Welcome to *Copper* #77!

I hope you had a better view of the much-hyped lunar-eclipse than I did---the combination of clouds and sleep made it a non-event for me.

Full moon or no, we’re all Bozos on this bus---in the front seat is Larry Schenbeck, who brings us music to counterbalance the *blah weather*; Dan Schwartz brings us *Burritos* for lunch; Richard Murison brings us a non-Python *Life of Brian*; Jay Jay French chats with Giles Martin about the remastered *White Album*; Roy Hall tells us about an *interesting day*; Anne E. Johnson looks at lesser-known cuts from *Steely Dan’s* long career; Christian James Hand deconstructs the timeless "Piano Man"; Woody Woodward is back with a piece on seminal blues guitarist *Blind Blake*; and I consider *comfort music*, and continue with a *Vintage Whine* look at *Fairchild*.

Our reviewer friend Vade Forrester brings us his list of *guidelines for reviewers*.

*Industry News* will return when there’s something to write about other than *Sears*.

*Copper*#77 wraps up with a look at the *unthinkable* from Charles Rodrigues, and an extraordinary *Parting Shot* taken in *London* by new contributor Rich Isaacs.

Enjoy, and we’ll see you soon!

Cheers, *Leebs*.
It’s cold, it’s gray, it’s wet. Time for comfort food: Dvořák and German lieder and tuneful chamber music. No atonal scratching and heaving for a while! No earnest searches after our deepest, darkest emotions. What we need—musically, mind you—is something akin to a Canadian sitcom. (Why not give *Corner Gas* a try?)

I’m determined to ring in 2019 with music that’s intimate and friendly. You’ll recognize some of the usual suspects but also a couple of new faces.

**Antonín Dvořák: Piano Trios Nos. 3 & 4, “Dumky.”** Christian Tetzlaff, violin; Tanja Tetzlaff, cello; Lars Vogt, piano (*Ondine*). Here we have a sister and brother who complete each other’s sentences as a matter of course. It helps that they’re also superb musicians, so when they toss phrases back and forth, the results seem utterly inspired. Small changes of tempo or dynamics inevitably produce just the right onward rush or tender aside. The equally sensitive Vogt might as well be their sibling, having collaborated with them on so many projects (try their Brahms album). Recording quality is excellent.

Repertoire-wise, these two trios are both engaging but quite unlike one another. No. 3 (F minor, op. 65) gives us Dvořák’s Brahmsian turn. The urgent, epic first movement builds dramatically from its opening motives to create a sense of large-scale drama, possibly connected to events in the composer’s life.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfNHk6-pV8Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfNHk6-pV8Q)
The “Dumky” Trio (E minor, op. 90) began as “something small, indeed very small . . . little pieces [that] will be both happy and sad!” as Dvořák told his publisher. A dumka (pl. dumky) was a Slavic ballad, usually melancholy or dreamy; when set by classical composers, balladic sections were offset by livelier music. We get six fairly short movements, all of which emphasize melody over “development.” Try a little of the evocative Andante - Vivace:

A couple of years ago I would have recommended the Busch Trio’s recording of these two works without hesitation; in fact I still think highly of it, along with their other Dvořák albums. If you’ve been collecting them, you may appreciate their sturdier, less “poetic” approach.

**Hugo Wolf: Italienisches Liederbuch.** Diana Damrau, soprano; Jonas Kaufmann, tenor; Helmut Deutsch, piano (Erato). Two of opera’s reigning superstars collaborated with an old art-song hand (one of Kaufmann’s teachers) to create this complete set from a uniquely gifted late-Romantic composer. Wolf (1860–1903) concentrated on song; his high literary standards helped him mold a series of lieder collections unmatched in their consistent quality. Although he was an ardent Wagnerite, Wolf never allowed his allegiances to dictate the style of his own music. Instead he became a sort of poet whisperer, intuiting the needs of each poem he encountered and responding appropriately.

In the Italienisches Liederbuch, that poet was Paul Heyse, who channeled anonymous love poems from Tuscany and Venice, usually single stanzas of six or eight lines. Their brevity encouraged Wolf toward simplicity and concentrated expression. Of course, he couldn’t help adding shades of meaning that go well beyond the verse; aficionados of this repertoire treasure those inflections. Here are two excerpts. First, Damrau offers “Auch kleine Dinge,” the words of which telegraph Wolf’s intentions for the whole cycle:

*Even small things can delight us,*
*Even small things can be precious.*
*Consider how we love to adorn ourselves with pearls;*
*They fetch a high price, and are only small. . . .*
*Just think of the rose, how small it is,*
*Yet it smells so sweet, as you know.*

And here is Kaufmann with “Wie viele Zeit vorlor’ ich”:

*How much time I have lost in loving you!*
*If only I had loved God in all that time*
*I would be sure of a place in paradise,*
*With a saint sitting at my side. . . .*
*And because I have loved you, my lovely violet,*
*I shall never now enter paradise.*

**Embracing the Wind.** Auréole: Laura Gilbert, flute; Mary Hamman, viola; Stacey Shames, harp. Music by Paul Ben-Haim, Robert Paterson, Lior Navok, and Ian Krouse (AMR). Looking at Paul’s playlist for Music Room One recently, I was struck by the preponderance of tracks featuring female voices, especially mezzos and altos, and relatively intimate, often acoustic accompaniments. Simple textures, complex timbres: a great formula for determining just how accurately—and how musically—your system reproduces sounds. That’s part of the appeal of Embracing the Wind, new
from trio Auréole.

Blame Debussy! He wrote the urtext for all those flute-viola-harp works that have proliferated since his 1916 Sonate. And he was definitely onto something: a harp produces wide-ranging, pearly transients; a viola, deep midrange sounds; a flute, breathy bird-like phrases. All three instruments can generate intense activity or slower, more sustained melodies. Music on this album ranges from an exquisite late work by Israeli composer Ben-Haim to Thamar y Amnon, Krouse’s instrumental interpretation of Old Testament sexual violence and shame—via verses from Garcia Lorca. (Though not a word is sung, Krouse supplies Lorca’s complete text and translation plus a lengthy description of the “action” in his program note. Overkill, I think.) Here’s the Pastorale from Ben-Haim:

and a bit of the Krouse:

**Alexander Kastalsky: Memory Eternal.** Clarion Choir, Steven Fox dir. (Naxos). Simply gorgeous. Most of this album is taken up with Kastalsky’s 1917 Vechnaya Pamiat Geroyam (“Memory Eternal to the Fallen Heroes”), his a cappella reworking of a symphonic Requiem composed to honor the fallen of World War I. Using elements of Znamenny (ancient Slavic liturgical chant), choral folk song, and the music of his teachers and contemporaries (Tchaikovsky, Taneyev, Chesnokov, Grechaninov, Rachmaninov et al.), he helped create an instantly recognizable Russian choir style. In other words, this music will seem familiar to you even if you’ve never heard it. Fox and his choristers, including bass soloist and Protodeacon Leonid Roschko, do it full justice. Wonderfully ambient but not swampy acoustics courtesy of St. Jean Baptiste Church, NYC.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSGsmIjRCVE&list=PL-BuhAWBkoWSK-3LU5OS7ALg9dKI76IIQ

By the way, I haven’t forgotten about Berlioz, nor other less-peaceful sounds! Maybe next time—let’s get warmer first.
As I write this, I’m listening to the early Flying Burrito Brothers. I love this stuff.

I first got “turned on” to music like this by hearing the very first Hot Tuna album (called, shockingly, Hot Tuna), the one with mostly just Jack and Jorma. I had started playing about 6 months earlier, just as the Fabs split up, and was listening to Ten Years After, the Airplane, Santana, and Joe Cocker – “the heavy groups”. Suddenly, acoustic Hot Tuna — I consider the album to be among the greatest bass recordings ever done, both for Jack’s playing and for how it captured the bass’s tone. [1]

The album remains a touchstone for me, but I started to listen to everything that was, I suppose you’d call it, softer. That was the primary music I listened to for about two years — formative, crucial, years for my playing.

So, the Burritos: I had no idea who the members were, but I made a recording of them playing in Philadelphia’s Sigma Sound Studios over the air on WMMR that I listened to all the time. I loved it. So one would think I’d be primed to love The Eagles, right? And, as I said last time, you’d almost be right. I want to explore what about them turned me off so much, and why I think (or rather, why I know) they’re so disliked by a very vocal minority.

