We’re in the midst of the holiday season, a time of year that puts many of us in a contemplative mood. And although I don’t know anyone who leads a life without obstacles, all of us have a lot to be thankful for, especially when it comes to music.

Music is a source of joy, solace, excitement, fond memories, consolation, a way to connect with the artist, a way to remember loved ones who are no longer with us, a way to celebrate a new love, something to enjoy in private or share with family and friends...one of the many things in life to be endlessly thankful for.

In this issue: we’re thrilled to announce the addition of James Whitworth to our staff. James is a nationally syndicated cartoonist and writer based in the UK. His work has appeared in the Sheffield Star, Hi-Fi News, The Independent and others and in galleries. He is also the author of a series of crime novels.

Bob Wood tells us what life at a radio station was like in the uninhibited Seventies. John Seetoo offers part one of an interview with industry titan John Meyer, founder of pro audio company Meyer Sound. Anne E. Johnson goes from jazz to rock with pieces on the music of Coleman Hawkins and Led Zeppelin. Roy Hall tells us about Artek, a relative who gave him an appreciation for many things. Tom Gibbs looks at new releases from Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie and...a jazz band doing The Allman Brothers?

Rich Isaacs inaugurates a new series looking at progressive rock, a much-maligned genre for some, but not us! I contribute the first of a two-part report on the recent 2019 New York Audio Show. Dan Schwartz continues his exploration into audio system synergy and the not-so-smooth road he’s taken.
Professor Larry Schenbeck offers insight into Joseph Haydn and his theatre work. In our new Audio Anthropology feature, we take a fond look at audio back in the day. Last but certainly not least, Woody Woodward tells us about the great Christmas hymns.

Frank
Everything But the Kitchen Sink

AUDIO ANTHROPOLOGY

Written by Frank Doris
Back in the 1970s Pittsburgh was a top ten radio market, i.e.; the Big Time. KQV AM was number two to the mighty KDKA the first radio station to be established in the US (“The Pioneer Broadcasting Station of the World,”), but being number two was still huge.

At that time in popular music, radio and radio personalities were a big deal – think of Dan Ingram, Larry Lujack, Alison Steele, Roger W. Morgan and others – they were a conduit to the new, hip whatever was happening on the scene.

I was hired in the early 1970s by KQV’s then-new program director. A few years Before working at the station, I had been listening to KQV at night in Charlottesville, Virginia, where I worked at WELK at the time – the signal would come in even over that distance – and I would sit in my truck and listen to the great Jim Quinn, who is still on the air on WYSL and WAVL hosting the “Quinn In the Morning” show. Who'd have thought I’d actually wind up working at the station?

It was a big deal. After I got the job at times I’d think, “what am I doing here?”

KQV was the farm team for a number of major outlets including the ABC Radio stations at a time when ABC had the biggest station in the country, New York's WABC AM. They also had monster station WLS in Chicago. These cities and their stations were as good or better than the major stations in my home town of Philadelphia (including WFIL) and they were the dream stations, with the best talent and huge broadcast signal strengths. In many respects KQV was their training ground.

WLS eventually took three of our staff – a newsman, and two personality jocks. I was hired to do overnights on KQV. Me and my skinny voice in the land of the gorilla-ballased. (Three of the guys had profoundly deep voices, and back then that was a highly sought after and imitated sound. It felt
emasculating for me to speak along with them. I was a capon compared to them!)

I was and am still pretty creative so I wound up entertaining three groups of people: those out late, up all night and up early. I also did some news stories in the 5:00 – 6:00 am hour, always ending with the Dow Jones closing report of the day before and the sound effect of a door slamming.

In fact, at first, I was so intimidated I actually didn't believe I was a member of the team, until one day 18 x 24 pictures of the six personalities was put onto the studio wall, and I was one of them. An honor.

Because of union rules, which enforced strict separation of the engineers from the guys on air (and it was all guys at the time). We weren't even allowed to move our microphone. The engineer had to do it. If the “talent” touched it, the union would file a grievance. Pittsburgh was a union town!

I got along great with my engineer, who would usually be taking tape machines apart and checking tape alignment. After a while, I could move the microphone on the sly when he turned his back. He'd literally look the other way; otherwise, he’d have to file a three-part grievance form!

