs) is one of the most significant titles of any music book in history. This collection by J.S. Bach’s second surviving son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, published between 1779 and 1787, helps usher in a new era in the music industry.

By the late 18th century, there were no longer enough church jobs to keep food on composers’ tables, and individual wealthy patrons were hard to find. But across Europe, more and more private citizens were entertaining themselves and their friends by making music at home. The money they spent on sheet music provided crucial income for many a fine composer.

This is not to say that C.P.E. Bach’s keyboard sonatas are easy. As the title implies, they offer a range in difficulty. And if your fingering technique is rusty or your fortepiano is on the fritz, never fear. Hungarian early-keyboard specialist Miklós Spányi has you covered - many, many times over. Since 1998 he has been releasing two CDs per year in his C.P.E. Bach: The Solo Keyboard Music series for BIS. In 2017 and 2018, he released volumes 33-36.

Volume 33 includes some of the Kenner und Liebhaber sonatas played on tangent piano (also known as a clavichord), so-called for the small blades or “tangents” used to strike the strings. This 5-octave keyboard was invented to offer a wider range of pitches, dynamics, and expressiveness than the harpsichord allowed. When the fortepiano - which could play even louder and softer -- caught on around 1800, the tangent piano died out as quickly as it had appeared. But Spányi isn’t just trying to be esoteric: C.P.E. Bach wrote his sonatas specifically for the tangent.

A good introduction both to the instrument and the composer is this opening Allegro Moderato from
the Sonata in D minor, Wq. 57, No. 4 (Wq. signifies the catalogue by Alfred Wotquenne, who also
catalogued the works of Gluck; there is also a catalogue by E. Eugene Helm, signified with an H.
number).

Besides the dry, woody tone of the tangent piano, you’ll immediately notice the clearly delineated
beats in this movement. Representing the musical generation following his father’s rich, complex
counterpoint (which was already old-fashioned when J.S. Bach wrote it), C.P.E. composed in a florid
galant style, more focused on chordal progressions and melody than polyphonic voices.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yzsAkxQ_tA

The importance of a melodic upper voice in these keyboard sonatas (an indicator of the classical as
opposed to the baroque period) is obvious in this example from Spányi’s Vol. 34. This is the
Larghetto second movement from the Sonata in G, Wq. 58, No. 2. Spányi does a wonderful job of
letting nature take its course, so to speak – Bach has provided an organically prominent melody line,
with comely upward arcs and tasteful filigree, and Spányi doesn’t push it to be more than it naturally
is. Restraint is vital to keep the music from sounding anachronistically romantic.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaU_IvfXNB0

The Kenner und Liebhaber collection also includes some stand-alone rondos. This would have been
written just before the term “rondo” became associated with a fast, show-off movement (thanks,
Mozart!); here it just means a movement where a recognizable refrain keeps coming back. The
simplicity of Rondo Wq. 58, No. 3 shows the “Liebhaber” (amateur) side of Bach’s output. But simple
does not mean dumbed down, and Spányi’s sensitive, patient touch celebrates the Empfindsamkeit
(sensitivity) that C.P.E. Bach, in his instructional essays, described as an essential ingredient of good
music.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4PdJ02g_LI

For C.P.E., it was fantasy-style pieces that truly embodied the subtleties of Empfindsamkeit. Volume
35 includes Spányi demonstrating a couple of these wandering pieces. It’s a compositional idea
dating back to the Renaissance – a piece that meanders from one theme, style, tempo to another.
Here’s the Fantasia in F, Wq. 59, No. 5. If you tune in at 1:30, you’ll get a stately pre-classical
allegretto; at 3:00, it’s a breathless, unmetered stumble around the keyboard; at 3:49, Spányi breaks
out some race-car virtuosity. If you haven’t used all your emotions yet, there’s still over a minute of
the piece remaining!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVj0BjKhQzg

Spányi is not the only one reveling in C.P.E. Bach’s solo sonatas lately. Playing excerpts from Book 1
of the Kenner und Liebhaber sonatas, is veteran early-keyboardist Colin Tilney (Six Clavichord
Sonatas “For Connoisseurs and Amateurs” (Book 1) – Doremi Records). The most striking difference
between his and Spányi’s recordings is the sound of the instrument. Tilney is also playing a tangent
piano, which he calls a clavichord, but no adjustments have been made in the sound engineering for
modern playback.