And believe me, I know we’re a minority. In 2015 the Eagles Greatest Hits Reunion Revue played for eight nights at the forum. I went one of the nights, courtesy of Bernie. I enjoyed their playing, but that’s about it (except for the experience of seeing and hanging out with Bernie). It was nice to see that certain level of professionalism, but the music? Meh. But eight nights, 12,000 people a night — that’s a whole lot of fans. And plainly, they completely disagreed with me. People were swaying and singing along for three solid hours. 96,000 people can’t be THAT wrong.

So what is it? What about them puts off all of those folks who should like them?
I can almost remember exactly where we were when the discussion occurred. We had just played Mountain Stage in Charleston, West Virginia. It was, as usual, just the two of us, and we were on our way up and over the mountains to Washington D.C., to do a performance for Sirius Radio (I think — one of the digital services, anyway). I don’t remember how we got into it, but I do remember Bernie saying, “You would have hated playing with Henley!”

I laughed and said, “I’m sure I would have!” (I had heard plenty of stories about Henley). “But why?”

And he told me about how, back in the day (so to speak), if he changed ONE NOTE in a solo from how he played it on the record, Don would go nuts after a show. Around the time of the rehearsals for the Eagles’ 2015 shows, Bernie was over here one day, and we were talking about that moment. My wife, Elin, was curious what that was about. Bernie put it this way (paraphrased — his exact words are on the wind):

“For players like me and Dan, the opportunity to play live is a chance for everybody there to reach something new together. We approach the music as if it’s new – every time.” Conversely, the way Henley and Frey ran the Eagles, and with the addition of more musicians to fill out the recorded overdubs, Bernie described it as a revue of the hits; the same way, every time.

It’s a battle, or conversation, as old as recording: should live music be faithful to the recording or not? Obviously, with my love of the Grateful Dead, and early Weather Report, the wildness of some music as opposed to the heavily-rehearsed, I know where I come down. Give me the chance to fail; it’s the only way I know to guarantee the chance to soar.

[1] When Jack Casady visited me in 1993 to do an interview for Bass Player magazine, I played him a track from Jon Hassell’s *City: Works of Fiction* to demonstrate the effect of the first Hot Tuna album on me.
Grilled Cheese and Tomato Soup

THE AUDIO CYNIC
Written by Bill Leebens

There are days for haute cuisine, hipster toy food, meals that challenge and provoke and lead one to question the nature of food itself: nourishment? Art? An act of rebellion against convention and tradition?

Then there are days for comfort food, a physical reassurance that maybe everything will be all right, a remembrance of meals past with loved ones long gone. These are days that put questions on hold, that quell anxieties, that bring a pause to the strings of days that move too too fast.

These are the days for grilled cheese and tomato soup. These are the days for buttered popcorn and a crisp cold apple by a crackling fire, like your mother used to serve on cold winter days when the windows were frosted and breath would freeze if you went outside. Days when the act of movement itself required preparation and consideration and was almost too challenging to bear.

That grilled cheese sandwich: with or without the soup, it can become an act of contemplation and reverence, almost an act of prayer in which every aspect is vital, every element has to mesh. Discord is not allowed, innovation is unwelcome.

The bread? Pillowy white fluff from a plastic bag. This is not the time for artisanal or seeded or
sprouted or gluten-free. The cheese? Sorry, American. Perhaps a little cheddar or even pepper jack
blended in if one is inexplicably adventurous or upbeat, but no chevre or dear God, bleu. Butter. Lots
of it. A pool melted in the pan or on the griddle, more carefully spread on the bread. Heat, high, but
not so high as to blacken the butter.

The result should be a perfect golden brown, crusty, crispy, almost caramelized. The cheese should
be viscous and stretchy and gooey and should erupt like slow-moving magma when the crust is
broken and yields.

To this midwestern WASP, making a grilled cheese sandwich is as close as I can come to preforming
a tea ceremony. That likely sounds ridiculous, but it can be a contemplative, conscious act, not just a
thrown-together drippy mess hurriedly and thoughtlessly gulped down.

There are parallels in music.

There is comfort music, familiar and perhaps a little wistful, like a patiently-paced performance of
Trois Gymnopedies.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWgC8hRlOK4

Or perhaps the thousandth play of Nilsson Sings Newman, forty-five years on.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZnt3hgXh5E&list=PLkqXz94pBYYYoBhdYoY4j1HdvdAkn6wK&i
ndex=9

Then there are days that require a kickstart. Decades ago in my blue collar ---actually brown collar---
days when I made my way to a demanding and diminishing job I hated, I would fire myself up with
The Call's "Let the Day Begin", played over and over on my Dasher's cassette player, laboriously
rewound at stoplights.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=to2KasivROc&list=RDto2KasivROc&start_radio=1&t=0

More recently, Richard Thompson's sardonic "Dad's Gonna Kill Me", played at very high volumes,
has accomplished the same thing, an emotional doppio espresso. Fortunately, no rewinding is
required.

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

On a gentler level, Simone Dinerstein's Goldberg Variations are just the thing to get the heart and
brain moving and get a reluctant worker bee up and out the door.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftlQ7OYgN28

We are all different; we are all the same. Whatever works for you, says I.
Whatever works for you.
The Life of Brian

QUIBBLES AND BITS

Written by Richard Murison

Havergal Brian was one of the most prolific English composers of the 20th Century. Many of you will be thinking “Havergal Brian”? Very few have actually heard of him, but that number is growing all the time. It was his burden – one carried by many highly-regarded composers – that his reputation has only really started to germinate since his death.

William “Havergal” Brian was born in 1876 – he was a mere 16 years younger than Mahler – and was a largely self-taught composer. Throughout his long life – he died in 1972, just shy of his 97th birthday – he churned out a colossal body of very substantial works, including no less than 32 full symphonies. His admirers included Sir Edward Elgar, Sir Henry Wood (who programmed his works at a number of Prom concerts) and Richard Strauss. Almost none of his music was ever published during his lifetime, and, as a consequence, a substantial body of his earlier output is irretrievably lost. He adopted the name “Havergal” as a tribute to a family of hymn-writers, of whom the most notable was Frances Ridley Havergal.

In his earlier years, he enjoyed the financial support of a wealthy patron, who allowed him to focus on composition, and provided for his growing family. But his patron died at the beginning of WWI, and with him his generous stipend. Brian enlisted with an Artillery company but was discharged due to having “flat feet,” and he left his family to work in London as an occasional journalist and music critic. For the most part, he lived a penurious existence, and by WWII he was a pensioner.

In 1958, at the age of 82, he moved to a seafront council flat in Shoreham-on-Sea, on England’s south coast, where, instead of fading into oblivion, he embarked upon an incredible 10-year burst of truly extraordinary creative output. In that period he wrote no less than 20 symphonies and two concertos, as well as a number of other substantial orchestral works. This remarkable stream of composition continued in the face of almost total disinterest on the part of the music establishment. Very few of his compositions were performed during his lifetime, and no commercial recordings were ever made.

There were three major obstacles to performing – let alone recording – Brian’s music. The first was his reputation. At a time when Britain was still struggling to emerge from being a class-driven
society, most of the music establishment was just that – the establishment. And establishments tend to prefer people who adhere to establishment norms and don’t rock the boat. Being a self-taught, working-class, amateur with ambitions above his station would have placed him somewhere beneath contempt. So Havergal Brian’s work was not generally supported by the musical establishment of his day.

The second was the fact that almost none of his music had been published, so there were no printed scores to work from. Any performances that did take place had to be played from hand-annotated copies, many of which contained transcription errors and other major obstacles, such as page breaks at seriously inconvenient places. These issues inevitably meant a need for additional rehearsal times, something which was inconsistent with the demands of the major orchestras and conductors.

Finally, it must be noted that Brian’s works invariably call for quite substantial orchestral resources, and are quite challenging to play, which means that smaller local orchestras are often poorly equipped to take on the challenge. The toughest of all is Brian’s first symphony “The Gothic”, which, in addition to an immense orchestra, calls for four choirs, a children’s choir, four vocal soloists, and additional accoutrements such as an organ and a “thunder machine”. It goes on for an hour and 40 minutes, and is officially recognized as the longest symphony ever written. Remarkably, it was performed in 1966 at the Royal Albert Hall, by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Sir Adrian Boult, for live broadcast by the BBC, with Brian in attendance. A famous photograph shows Sir Adrian addressing the assembled forces using a megaphone! A recording of that performance does exist, and is now available on CD from the Testament label, but is not highly regarded.