Pittsburgh looks great when you’re viewing it from across the three rivers. The radio station was located downtown, we jocks worked behind a window where people outside the building could see us. (Kind of like “The Today Show” set.) You – could – close the curtain, but no one did, and the glass was thick and multi-paned to keep bullets out. (Well, for soundproofing also.) Bullets? Sad but true, radio can attract crazies in the audience, especially considering the great numbers of people a station reaches. Real psychos. On a more positive note, we’d also attract a lot of kids, who watched and learned. Some of them became professional radio people.

The early seventies witnessed the birth of FM radio, and KQV-FM was blessed with a huge coverage area. All of the ABC FM stations were automated, with what they called “The Love Format.” KQV-FM simulcast the AM station at night.

Before WDVE went live, on AM transmitter maintenance nights – maybe once a month – I’d be sent to the FM studio and told, “do whatever you want, but don't try to do the same thing you do on KQV.” They didn’t want me to compete with myself! In fact, mine was the first live voice ever heard on WDVE. So, I basically got to screw around and at the time that was pretty hip. Once, I received an “interview” record, where the company who issued the record would send you the script, and the answers to the questions on the script were supposed to be played back from the disc. These “interviews” were usually done to promote something. However, just for fun I’d ask wrong questions or ask the questions out of sequence – which tilted the answers wildly.

FM stations also got to play hipper music. And the management – and listeners – must have liked my antics because during these early days of WDVE the then-new general manager asked me three times to become the program director but I kept turning him down, because I wanted to be on the radio. By the way: a dumb move.

The people in that station partied hard. Just a notch below destroying a hotel room-hard. Those were the days. There happened to be several bars right around the corner and across the street. Yes indeed. We partied hard. I will confess to barfing Swedish meatballs in the news director's guest bathroom at one of his parties. Then there was the party where I convinced the news director to turn his speakers up and up until they blew out.

The news director was a very intelligent and clever guy hidden under a shell of seriousness. But at
parties he became a sort of children's show host, and the adults at the parties became the children. (Apparently this was modeled on someone he saw on TV.)

On the other hand, when we weren't indulging in frivolous activities the staff did many good things. We played celebrity basketball for charities, emceed concerts, drove around in a converted hearse and handed out book covers at high schools (and had tens of thousands of opportunities to get paper cuts). We did TV cut-ins for MDA telethons. Because union rules were strict, eventually we got paid for not emceeing concerts (a long story). We received free tickets to more events than I can remember.

I never made it to WLS.

Some other stories of life at KQV: there were a bunch of us who had broken into a fellow air personality's condo for a surprise party for the guy. He comes in with his girl and they're loudly arguing while we're hiding in the next room. The guy stomps upstairs and we're all staring at his cat – what do we do? Eventually he came downstairs to a weak surprise.

I learned to fly while in Pittsburgh and am proud to say on a very short runway in Aliquippa, PA, now closed. Once I flew a plane over one of the Pirates' World Series Games and the control tower jokingly asked for the score. I just rented a plane, flew over the stadium where all these other planes were circling and pulling ad banners, and got in line. Fast forward to today versus then. This would never be allowed.

One night my newsman walks in on me, draws a pistol and starts yelling as he shoots me about six times. I just looked at him with disinterest. I knew he wasn't going to kill me and that the gun must have been loaded with blanks.

One night someone hid a walkie talkie in an air conditioning duct and when I turned the microphone
on I'd hear another voice up there in the distance. What in the world? Took me a while to figure it out.

During the night our window would attract people coming out of bars, street denizens, hookers, guys who didn't know they lost the parrot on their shoulder. One night a car stopped for a tall lady...who was really a transvestite. We tried to wave the guy in the car off...but in s/he goes and they drive off. For about two minutes. Then the car stops and s/he gets back out. I guess the guy was surprised.

One day a bullet hole appeared in the outer glass of another studio in our building, one we used for making commercials. We never found out where it came from.

We got paid extra if we recorded more than three commercials in a week, thanks to the union. You couldn't mess with them!

I used to have this one on tape, but in moving 18 times in my life I got rid of many, many old tapes: our overnight part-time news guy laughing on the air while trying to read a story about a school bus and train collision. He just lost it. Kept turning his microphone off trying to regain composure. Nnnnope.