This was on purpose. Producer/engineer Christopher Butterfield includes the following awkwardly worded program note: “In order to obtain the correct soft and intimate sound of the clavichord, the listening volume for this recording should be set at a low level (below your volume setting for normal listening level).” To my ear, loud or soft, it’s a failed experiment, especially when compared to the complex timbres captured in Spányi’s recordings.

Here is Tilney playing the Allegro di molto third movement of the Sonata in G, Wq. 55, No. 6. What it lacks in sonic depth, it more than makes up for in performance intrigue. While Spányi relaxes into the natural development of these pieces, Tilney seems to actively explore the inner workings of C.P.E.’s mind - and he finds some rather surprising things there.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uDufiBi4LY

The prolific C.P.E. wrote sonatas for other instruments as well, and there are a couple of interesting recent recordings. Johanna Rose plays the Bach sonatas for viola da gamba, with harpsichordist Javier Núñiez (Rubicon Records). These are elegant works, rarely recorded. While Rose’s bowing arm does not have quite the attack and rhythmic exactness of a Jordi Savall or Alison Crum, she produces a clear, singing tone and has intelligent musical sense. These pieces are well worth knowing. Here’s the second movement of the Sonata in D, Wq. 137.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1vc7_hNdsY

And then there are the solo organ sonatas. Iain Quinn has recorded five of them on a Naxos release, plus one of the keyboard sonatas rendered on organ. This skilled performance reminds you of just who taught C.P.E. Bach how to write music: Mr. Organ himself, the all-time world champion of keyboard polyphony, a.k.a. “Dad”. Of course, these pieces are by the same galant composer we’ve been discussing, yet his music seems different in the context of that magnificent, enveloping pipe organ sound. No question whose son he is.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6Z1l9kYeFE
Toys ‘R’ Us Is Dead

INDUSTRY NEWS
Written by Bill Leebens

Back in Copper #56, Industry News featured a Jeremiad of sorts, "Debt Is Death (Sometimes)". One of the poster children for crippling debt mentioned in that piece was Toys 'R' Us. While perhaps not a great concern to the average audiophile, Toys 'R' Us was nonetheless a major retail force in this country until the company's overwhelming load of debt prevented it from keeping its stores up to date (if you're thinking it sounds like Sears, good for you), and it lost market share to Amazon, Walmart, Target, and others. TRU entered Chapter 11 bankruptcy last fall, hoping that reorganization would allow the chain to survive.

It did not.

By the time you read this, the last few Toys 'R' Us stores that had remained open will have closed, for good.

Speculating about how the chain could've survived is akin to saying, "that darn Titanic would've been fine if it hadn't been ripped open from stem to stern." Perhaps Toys 'R' Us would've been okay if not for that pesky $6.6 BILLION in debt—-but that's how it was. And as pre-existing conditions go, a debt load like that is definitely a killer.

An interesting fact about the chain's business, and indicative of how the toy business has changed, is that TWICE (This Week In Consumer Electronics) listed TRU as #22 on the 2018 list of the Top 100 consumer electronics retailers in the US, with $441 million in electronics sales last year.

As has been the case with Circuit City, there are rumblings about someone buying the brand name and reviving it in some form. But efforts to revive Circuit City have gone absolutely nowhere, and I
suspect that there are plenty of money pits out there already, without losing hundreds of millions more on Toys 'R' Us. And copy-editors everywhere---at least the half dozen still remaining---would be ecstatic to never have to fuss with that damned name again.

It would be nice if the fate of TRU served as a cautionary tale for the perils of deals only made doable by carrying immense debt, but the recent AT&T deal and the feeding frenzy surrounding Fox indicate that absolutely nothing has been learned from the Toys 'R' Us story---and indeed, many of the same players are involved.