Despite the persistent neglect of his work, Havergal Brian did still have the occasional champion, and the most important of these turned out to be Dr. Robert Simpson, a BBC producer, and himself a symphonic composer with a solid reputation (Simpson and Brian appear in the photograph at the top of this column, taken in 1972). It was Simpson who was responsible for making the 1966 broadcast of “The Gothic” happen, and he was determined to go one step further by producing the first ever commercial recordings of some of Havergal Brian’s works.

This is where the story of Havergal Brian crosses my own path. Simpson knew he would need a substantial orchestra of professional quality, but with the capacity to devote far more rehearsal and preparatory time to the project than would normally be available. He mentioned his dilemma to Sir Michael Tippett, who recommended that he approach the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra, which Tippett had regularly conducted. The orchestra was open to recording projects, and moreover had a strong preference for modern works where its technical shortcomings might not be so obvious. They eagerly came on board.

One of the pieces scheduled to be performed was Psalm 23, an early piece by Brian (ca. ~1905), which he had shown to Sir Edward Elgar who pronounced himself impressed by it. Unfortunately, over the years, it had got lost. Except, that is, for the vocal score. So in 1944, he set about reconstructing it, and because of the Elgar connection, Simpson wanted to include it in his set of commercial recordings. That meant he would need a choir, and so my school choir was co-opted into the project. This was natural because we were, at that time, one of the county’s top choirs and worked routinely with the LSSO.

Since Simpson was a BBC producer, he also set about making a TV documentary about the project. It was called “The Unknown Warrior”, and was aired in 1972. Here it is in its entirety for you to watch. I’m in there somewhere, singing bass in the choir, although you can’t see me. But there is a very nice close-up of the young soprano who became my wife of 40 (and counting) years!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41ZFu-MKTRQ
The recordings eventually came out, comprising symphonies 10, 21, and 22, Psalm 23, and English Suite No. 5. Responsibility for conducting the performances were distributed among three conductors, Eric Pinkett, James Loughran, and Laszlo Heltay. For symphony 10, a young James Loughran (who had just succeeded the legendary John Barbirolli at the Hallé), was making his own “first-ever gramophone recording.” Due to the machinations of conductor Laszlo Heltay, the recording schedule for Psalm 23 was pushed out to a date when our choir would be unavailable due to school exams, and his own Brighton Festival Choir was substituted.

Today, you can buy a CD transcription of the original LP’s on-line from Heritage Records. You won’t be mistaking the LSSO for the London Symphony Orchestra, but at the same time the LSO wasn’t clamoring to participate in making these historic recordings. You won’t be buying this CD to listen to Heltay’s contribution either, but the performances conducted by Loughran and Pinkett are notably more accomplished.

Robert Simpson’s tireless promotion of Havergal Brian ultimately bore fruit. Today, much of Brian’s work is seeing widespread concert programming, and almost all of it can be found in commercially-available recordings, albeit mostly from specialist labels. There is an active Havergal Brian Society, with a comprehensive and informative web site (which looks like it was designed in 1992). It is also interesting that in 2011 “The Gothic” was performed at a Prom concert at the Royal Albert Hall, with almost a third of the hall taken up by the performers. Tickets sold out on the day they went on sale, which is quite remarkable for an early-season Proms concert. The conductor was Martyn Brabbins, who has conducted numerous Brian works on the Dutton label, and also serves as President of the Havergal Brian Society. The performance is available on CD, on the Hyperion label. Here is an amateur video of the closing moments of the concert (5 minutes of symphony, 10 minutes of ovation):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oMxbxI3l18

So that’s the Havergal Brian story. The unknown warrior who spent a lifetime battling against disinterest and neglect. A man who wrote more than 20 symphonies while in his eighties and nineties. But is it a tale of redemption – with the recognition denied in his lifetime triumphantly bestowed after his death?

Well, no. At least I don’t think so. I’ve been listening to a lot of Havergal Brian lately, and Gustav Mahler he ain’t. While there’s no doubt that he was a composer of genuine talent, and vision, and much of what he wrote is eminently listenable, his overarching problem is that his music is ultimately too fragmentary. Individual ideas spring up and capture the attention and imagination…but then he goes nowhere with them. And while one can often discern the elements of a narrative arc, it is as though whole chapters are missing. The lack of satisfaction leaves me, as a listener, unsettled and feeling short-changed. Listening to Psalm 23, which I well remember singing back in 1972, I hear what sounds like a medley of musical fragments that have been inexpertly assembled. Sure, each of the fragments is impressive, and some are undoubtedly things of great beauty, but the whole fails to amount to more than the sum of its parts.

Brian’s larger-scale works also tend to suffer from never seeming to generate a suitable climax. This becomes more notably egregious the larger the scale of the work. After all, if you are going to assemble the gargantuan forces required to perform “The Gothic”, you would think that at some point you are going to want to make use of them all. But no. The vast majority of critical reviews of
the 2011 Prom concert were not complimentary. And yet the vast majority of audience reaction was laudatory...and many of the critical professional reviews felt obliged to admit that the overall effect of the performance was in some strange way rather satisfying.

A number of pro-Brian analysts choose to advance the argument that the very aspects of his music which give rise to the most criticism are in fact conscious and deliberately-conceived choices, honed by a deep-seated reaction to the first World War, and nourished by his isolation from the various progressive schools of music which dominated high-brow music circles (and not necessarily for the better) for most of the 20th Century. Who is to say which view is correct?

As I type, I am listening to Symphony 21 from the “First Commercial Recordings” CD, and I am definitely enjoying it. Each individual moment is nicely constructed, expertly orchestrated, and pleasantly melodious. But whereas I could probably play through the entire hour of Part II of Mahler’s 8th symphony in my head and not miss a beat, it strikes me that I can’t imagine how I’d ever get to that point with Havergal Brian’s 21st. I think that’s the bottom line.
While at the listening session for the new Giles Martin remixed *White Album* and associated demos, I experienced how much Giles sounds like his father, George. In manner, style, and cadence...but younger. If I closed my eyes, I could almost hear George, which, I guess, was almost fitting given what I was about to experience.

The Giles Martin re-imagined *White Album* remixes, along with Giles' voice and mannerisms, make listening to the *White Album* the same...but very different.

To many of you, Beatles freaks, who were hoping (but not sure) if the *White Album* would be subject to the same kind of marketing blitz of multiple versions and remixes of *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*...You should know that the 50th Anniversary release of the *White Album* is even grander (if that’s possible) than *Sergeant Pepper’s*.

The inclusion of many of the legendary Esher Demos, the actual 4-track demos individually made by John, Paul & George, ultimately led to the songs that comprise the 30-track double *White Album* released on November 22nd 1968, a mere 5 years since Americans heard “I Want To Hold Your Hand” for the first time (not to mention the 5th anniversary of the Kennedy Assassination!)

The weekend of the 1968 release of the *White Album*, I was attending a 48-hour drug-fueled (mostly psychedelics) party at my friends apartment on the Upper West Side in Manhattan.

It seemed that everyone brought a copy of the album.

We listened to it, side to side, track to track (as God intended vinyl to be heard), in order, nonstop.
We didn’t know about the fights: First Ringo quit, then returned to a relieved and warm welcome back from the others; then George quit (he actually argued with Ringo as to who quit first!); then sound engineer Geoff Emerick walks out, refusing to accept John Lennon’s pleas to stay, and never returns to the project, leaving the job to several others.

I can’t speak for the others, but as a fan I knew nothing of what was really going on in terms of the songs meanings and derivations.

I didn’t know that most of the songs were written in India during the Maharishi retreat period. I didn’t know that this may have been the sound of my favorite band on the verge of a breakup. The only report I read was in *Rolling Stone*, and it informed that “Martha, My Dear” was about Paul’s sheepdog.

That was about it.

We were all blissfully high and reveling in a 30-track double album by our favorite band. We were loving every minute of it.

Now we know all. Here are some tidbits:

"Bungalow Bill" --- A real guy living in the Ashram.

"Dear Prudence" --- Prudence Farrow (Mia’s sister), too shy to come out of her bungalow while John & Paul serenade her outside her window.

"Helter Skelter" --- Paul wanting the band to sound louder than The Who.

"Sexy Sadie" --- Change the phrasing to Maha-rishi and then sing all the lyrics as written. The song is an expose (as Lennon saw it) of the Maharishi’s hypocritical manipulations of a woman at the ashram.

You get the idea.

As fans, we knew none of this at the time.

In the intervening years, we now know (maybe too much) about everything concerning the Beatles.

I’m always torn between my Beatles research, my desire to remain just a fan, and whether they can co-exist (like there’s a choice!)

Now, 50 years later and as a journalist, I sat in the listening studio at Power Station with about 30 well-known music industry Beatles professionals, some of whom know way more than I about the life and times of the Beatles. Many of these people have written the very books that have informed me. The difference between me and most of them?

I have a life!

I can always listen just as a fan, but as a musician, producer, and now journalist, I wanted to know more about the technical side of the process.

Giles was very accommodating, funny, self effacing, and quite honest.

Here is my interview with Giles Martin:
JJF: Was the *White Album* totally remixed in the native Hi-Res digital domain?

GM: Yes. All the tracks, mostly 8-tracks (some 4), were transferred into Hi-Res digital and then used to remix the album.

JJF: Were Paul & Ringo present during the mixes?

GM: No. I’d go to Ringo to play him stuff, and Paul came to me.

JJF: Anything they didn’t like?

GM: Not really. They know what they like and want as well. There’s an element of trust there because they know I’m not doing this to further my career, if that makes sense.

JJF: My friends, mainly musicians, come to my house and I play the remix of “Sgt. Pepper’s.” The first thing they notice is that the drums sound like John Bonham and Paul’s bass sounds like John Paul Jones. I make the joke: Well that makes sense, those two are the only living members (Giles laughs)...Are you conscious of the fact that the drums and bass are so prominent?

GM: The fact is that I don’t have to limit things with compressors. I can have more low-end in the mix because I don’t have to worry about the needle jumping out of the groove (on a record). All of these things result in more dynamism.

But essentially, it’s what was on the tape (originally recorded). There were very few clean drum takes on Beatles records. On *Sgt. Pepper’s* we had isolated drum takes on “With A Little Help From My Friends” and “Lovely Rita”.

“A Day in the Life,” for example, was hard to mix because the bass and drums were on the same track.

The *White Album* was mostly 8-track. On the *White Album*, there were a few discreet (meaning isolated) drum tracks.

JJF: Your dad has been quoted as saying that the *White Album* would have been much stronger if it was just a single album. Did he ever tell you what tracks would have made the cut for a single album?

GM: We never really discussed the Beatles, funnily enough. When I ended up doing Love --- because Love was so ridiculous and seemed like a bad idea the time --- I thought that if I was going to get fired and I had only one legacy, I would back up the tapes so at least I’ve done something (none had been digitally backed up at the time).

I listened to everything, made notes, and played them for my dad. That was the only time I talked to my dad about the Beatles.

JJF: Do you have any favorite tracks on the *White Album*?

GM: “Happiness Is a Warm Gun” (in the general listening session, Giles spoke about the song as a very special arrangement that always kept changing) and I kind of like “Blackbird” because my kids sing it. It’s a clever song.

JJF: In general, what would you say is the overriding purpose of the remixes?
GM: We try to peel back the layers between what’s on tape and what you listen to at home...make it sound like a record with less shit on it. We have everything at our disposal that they had (at the time). We have all the old Vox’s, we had all these choices. The old red TG desk, we have plugins and I work out how we can take things off and still keep the record.

It’s the vibrancy on tape that’s so important.

JJF: I always explain to people that you can never get any closer to an artist’s recordings than what a producer hears at the mixing desk. Having said that, how much closer is the White Album mix today, compared to what it was 50 years ago?

GM: I think we have the advantage, despite what people say. The worst listening environment now, is better than the worst listening environment then. Now, more than ever before, we can get the listener closer into the control room.

JJF: Will Rubber Soul and, by extension, Abbey Road be getting the same treatment?

GM: I can honestly say: There are no plans. I’m always surprised to get through one of them. I would never say never, but right now there are no plans. It’s never been discussed...

JJF: What surprised you at the White Album remix sessions?

(It’s important to note, before Giles’ response, that the reason for the question had to do with all the stories that the White Album, because of the infighting, was like 4 solo albums. Here, for the record, is the actual breakdown: 17 tracks had all 4 Beatles playing, 4 tracks had 3, 2 tracks had 2, and 7 tracks had 1)

GM: The biggest surprise was that it was a band working together. The biggest surprise to me, was that I thought it was a conflict album. It was certainly conflicted with my dad because it wasn’t going in the direction (meaning control) that he wanted to go.

Some people want to believe that they weren’t playing together in the room.

What I heard in the music (and talking in between takes) was congeniality and collaboration.

JJF: Thank you Giles!
“You should visit the Yakeshi Factory in Foshan,” my friend Richard said. “They make really good products, and after every one of my visits, they send me back to my hotel with two girls for company.”

Richard was a competitor of mine, but we often shared information. Doing business in China is challenging, and having a friend with similar interests and insight was beneficial to both of us.

We were sitting in a bar in the Shangri-La in Luo Hu, Shenzhen. The hotel is misnamed, as it is quite run down and shabby. I sometimes stay there, though, as it sits on the border of Hong Kong and the train to the almost western civilization of downtown Kowloon.

Two girls (or any girls) is not my thing, but the factory sounded interesting as they made inexpensive amplifiers and CD players. I made an appointment and was not disappointed. The products were well-made and the prices terrific. Visit over, Mr. Chung, the owner, and Robin, the manager, took me out for a Chinese banquet. The Chinese often like to impress western merchants by lavishing food on them, and that night was no exception. Meal over, they dropped me off at my hotel. No girls.

A few months later I bumped into Richard.

“How are you doing with Yakeshi?” he asked.

“Fantastic factory. Thanks for the recommendation,” I replied.

“My pleasure. Did they set you up with the ladies? I was just there and the girls were amazing. Let me tell you about one of them...”

“No,” I quickly interjected. But I’m glad you had a good time.”

My next visit was exactly the same: factory visit, dinner in the evening, then back to the hotel.

I did find it curious that Richard was always offered women and I was sidestepped, but it didn’t really matter, as the factory always provided great products.
My third visit was in the morning, about a year later. Business and lunch over, Mr. Chung said to me,

“What are your plans today?”

“None,” I replied. “I kept the day free in case we went beyond lunch.”

“Would you like to see something interesting?” he said with a glimmer in his eye. I have a place to take you to that I’m sure you will love.

Finally, I thought.

“Sure.” I replied, “What do you have in mind?”

And as if to add some mystery to it, he added, “You’ll soon see.”

“Cool.”

I sat in his lavish, brand-new BMW as he drove me slowly towards Shenzhen. Because of the volume of traffic in southern China, cars rarely speed. The scenery in Guangdong Province was once beautiful. But now, due to the massive expansion of industry, the air is polluted, the buildings are utilitarian, and even though crops grow everywhere they can, a gloominess hangs over the landscape.

After about an hour or so, I began to wonder about our destination. Should I tell him I have no interest in meeting women? Would he be offended if I refused? But as he had piqued my interest, I decided to stay silent and see where this led. At one point, we turned into an open space and a sign read “Lian Hua Shan Park.”

He stopped the engine and got out. He led me on a steep path, up a hillside, and as we progressed up the hill I was beginning to get a little winded. Where could we possibly be going? At the top, the path widened into a large plaza, and in the center was a giant statue of Deng Xiaoping, who seemed to be striding forward with his head held high. Deng was instrumental in opening up China, and is really the man responsible for the economic clout that China today exerts all over the world. Fascinating as it was, I was bewildered by the statue.

Mr. Chung and I surveyed the vista of a sprawling Shenzhen laid out in front of us.

“Just think,” Mr. Chung said. “Thirty years ago, there was almost nothing here, and now look at it. Isn’t that interesting?”
As I've indicated in the previous installments of *Vintage Whine* in *Copper* #75 and #76, the story of Sherman Fairchild goes far beyond the realm of audio, and at some point really should be detailed in a full-fledged biography---the range and extent of his interests and achievements beggars belief. Fairchild's ventures in pro and consumer audio alone deserve far more space than I'm able to devote to them here.