Oh, well. Nothin' to see here. Keep movin'.
Testing 1

FEATURED
Written by Charles Rodrigues
"... Of course, you realize it won't sound exactly the same in your living room, sir..."
Acclaimed British biographer Jenny Uglow has published a new study of Edward Lear, that eccentric Victorian whose playful verse has always delighted children, and the child in all of us. Lear was also an ornithologist. As a teenager he was already working at illustrations; John James Audubon encountered him in London and became a friend and mentor. In 1832 the twenty-year-old Lear published *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots*, distinguished both by its excellence and by being the first such edition limited to a single species. A lifelong wanderer, he used proceeds from the edition to begin financing his travels. According to Uglow,

*Birds gave Lear joy all his life, not in cages but in the freedom of the skies, lakes and rivers, forests and gardens. Every journey he made was crowned with birds.*

In a review of Uglow’s *Mr. Lear: A Life of Art and Nonsense*, Jonathan Cott took that idea and ran with it:

*Birds appear everywhere in Lear’s limericks, stories and songs, and in his drawings and doodles he would often portray himself as a hybrid avian-human, with his arms feathering out into wings and his nose curving into a beak. . . . [Uglow] presents the arc and trajectory of Lear’s life, the many journeys and returns, as those of a migratory bird. It is clear that Lear fully embraced William Blake’s notion that “ev’ry Bird that cuts the airy way / Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses five.”*
Reading Cott, I couldn’t help thinking of Olivier Messiaen, another person for whom birds were not mere birds (see Issue 59 of Copper). As a philosophically inclined observer, I’d like to knit together a few more thoughts about the Sublime and the Ridiculous, vision and doggerel, Lear and Messiaen.

But first, back to Lear: if he himself identified with birds—positively aspired to birdness—ordinary humans more often identify him with absurdity, word play, “nonsense,” to echo Uglow. In a longer piece for the New Yorker, Adam Gopnik compared Lear’s approach with that of his contemporary, Lewis Carroll. Whereas Carroll famously took ordinary situations—a little tea party, perhaps—and rendered them absurd through his characters’ outlandish behavior, Lear took outlandish characters or situations and treated them as perfectly normal:

There was an Old Man on a hill,
Who seldom, if ever, stood still;
He ran up and down,
In his Grandmother’s gown,
Which adorned that Old Man on a hill.

Consider “The Owl and the Pussycat,” which Gopnik calls “one of the greatest love poems in the
language.” That’s because, for starters, those two make a most unlikely pair of sweethearts.
Nevertheless and furthermore, they experience an idyllic courtship (“O let us be married! too long
we have tarried: But what shall we do for a ring?”). And everyone in Lear’s fanciful (= visionary,
ideal) community wishes them well:

They sailed away, for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-Tree grows

And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

“Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?” Said the Piggy, “I will.”
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.

Perhaps we cherish Lear not merely because he’s silly but because he suggests the possibility of a
more compassionate universe. Why can’t life, we ask, be more like “The Owl and the Pussycat”?
Gopnik ends with this:

Nonsense suggesting sense is a familiar pattern. Nonsense suggesting the numinous is not. G. K.
Chesterton once wrote that Lear’s rhymes “constitute an entirely new discovery in literature, the
discovery that incongruity itself may constitute a harmony,” and that if “Lewis Carroll is great in this
lyric insanity, Mr. Edward Lear is, to our mind, even greater.”

Uglow refers to “art and nonsense” as if they were separate categories, but Gopnik and Chesterton
apparently disagree. What does any of this have to do with Messiaen’s music? We know that
Messiaen often sounds otherworldly. Lear reminds us that odd sounds can mean a lot. We don’t
often get to hear “nonsense suggesting the numinous.” Or perhaps we do, but we just don’t know
how to listen for it. (Think of supertweeters. Or Shakti Stones.)

In Messiaen, Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone sought to illuminate Messiaen’s life not only through
musical analyses but also by examining his life and times, friends and enemies. The result is not
perfect—one suspects that his widow Yvonne Loriod, who worked with Hill and Simeone, managed
to airbrush away some of her husband’s frailties—but it presents a fuller picture than what we had.

Alas, one thing it reveals is that Messiaen had no detectable sense of humor. Perhaps this is
understandable given his spiritual leanings, but consider his remarks about Ravel and his “brand-
new Piano Concerto”:

I think it’s inconceivable that Ravel could really have taken the Largo of his new concerto seriously,
this Largo which turns a phrase reminiscent of Fauré-on-a-bad-day into Massenet. . . . The best
model for French music today seems to me to be Albert Roussel—the Suite in F and some of the
symphonies—and early Stravinsky. I say early because I still hear nothing in his later music. . . .
Apollo still strikes me as like a piece by Lully with the wrong bass notes. (1931)