This installment, we're going to focus on Fairchild gear as it applied to records---both cutting discs and playing them back. But first, a caveat: if one were to explore the vintage audio products made by Marantz or McIntosh, or even Fisher or Scott, those are well-documented. There's considerable reference material available on those products, and in some cases there are company histories available and even restorers who specialize in bringing classic models from those brands back to life.

As far as I can tell at this point of my research into Fairchild's audio products---none of that exists for the brand. And so, it's entirely likely that errors will be made in these stories, in spite of my best efforts to verify every factoid.

Keeping that in mind---onward!

Fairchild gear was involved in recording and cutting some of the most-revered records ever pressed. Last issue we showed cutting engineer George Piros at the controls of a Fairchild 523 cutting lathe, part of a pretty complete Fairchild suite at Reeves Sound Studios. According to our friend Tom Fine, his father Bob Fine worked at Reeves Studios in the late 1940's, alongside Piros. Tom adds, "My father's first studio, in Rockland County, had a Fairchild cutting lathe with a Miller Cutterhead. And of course the early Mercury Living Presence recordings were done on Fairchild tape machines....MLP wasn't recorded in stereo until very late 1955, so everything from 1951-1955 was mono, and recorded on Fairchilds."

As we've previously noted, Fairchild never did anything halfway, or on the cheap; the gear was built to be the best available, and was built to last. That 523's cost of just under $3,000 was about the price of a new 1948 Cadillac, and today would equal about $32,000.
Entering the '50s, Fairchild was a leader in record playback. We've previously written about the Model 225 moving coil cartridge, which is still sought by collectors and retrophiles. It may have been a compact, lightweight device, but it appeared particularly robust—especially in comparison to many of today's tiny megabuck cartridges.
quality throughout makes the difference in the FAIRCHILD cartridge

1. Precision ground and lapped, grain oriented diamond stylus fitted and bonded to stylus arm for minimum record wear and long life.

2. Center beam support insures precise vertical placement of stylus arm.

3. Special alloy aluminum stylus arm with low moving mass provides vastly improved tracking.

4. Microadjust Screw — permits exact factory setting of damping after final assembly. Assures uniform flux gap, proper centering of stylus arm and correct damping.

5. Moving coil comprised of 225 turns of copper-silver alloy wire .00115″ diameter wound on nylon bobbin .077″ diameter. Wire is triple gold plated before enamelling for maximum protection under all climatic conditions.

6. Special composition silicone rubber damping ring for moving coil.

7. Alnico V magnet for greatest energy product. Special alloy flux return path prevents leakage and hence insures full utilization of magnetic energy and maximum sensitivity.

8. Mylar vane anchors coil bobbin to base. Flexure pivot construction provides extreme freedom of motion.


10. Gold plated terminal lugs for corrosion-free contact and improved signal-to-noise ratio.

THE FAIRCHILD MODEL 225A CARTRIDGE

$37.50

FAIRCHILD RECORDING EQUIPMENT COMPANY
Long Island City 1, New York
Not to keep harping on prices, but even that seemingly modest $37.50 in 1955 equals $350 today---of course, many moving coil cartridges today are ten or twenty times that. Or more.

In 1958, well-known audio engineer/man about town Bert Whyte wrote in *Radio & TV News* about the first Stereo record releases---and the new gear needed to play them. Of the Fairchild stereo playback gear, Whyte wrote "The arm used is the large studio turret head type which is found in many broadcasting stations. The cartridge is a novel design, utilizing two moving coils to pick up the '45-45' groove modulations of the Westrex system...the Fairchild stereo cartridge is at present quite a bit larger than its conventional 225 units [shown above] and for this reason the large studio arm is used....the present arm and cartridge works very well and it is actually available to those affluent people who can afford the rather breathtaking 250 dollar price tag. But then, there are always those who want to be 'fustest with the mostest'."

And yes... $250 in 1958? $2,200 today. Compared to many moving coil cartridges---a bargain!

The most-legendary piece of Fairchild phono playback gear is the 412-4 turntable. In 1957 *Radio & TV News* found the new table worthy of a four-page feature upon its introduction. Typically for Fairchild, the table was built like a piece of industrial machinery: the chassis was heavyweight steel, the hysteresis-synchronous motor was suspended by spherical vibration mounts, drive was by two belts and an intermediate pulley for maximum decoupling, the main bearing was rifle-drilled Babbitt, the platter was a massive aluminum casting---well, you get the idea. But the really big news of the 412-4 was that platter speed was set and changed was not mechanical, but purely electronic, effected by an oscillator that changed the frequency of the current to the motor. In addition, the table could run on a.c. inputs from 85 to 135 volts, or on 50, 60, or 400 cycles---or from a battery supply!---all accomplished without any adjustments. Playing speeds were 16 2/3, 33 1/3, 45, and 78.26, adjustable plus or minus 5%.
A single-speed 33 1/3 model 412 was available without the electronic speed control (shown below), which was available as a slide-in unit that could be added to the basic 412 at a later time.
Ever seen either version of the 412? Likely not, and neither have I.

Next time: more Fairchild magic.
Steely Dan has such a smooth sound, it’s easy to imagine them appearing fully-formed from the musical ether. Needless to say, that wasn’t the case. Singer/keyboardist Donald Fagen had met guitarist/bassist Walter Becker in 1967 while they were attending Bard College in the Catskills. They both loved R&B, pop, and jazz, and they both wanted to succeed as songwriters.

Obviously, they needed to be in NYC. By 1968 they’d started pitching songs at the famous Brill Building, where the likes of Burt Bacharach and Carole King tried to interest producers in their wares. Fagen and Becker did get some decent nibbles -- they were commissioned to write a movie score, plus Barbra Streisand recorded one of their songs – but this approach was clearly not going to lead to the big time.

So, they struck out on their own, founding Steely Dan in 1972. That same year they signed with ABC Records to produce their first album, *Can’t Buy a Thrill*. The singles, “Do It Again” and “Reeling in the Years,” are still two of their most recognized songs. Quite a start!

Unique to this album is the presence of David Palmer, who was hired as lead vocalist for a couple of songs. Fagen and Becker originally set up a full band, but it turned out that only the two of them remained constant members of Steely Dan, relying on a big roster of session musicians for everything else. On subsequent albums, Fagen sang all the leads.

“Dirty Work” is one of the Palmer tracks, a laid-back blues rock number which delays the onset of jazz harmonies and textures (including that Hammond organ!) until the second half of the song. It’s strange to hear Palmer’s quivering tenor instead of Fagen’s voice.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrE_cDvcgJg
The toe-tapping melody is in sharp contrast with the grim contents of the lyrics, and that dichotomy became a common technique in Steely Dan songs. For example, there’s “King of the World, from *Countdown to Ecstasy* (1973), which deals with surviving a nuclear holocaust in a disturbingly upbeat tone.

This quirky funk track sizzles with Jim Hodder’s tight drumming. Hodder, along with guitarists Denny Dias and Jeff “Skunk” Baxter, were part of Steely Dan at this point, a rung above the other eight session instrumentalists and six backing vocalists. Fagen lays down a leaping synthesizer solo (starting at 1:54) that puts into music the image of a survivor wandering the scorched, empty land.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Us0EsdiLBjY

It’s not just because of their music and lyrics, or their famously detailed studio work, that Steely Dan is an industry original. Frankly, they handled every aspect of the business oddly. In 1974 they retired from live playing, only three albums into their career. One hopes that pianist Glenn Gould, who had made the same decision in the classical sector back in 1964, applauded their commitment to studio craftsmanship over on-stage showmanship. Pop music consumers certainly seemed to. While *Countdown the Ecstasy* had produced no hit singles, “Rikki Don’t Lose That Number” from *Pretzel Logic* (1974) was a smash.

For a band whose sound is based in brass licks and synths, it’s rare to find a song led by strummed acoustic guitar. But that’s what you have in “With a Gun,” which teases the country and western genre. The harmonies are wittily cock-eyed, giving a middle finger to the three-chord standard, and making you wait half a verse before landing on the tonic.