We do know that Messiaen loved Petrushka, Le Sacre du printemps and Les Noces. How could he
have dismissed, even in 1931, all other Stravinsky? The neo-classic works abound in wit and in
respectful play with the past, but apparently it takes someone witty and more respectful of all
Western tradition to hear that. There’s much in Messiaen that’s fanciful and childlike, but I’m not
But to what extent did incongruity actually feature in Messiaen’s art? We know he couldn’t resist criticizing neoclassicists as “false revolutionaries”; he mocked those who claimed rights as innovators because they “shifted a few bass lines in a Donizetti cavatina into the wrong place.” Yet he sought out fresh non-Western musics throughout his career and freely appropriated them (as today’s critics might put it) partly to shock listeners’ ears and hearts. Messiaen’s cosmology, his desire to evoke spiritual transcendence, depended heavily on the Other, on a shifting array of resources like Peruvian folk music. (Here I am thinking specifically of the song-cycle *Harawi* and its *Andean influences.*) One problem with cultural appropriation, though: eventually, appropriated objects become part of the un-shocking un-Other, even as their original significance is lost.

Musical playfulness—wit and humor—sidesteps the problem by refusing to take on such gargantuan responsibilities. Messiaen the four-year-old revealed his take on the transcendent when he discussed poetry and its effects with his mother. As she recalled later,

*It’s for you, I said to him, with its bees and grasshoppers. Mummy, he said, you’re a poet just like Shakespeare. Like him, you have suns, planets, ants, frightening skeletons. I prefer things which are frightening.*

He certainly did. I suppose we’ll have to leave musical play, especially the kind involving animals, in the hands of Lear’s slightly younger contemporary Saint-Saëns, with a sidelong glance at Messiaen’s colleagues Jean Françaix and Francis Poulenc.

One can’t help being reminded of the last words of Osgood Fielding III:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mHhr-aaLnI
A few years ago, my old Spica TC-50s finally came to the end of the line. John Bau’s brilliantly constructed wedges from New Mexico could have lasted a bit longer, but the tweeters were damaged, the foam surrounds rotted, and the grille cloth torn and filthy. For the price quoted to get them professionally restored, I could have modern, new speakers with free shipping and no sales tax. I wanted to save time and money for a change, so I went ahead and purchased from the omnipresent online seller of everything.

The small box arrived-- a set of speakers from a European heritage brand that moved to a mega-factory in Asia. I didn't care for the mass-production aspect, but, according to the online reviews, these were supposed to be pretty good. Yet all the favorable ratings didn't curb my disappointment.

As I lifted the speakers from the box, they felt hollow. The sound from the 14 x 12 x 7 containers was fine, maybe a little antiseptic, but nowhere near Spica's innovative design and sound quality. These were made entirely of plastic, and I was just as happy to turn them off as I was to play them --a bad sign when it comes to audio. Equipment should engage you and suck you in and make you cancel appointments so that you can spend time with it.

This experience of ordering speakers online made me nostalgic for the thrill of auditioning equipment, talking to a knowledgeable salesperson, and transporting the gear myself. In the name of convenience, these interactive steps had disappeared since my first purchase back in 1978.
I was an indoor-boy, a little pasty and pudgy because I spent most of my time perusing *Stereo Review* magazine. My friends at Fox Lane Middle School in Mount Kisco, NY were equally dedicated: 'Solder Gun' Bobby kept a dog-eared Radio Shack catalog in his locker. "A. V." Kevin was obsessed with microphones. Jamie, aka "Paco," played guitar, and his dad owned the loudest speakers and best record collection in town. That's what we talked about - all the time.

Whenever my grades in school improved, I was allowed to move my parents’ 1975 Sony compact stereo into my room, where I kept three albums in heavy rotation: Aerosmith, *Live Bootleg*, Queen, *Live Killers*, and the granddaddy of them all, Led Zeppelin's *The Song Remains the Same*. When the house was empty, I would set the records on the high spindle, push the levers to 10, and lie down between the speakers, each one about a foot from my head. After the last record dropped, I would flip the stack over and finish out the set. The sound was harsh, and I couldn't feel the music like when I was listening to the big Jensens at Jamie's house.