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

Dark humor is a consistent element of style of Fagen/Becker songs, a fact widely on display in the 1975 album *Katy Lied*. Just consider the song titles: “Bad Sneakers,” “Your Gold Teeth II,” and “Daddy Don’t Live in That New York City No More.”

And then there’s “Doctor Wu,” as tongue-in-cheek as it is jazzy. The lyrics deal with a jilted man telling his shrink about his lost girlfriend, all the while wondering whether the good doctor is also the woman’s new lover. This song also provides endless examples of the so-called “mu-chord” (warning: music theory ahead), a dissonant jazz chord similar to a sus2 (a triad with added second or ninth) but missing the third of the chord. Because of its prevalence on Steely Dan songs, it’s typically associated with them.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w58E2S315a4

*The Royal Scam* (1976) and *Aja* (1977) continued the band’s success, with the latter becoming their highest-selling album as well as a critical triumph. Besides singles like “Josie” and “Deacon Blues,” the record includes an interesting character study in “Black Cow.” The title comes from the root beer floats a woman likes. Musically, the song is notable for its use of contrast, both in pitch (high against low) and timbre (twanging against pinging, for example).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzrDs_Vaho4
In the last of the first round of Steely Dan albums, *Gaucho* (1980) employed over 40 session musicians. They style has changed, too, to simpler harmonies and a more atmospheric sound. Keith Jarrett’s name appears among the writers for the title track, but only because he sued for plagiarism when he heard it. He claimed they’d lifted a riff from his 1974 album *Belonging*, and a judge agreed with him.

Tom Scott’s sax provides a distinctive intro to each verse. The way Fagen plays his keyboard in the same rhythm as his singing is one of the unusual features of the song, as is the Mexican-inspired meandering structure of the chorus.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYryV8og6Ms

By this point there were legal battles over ownership of some tracks. Becker was having drug problems and got hit by a car. Things fell apart: Steely Dan broke up in 1981. Happily, that was not a permanent decision. They reunited in 1993 and began a heavy touring schedule to gain back lost ground.

After 20 years of studio silence, they released their eighth studio album in 2000. Not only did *Two Against Nature* chart well, but it won four Grammy awards, including Album of the Year and Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group (for “Cousin Dupree”).

The title track features that signature attention to detail: Daniel Sadownick’s bongos share percussive duties with David Tofani’s sax.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Pt1_Pbtwgc

The last album (so far – you never know with Steely Dan) is 2003’s *Everything Must Go*. There’s some dark stuff on here. “Godwhacker” was inspired by the death of Fagen’s mother from Alzheimer’s. Harking back to the more general apocalyptic humor you can trace all the way through their career, “The Last Mall” announces a shopping center’s final sale, and they do mean final.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0LRHUwEnFk

Fifteen years and counting without an album, but the band continues. Even after Becker’s 2017 death, Fagen still tours as Steely Dan: These days, that’s him, a bevy of crack session musicians, and the ghost of his musical other half.
Piano Man

HAND PICKED

Written by Christian James Hand

By 1972, William Martin Joel's career was, pretty much, over. He had released his debut album, Cold Spring Harbor, to a crushing silence. The record had been mastered at the wrong speed, which was to blame for its awful sonics and even more awful sales. Prior to this, a young, and naive, Joel had signed a LIFETIME recording contract with Family Productions, the record label owned by renowned huckster Artie Ripp (It is believed that Artie is the driving-force behind the term "rip off." This may not be factually accurate).

Carrying a debt of $450,000 for the recording and marketing of the album, Joel was more than a little fed, to say the least. In an attempt to clear his head and get some perspective, a 23-year-old William, along with his ex-bandmates' ex-wife (scandalous!), now HIS wife Elizabeth, departed New York for the sunnier climes of Los Angeles. The hope was that he would be able to get out of the deal with Ripp and get on-board at Columbia Records under the watchful eye of industry titan Walter Yetnikoff. There was a problem though, Joel didn't want Family to know that he had moved to Los Angeles. So, he needed a job. The obvious choice was to begin working as the musical act at the Executive Room on Wilshire Blvd. To maintain his anonymity, he chose to perform under the stage name Bill Martin. It was also here that he would take some of his experiences as The Entertainer and fashion one of his most indelible songs. It was while at the Executive Room that he became The Piano Man.

The Players:

Drums - Ron Tutt
Bass - EITHER Wilton Felder OR Emory Gordy Jr.
Accordion - Michael Omartian
Mandolin - Uncredited
Guitars - EITHER Larry Carlton, Dean Parks, OR Richard Bennett
Piano/Harmonica/Vocal - Billy Joel

To The Tape!!
Ron Tutt came to the Piano Man sessions with a lengthy resume that included such luminaries as Roy Orbison, Neil Diamond, Jerry Garcia, and time behind the kit as sticksman for Elvis' TCB Band -- no slouch on the old trap, if you know what I mean. "Piano Man" is based in waltz time. There aren't many drummers that could really make THAT work, but Ron comports himself beautifully.
back there. The entire song is a master class in self-control and putting the tune first. At the 4:30 mark, however, Old Ronny gets a little flash and gives it some lovely ruffs and ghost-noted fills that explode as Billy sings of carnivals and loneliness. The entire track is SUCH a bastard. Tutt’s bass-drum work is so decisive, so meant. You can hear the thought in all of it. A standard waltz wouldn’t be nearly as busy, but this is a Rock Waltz and there needs to be sufficient support for the bass-line, the piano, and that vocal. Tight is the best way to describe it. There is no wasted effort. Nothing extraneous. I am particularly fond of the hi-hat playing. It’s spartan, but there is a fastidious swing to it. Not easy to do. Honestly, it would take a special kind of mind to ENJOY playing a song with this feel. Kudos, Ron, I couldn’t do it. I also find it interesting just how much reverb the drums are drenched in. One could imagine that a producer today would want to reflect the intimate nature of the location of the song and possibly use a much drier sound. Reverb of this nature gives the impression that it was played in a much larger space --- perhaps they knew that Joel would end up as one of the great Arena Rockers! #spoileralert

The credits for this record, as you can see from the above list, are a little hazy. The bass department for the whole album was occupied by two players, and both of them are capable of doing the business on this track. Who was it? No idea. Wilton Felder had played with The Jackson 5, Joni Mitchell, Randy Newman, and Marvin Gaye, among many others. He was both an accomplished saxophonist AND bass player. The other possibility listed is Emory Gordy Jr. He came to this gig after filling the bass department for Liberace, Neil Diamond, and as the other half of the Engine Room for Elvis' TCB Band. If asked, I would hazard a guess that it is Wilton playing on this song. The little flourishes in the post-chorus section, the establishing riff and groove in the verse, and the other version of the line in the second verse all sound like Wilton to me. But, who knows. All that matters is that it’s AWESOME! Holy smokes! It takes a special player to get a waltz to be FuNkY, and this line is FUNKY. I love the counter-melody that is employed in the "La-La" bit. Simple. Complex. Simple. My favorite. The entire bass line evolves over the course of the track, which is pretty friggin' smart. The song, in its original form, is over 5 minutes. It would be VERY easy for that to become boring and plodding. By building the track, adding more fireworks and flourishes over the course of that time, it keeps the ear refreshed with new melodies and relationships. WHOEVER wrote this line is VERY good. And the playing is sublime. R&B Waltz isn’t an easy thing to invent!

Billy is also an accomplished harmonica player, and this track starts with him giving it the beans on both the piano and the mouth harp. He has often said that his major influence on that instrument is, of course, Bob Dylan, and it shows here. Another other cool little surprise in this track is that there is an acoustic guitar played in the choruses. It's a trick that is often employed to provide somewhat of a percussive drive to a part without using a percussion instrument. The jangle of the guitar becomes almost a "Shaker In Key" that is FELT more than heard; I have used this trick myself and it's very effective. And a neat little way to impress the kids.

One can only imagine that the accordion was an instrument that Joel heard often in the Italian communities where he was raised. Michael Omartian also has a resume filled with the big names. He played accordion for Dolly Parton, Amy Grant, and Michael Bolton, to name a few. What I love about this texture in the song is that it isn't played as a waltz, or as a strolling player in the bar that the song is set in. To me, it sounds more like a sea-shanty. Almost as if Joel and all of the punters in the bar are actually a crew of pirates on an old ship, traveling the seas, in need of a song to sing in the hours before the marauding happens. Quite an accomplishment. There are MANY narratives happening in this song. As to WHO played the acoustic guitar? No clue. One of the three blokes listed.