That summer I got a job working for an Italian landscaper. Did I mention I was an indoor-boy? The
job was miserable because Carlo made me do everything from mowing to weeding, and gardening. My hands were blistered, and I fantasized about rolling the lawn mower into the pond so he would fire me. I hated the work and, citing more pressing responsibilities, I gave notice to Carlo who said, "Ah, you like de money but no de hard work?" as he put cash into my raw outstretched hand.

After my failed attempt at landscaping, I made some money washing cars, babysitting, and sanding furniture for a carpenter. When I finally earned several hundred dollars, I rode my ten-speed bike triumphantly to a shop in downtown Mount Kisco. As I entered the store, large wooden boxes, gleaming amps, sophisticated turntables, and precision tape decks called to me.

The salesman and I had an immediate rapport. This guy was cool with longish hair and a 70's mustache. I described what I wanted in my listening experience, and he led me to the Cerwin-Vega speakers. They were thunderous and about six times the size of my Sonys. Imbued with efficiency, CVs needed just a few watts to blast 12" woofers (with red surrounds, what?!), horn tweeters, and a midrange. The grille was removable, allowing me to see the woofer vibrations as they blared demo copies of albums I picked out of a bin.

"Whadya got at home to play these?" He asked. I described the system. "You can't hook up speakers like this to that thing!" The CVs used real speaker wire and not the single RCA connection on the rear of the Sony. I really had not planned on buying a full kit, but, as Alec Baldwin's character says in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, "Guy doesn’t walk on the lot unless he wants to buy."

The salesman brought me over to the wall of silver, metered, receivers and proceeded to throw a few switches that connected the Cerwin-Vegas to a 45 wpc Onkyo receiver, whose faceplate was all lit up in a soft golden hue. He then had me test the knobs and switches. The flywheel for the radio dial was so smooth and accurate, and the volume knob had consequence. There was also a wealth of source options: two tape decks, a turntable and an auxiliary, and connections for TWO sets of speakers. Next was a record player, so off we went to the Dual section where shoppers encountered a turntable displayed on an unusually steep angle.

"Watch this," he said as he played the album in this treacherous position using an Ortofon cartridge that resembled a landing Concorde jet. To my amazement, it held on to the grooves with ease. I was fully hooked, and the salesman was ready to close. I came in looking for speakers but could have an entirely new rig for about 200 dollars more. Since this was the most money I had ever spent, somewhere from deep in my Eastern European genetic coding arose the statement, "Can I get a better price, if I pay cash?" My dad was a firm believer of cash transactions. Impressed by my moxie, he penciled full list prices for the three items on a pad, crossed them out one by one with a flourish, and wrote my new "special pricing." He even threw in the speaker wire. I counted out the deposit from my wad of hard-earned wages and rode back home to finagle my parents.

It took some begging, but luckily my father liked to show off. He was willing to make up the difference because I was going to have the best system in the neighborhood. Considering the scale of value and provenance: American speakers, Japanese receiver, and German turntable with a Danish cartridge - this was a serious system for a 12-year-old. I called the shop and let them know we had a deal.

After a sleepless night of anticipation, I returned the next day with the balance of the money and a borrowed station wagon for the stack of boxes awaiting me. When I got to the house, I noticed the envious neighbor kid watching through his window as I hefted my 50lb speakers out of the trunk. I'm an only child, so I hoard this kind of joy with no intention of sharing the experience with anyone else. I wanted to be left alone with my spoils.
As the equipment was unpacked, the woody speaker smell was only improved by the industrial perfume emitted by the other components. I studied the manual making sure everything was correctly hooked up before flipping the switch. And when I did, my Cerwin-Vegas delivered on all frequencies with gut punches and heavenly strains.

The CV/Onkyo/Dual combo served me for hundreds of albums, blared at school dances, and got the police called on me several times. Yeah, that was me playing the intro to 'Iron Man' nearly every day. I changed many fuses and even replaced blown tweeters, but the Cerwin-Vegas performed admirably all through my teens until the Spicas replaced them.

Handmade wood-veneer Zu towers, purchased directly from the manufacturer in Utah, now stand in place of the online speakers. After exhaustive research, phone calls & emails, trips to audio shows and shops, I am much more satisfied with my equipment. Yes, it was easier to click a few buttons and wait for the delivery truck, but there's something to be said about working a little harder, paying more for a quality product, and interacting one-on-one with the people who make and sell your gear. Forty years after my first Hi-Fi purchase, I unboxed my new speakers like it was the first time.