The guitar track reveals that the acoustic isn't just played during the choruses. It does the same "Shaker In Key" trick FOR THE WHOLE SONG!! So smart. And you can barely hear it, you FEEL it. But, it is another texture that takes it from waltz to Pirate Anthem, as far as I am concerned. And
THEN!?! The even BIGGER surprise...THE MANDOLIN! How is this uncredited?!? It's amazing. Beautiful execution. And another track that enforces the ribald, sea-shanty, pirate nature of the song. Just give it a listen and then go back and listen to the full mix. It's friggin' brilliant. Tucked inside the mix. Right headphone. Unless you have them on backwards. YOU HAVE THEM ON BACKWARDS!!

The Piano. Well, the song is called "Piano Man" and Billy Joel is a legendary piano player, sooooooo....this track is mint. Couldn't be anything but. It tickles me to no end that the song is called "Piano Man" and is played in such a way that anyone who sits at a piano, anywhere, and bangs through it while singing the lyrics BECOMES the Piano Man. You go from being OUTSIDE the song, to it being ABOUT you, by simply playing it. On the piano. The instrument named in the title...that has become YOUR instrument...and the story, your story. How fucking perfect is that?! I struggle to think of another song that does this trick. If you've got one, please leave the title in the Comments section.

Oh, and his solo is magnificent.

William's voice is one that instantly brings you to a place. He is one of the great troubadours of contemporary music. This vocal is one of his best. There is so much going on. Firstly, even though the song is first person, and sung by Joel about himself, he STILL seems to adopt a character to tell you the story. Almost as if it ISN'T him. Perhaps it wasn't. Perhaps it's Bill Martin who performs "Piano Man." Either way, I don't know if I have heard Joel use this character since. It's interesting that there are blokes that played on this record that also spent some time in the trenches with Randy Newman, as this is a favorite conceit of Newman's. It's such a sublime trick that Joel pulls off on this track. Good grief. The fragility of his voice at moments, the strength below the big belted notes. So much Broadway. It's a musical theater performance. The story telling. There's a whole musical waiting to happen here.

The characters that he sings of were mostly people from the bar that he saw nightly. Paul, the Real Estate Novelist, was a real person. The waitress was his wife, Elizabeth. Davey was actually David Heinz, a sailor that Joel had met while in Spain in '72. It's all real. Authentic. And, I think that that is why it resonates so much when you hear it. It all happened. There's no fiction here. It's directly from his own experiences. Like a good book. Springsteen, Newman, Joel, all songwriters who were capable of distilling their worlds, and ours, down to 4-minute books. Troubadours. The last verse is a gobsmacker. You can imagine him leading the whole bar in singing that last verse and chorus with him. What must it have been like to sit in that place and hear Billy Joel working through some of his early works? Absolutely amazing. Especially because nobody had any clue that Bill Martin would go on to become Billy Joel. Ain't life grand?

https://soundcloud.com/theklossessions/billy-joel-piano-man

I had the pleasure of attending one of Billy Joel and Elton John's MANY Face to Face shows, and it was quite something to see the difference between the two performers. Elton had CLEARLY graduated to arenas before Joel because there was a distance in his show. We couldn't quite GET there. Billy Joel, on the other hand, shrunk The Forum down to a tiny little nightclub. It was brilliant. We all felt like we were there with him. See one of his shows as soon as you can. It shouldn't be missed. Hearing an entire arena sing along to this one is an experience that everyone should have. It's church.

In "The Entertainer" Joel sings "It was a beautiful song, but it ran too long/If you're gonna have a hit, you gotta make it fit/So they cut it down to 3:05" about Columbia's radio department demanding an edit of "Piano Man" that they could get on the FM stations they needed to have play it. Billy certainly
wasn't happy about THAT desecration. The album version is THE version. It has to be. You need all of the characters, including the narrator, reading the whole story for you. But, more importantly, you need to give him time to build it all. To bring you in. Get you singing. Swaying backwards and forwards. Lost in the comfort of your solitude being replaced, for JUST a moment, with the unity of raised voices and smiling faces. For 5 minutes, everything is okay.

My dad was a big Billy Joel fan, and I can remember hearing these songs coming off the Thorens deck and filling the room in our little house in London. They were tales from an alien landscape. A world a million miles away. But, now that I have lived in Los Angeles for all of these years (many of them spent in the music industry), I feel part of "Piano Man." I feel like a character in it. One of the punters, but also one of the story tellers, and each night, as I leave the bar, I walk to the piano, put some bread in the jar, and ask Bill Martin, "Man, what are you doing here?"

Oh, and as a gift on his birthday, Walter Yetnikoff purchased back the rights to Joel's catalog from Artie Ripp and gave them to him at the party. There are rumors that Walter MAY have threatened physical violence in order to get said rights, but...they're just rumors.

Ah, the Good Ol' Days. Where are these pirates now?

Until the next one,

peace.

cjh

PS - You can find me on IG, Facebook, and here if you want any info about The Sessions and where to catch me live.
I’m not going to apologize for that. Think about it. I didn’t start this shit about blind guitar heroes.

*And the Lord said “So you got everything?”*

*Moses. “Yes Lord.”*

*“The tablets you swear to not destroy, or break, or whatever?”*

*“Got em.”*

*“Moses.”*

*“Yes Lord.”*

*“Moses.”*

*“What already?”*

*“There is something I need you to do. It could be a hard and long task.”*

*“If it doesn’t involve collections of animals and a weird boat I’m in.”*

*“You must find a black musician...um, yes a blind black musician, who shall transform ragtime piano for the guitar.”*

*“What?”*

Moses spent the rest of his years wandering in the desert. To be fair it took the Creator of All another three or four thousand years to find a blind black musician who would transcribe ragtime piano for the guitar.
Arthur Blake was born in 1896 somewhere in the Sea Islands off the Atlantic coast of North Florida/Georgia. There is a great deal of conjecture concerning his life and whereabouts in his short stay with us, but two things are known. He was born blind and he played the guitar like none before and few since.

I’ve explored and talked in this space of the kids who took the pain of slavery out of the cotton fields and barrios of America and created the art form that Ma Rainey would call the Blues. I am always enthralled and indebted to their voices. But primarily the instruments accompanying the voices and especially the guitar were crude, haunting possibly, like the extraordinary slide work of Willie Johnson who was a contemporary of Blake’s, but not the main focus of the music.

Before that stuff came out of the fields, other folks were taking classical piano styles and creating something new dubbed ragtime. This was a sound all its own and influenced Blake in a profound way. You can’t talk seriously about the finger picking style that Blind Blake created without talking about Scott Joplin.

Joplin was the son of musicians posing as laborers in the Deep South of post-Civil War Texarkana. As a young student he would have been exposed to the thrilling marches of the day being composed by John Philip Sousa. Joplin’s genius was in taking those straight ahead marches and playing them on piano in a ragged time phrasing. Joplin’s first published song was "Maple Leaf Rag" in 1899. In fact, what we have here is a recording of this new ragtime style done for a commercial piano roll by Scott himself.

http://youtu.be/pMAtL7n_-rc

It’s interesting to note how Sousa, Joplin, and Blake overlapped so closely. Sousa wrote "Liberty Bell" in 1893 which was eventually used as the opening theme of the highbrow British television series Monty Python’s Flying Circus. Joplin published "Maple Leaf Rag" in 1899 when Arthur Blake was maybe 4 years old but Arthur would soon after conceive this crazy idea to adapt ragtime piano for the guitar.

Blake would play some traditional blues like his first recording, for the legendary Paramount Records in Grafton Wisconsin, "Early Morning Blues" which showed his humor that ranged throughout his music. But his real contribution was his adaptations of ragtime for guitar. "Southern Rag" was recorded in 1927 and is remarkable for his unbelievable guitar style along with his ability to vamp vocally over the top.

http://youtu.be/SjsG8s2PsX4

Ok that’s ridiculous. Usually when we explore early instrumental styles, and especially in blues, we chuck head pontiffs have to remind the dear reader to focus on how innovative the particular style was at the time, in its moment. Not in the case of Arthur Blake. There isn’t a modern guitar player out there who won’t listen to that and be amazed and in fact inspired to learn how to play like that. And on top of what he’s doing he’s talking to his audience! Crazy.

Blake’s straight blues included the rag style and showed licks copied forever by the best like Ry Cooder and Jorma Kaukonen. I won’t go into those guys but you need to look them up. You’ll be surprised that you actually already know who they are. Point is, we still study these runs and thumb pumping mimicking the left hand of the stride piano players.
This is "Black Dog Blues" recorded at the same session as "Southern Rag".

http://youtu.be/rdrN-UAayAE

I love this next one because it shows the humor his audiences loved over the top of what would ordinarily be a sad blues tune. "Rope Stretchin Blues" comes from one of his later recordings for Paramount. Really.

http://youtu.be/S0SU16Plt3A

Blind Blake died young like most of these clowns, but his influence will always be underestimated. So many players have developed this finger picking style after listening to Hot Tuna, Doc Watson, or Taj Mahal without realizing the styles came absolutely from Arthur "Blind" Blake. His recording career only lasted from 1926 to 1932 and he was gone by 1934. But he left us with stuff like "Seaboard Stomp". Enjoy.

http://youtu.be/OuHI5c4lxPY
Part of the fun of being an audiophile is reading reviews of audio gear. I’ve read audio reviews for 60 years, starting with Stereo Review, leading to Gordon Holt’s Stereophile and Harry Pearson’s The Absolute Sound, continuing with several print and online magazines to the present. As an author, I’ve written reviews for 14 years, starting with Positive Feedback Online and moving to the SoundStage! Network’s suite of online magazines and The Absolute Sound in print and online. In the process I’ve formed some strong views about how a reviewer should go about his or her business. I thought I’d share some of them with you.

1. Use your own system to review equipment, not someone else’s and certainly not equipment in a dealer’s or manufacturer’s facility. And forget attempting to review something in a trade-show environment—yes, some reviewers have actually done that.

2. Replace only a single item in your system with the item you’re reviewing; otherwise, you won’t be able to tell what item produces a particular sonic characteristic. Avoid testing several components at once.

3. Review the equipment exactly as the manufacturer provided it. Don’t make any sort of modification, even easy ones; they can change the nature of the sound into something unique, which may not resemble what a reader is likely to hear. If a modification makes a big improvement, write a comment or a sidebar about it after you review the item in stock form. No-no mods include:

- Using a third-party power cord. Yeah, I know; many stock power cords are junk, but unless the
manufacturer doesn’t provide any cord, the stock cord is what many readers will use.

- Replacing stock tubes with new old stock (NOS) tubes from your personal stash. NOS tubes might make improvements, or maybe just changes, but can be expensive and the models you substitute may be impossible for readers to find. Many tubed components are optimized for the sound of the stock tubes anyhow.

- Using aftermarket footers. These can make big improvements, but most readers won’t use them. And each footer has a different sonic, ahem, footprint.

- Using a power conditioner. Plug the review item into your wall socket. Power conditioners can make a huge improvement, but can also degrade the sound. I might make an exception if the power coming out of the wall is trashy, but as my mother-in-law used to say, it’s making the best of a bad situation. I hope she wasn’t talking about me.

4. The reference system you use in a review should be comprised of reasonably current equipment; you need to show readers how the equipment you’re reviewing sounds in the context of a current system. That’s why reviewers get manufacturer’s accommodations, or discounts. Vintage gear is fine and fun for audiophile hobbyists but isn’t for reviewers. Who cares how good a turntable sounds with 78 RPM records? [I think Jeremy Kipnis might—check out the feature from Copper #76! --Ed.]

5. When reviewing speakers, use an amplifier capable of driving the speakers. Don’t try to drive inefficient speakers with a 20-watt amplifier. Make sure the amp can handle the speaker’s impedance swings.

6. Use a wide variety of music to demonstrate sonic characteristics of review item, not just the stuff you like. Ideally, music should include solo instrumental, solo voice, orchestral, choral, rock, jazz, classical. Don’t just use solo singers or small vocal groups with band backings. Use currently available recordings, if possible; your review could prompt a reader to want to listen to a recording you mentioned. If you don’t own a wide variety of music, subscribe to Tidal or Qobuz.

7. Compare the review item with comparable items if possible, even if you have to do so from a spec sheet. Readers appreciate knowing how an item stacks up against its competition.

8. Be reasonably proficient using your word processor. Pay attention to spelling and grammar checkers.

9. Have a logical structure for your reviews. Don’t wander about aimlessly. Here’s the structure I like to use, although it’s not the only acceptable format. It’s essentially the format specified for SoundStage! publications.

- Section 1 -- Description of the equipment. Explain in easily understandable terms what the review equipment does, if it’s something unusual. It’s surprising how many manufacturers can’t manage to do this, but instead, lapses into industry slang that confuses the reader.

- Section 2 -- Setting up the equipment for the review; problems encountered. This is especially important for turntables, where the sound is quite dependent on setup. Mention what equipment you used with the review item; that has a big effect of the sound quality. Believe it or not, I saw a major reviewer review a tonearm without mentioning what cartridges he used with it, or how easy setup was.

- Section 3 -- Sound; how the equipment sounded, with plenty of musical illustrations. But don’t just list a bunch of recordings and say the review item sounded good on all of them.

- Section 4 -- Comparisons; how does the equipment stack up against its competition? Readers really want to know this information—they read reviews to help them sort out which equipment to buy.

- Section 5 -- Conclusions and recommendations; whether you’d recommend the item you reviewed, and any limitations for its use.

10. Stay on point. Readers don’t want to know a lot about your family, your hobbies, your food and drink preferences, or your pets.
11. Don’t go overboard about your emotional reaction to a review item. Emotional reactions are hugely dependent on the music played. For example, if you play hip-hop music for me, even through a fantastic system, my emotional reaction will be to puke. OK, that’s a physical reaction, but you get the point. Hey, if you like it, great, but it’s not appealing to me. There is no emotion track on a recording. Emotional responses result from how the listener reacts to some sort of sonic characteristic like timing precision, harmonic accuracy, or microdynamic tracking; discuss that instead of emotions. Yeah, I know, it’s easier to talk about how music moved you, as if everyone would react the same way.

12. If you discuss technical issues, know what you’re talking about. Get help from the manufacturer if you’re allowed to talk to him.

13. When you review an item you don’t like, try to find good points as well as bad to write about. The manufacturer didn’t set out to make a POS and a vicious review can damage his business, which can be fragile. This doesn’t mean you can’t write bad reviews.

14. For reviews published online, respond to reader comments if your magazine allows it. People took the trouble to read your review and may have further questions. Maybe you weren’t clear about something, or they’d appreciate more info on something you mentioned. But be polite. There is no excuse whatsoever for abusing those who leave comments, even obvious trolls. Just ignore them if they are just trying to stir things up.

15. Don’t use foul language in reviews or responses to reader comments. Young children might read that language. If you can’t express yourself without using foul language, find another job.

16. Provide a list of the equipment in the system you used for the review, but don’t list every accessory you own or equipment you own that you didn’t use in the review. No one besides yourself will be impressed. For example, if you’re reviewing a DAC, don’t list your turntable unless the DAC has a phono input.

17. If editors let you see the edited version of your review, take advantage and look it over carefully. They may have misunderstood something you wrote and edited it to read much differently than what you intended. Check the art they chose to illustrate your review to be sure it illustrates points you’ve made. I’ve seen reviews where the pictures shown were not of the equipment reviewed; fortunately, not any of my own reviews.

18. If the review item uses tubes, mention what types of tubes are used; e.g., 12AX7, 6922, KT88. Interested readers need to know if replacement tubes will be readily available, or if the designer used some sort of exotic, rare, and expensive tubes that may be hard to find. If exotic tubes are used, find out replacement costs.

19. If you’re reviewing a speaker, don’t use subwoofers with it. Readers want to know how the speaker performs in the bass region, not the subwoofers. The same applies to amplifiers; don’t use subwoofers, at least powered subwoofers. You’ll be listening to the amplifier built into the subwoofer, not the amplifier you’re reviewing.

OK, that’s my list. I’ll admit to violating many of those guidelines at one time or another but have generally tried to stick to them. I hope they’ve made my reviews more valuable.
Don’t Even Think About It

FEATURED

Written by Charles Rodrigues
Prince Albert Memorial

PARTING SHOT

Taken by Rich Isaacs