I wanted a better shift but there wasn't one available, so I told my boss the program director that I was going to start looking for work at another station. Bad idea – he replaced me before I found another gig.

I eventually found a job at KRIZ in Phoenix. I lasted six weeks. Then I was rehired by WAMS (Station Three in this series) in Wilmington, and was let go in six days. The program director said that when I was on he couldn't understand what I was saying.

Not a happy time in my life.

(To be continued...)
Alternate Reality

THE RUN-OUT GROOVE

Written by James Whitworth
"HERE'S THE RECORD YOU ORDERED WITH ALL THE ALTERNATE TAKES."
"HERE'S THE RECORD YOU ORDERED WITH ALL THE ALTERNATE TAKES."
Today we most often encounter Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) as the celebrated “father” of the string quartet and composer of over a hundred symphonies. But for much of his lifetime, Haydn’s day-to-day was bound up with music for the stage: opera seria and buffa, romantic farce, Singspiele and German plays. Between 1766 and his death in 1790, Haydn’s patron Prince Nikolaus “the Magnificent” Esterházy made opera his chief pursuit; the elaborate opera house he built on the grounds of his country palace, Eszterháza, saw the production of up to 150 stage works a year. As the Prince’s Kapellmeister, Haydn supervised entire seasons, hiring (and sometimes training) singers, scheduling performances, rehearsing the casts, even writing a few of the operas himself. An eyewitness in 1784 was understandably gobsmacked at what was on offer:

*Every day there is [a show,] which the Prince always attends and which usually begins at six o’clock in the evening. It is indescribable how eye and ear are entranced. The soul is melted by the music when the whole orchestra sounds, sometimes by its touching delicacy and sometimes by the most violent power—for the great composer, Her[r]haiden [sic] . . . conducts it: but also by the excellent lighting, by the lifelike decorations, when clouds with gods are slowly lowered, or are raised from below and disappear in an instant, or when everything is transformed into a lovely garden, a magic wood, a magnificent hall. – Next to this opera house is a well-appointed coffee house.* [Beschreibung, 1784]

So: everything you could ask for in an evening’s entertainment, even though CGI had yet to be devised. As his international fame began to take off, Haydn realized that instrumental music—more portable, less expensive to put on—offered a better way to spread his name around. After the 1770s, he composed more symphonies and quartets than operas.

Yet even before then, Haydn knew how to mend, patch, recycle. A significant amount of his theatrical music ended up in the symphonies he cranked out between 1766 and ’75. We often label this experimental-sounding music *Sturm und Drang* (“storm and stress”), after a pre-Romantic German literary trend. But its obvious link is to the theatre. We know for sure that Haydn’s music for Regnard’s *Le distrait* (“the absent-minded man”) has survived as Symphony No. 60, “Il distrazzo.” We know this because, as H. C. Robbins Landon (hereafter HCRL) put it, “[Haydn] is always listed in the Gotha Theater-Kalender as a kind of ‘house composer’ for the Carl Wahr Troupe,” and because
the Pressburger Zeitung for July 6, 1774, specifically reported the following:

Eszterház, 30 June. High-ranking dignitaries from abroad are expected today, namely the Ambassador of Modena. . . . Although His Princely Highness is absent, the most pleasant arrangements have been made to entertain the visitors. This evening there is a German comedy. . . . Tomorrow they will view the magnificent castle and garden, the grand new ballroom and the new marionette theatre. That evening there will be the Italian opera L’infedeltà delusa. The music is by Herr Kapellmeister Joseph Haydn. This admirable composer also recent wrote, for Herr Wahr’s company, original music to Der Zerstreute [Le distrait], a score which connoisseurs consider to be a masterpiece. One notices, this time in music intended for a comedy, the same spirit that elevates all of Haydn’s work. . . . He falls from the most affected pomposity directly into vulgarity, and so Haydn and Regnard contend with one another in capricious absent-mindedness. . . . From act to act the music realizes the play’s intention more closely.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKafJzGgEA8

That’s a live performance of Symphony No. 60 from conductor Giovanni Antonini and Il Giardino Armonico; its studio counterpart is included in volume 4 of Alpha’s priceless Haydn2032 series. If you migrate to its YouTube page, you’ll find a useful set of jump-to-track links.

Now another installment has arrived. With No. 7 ___ Gli Impresari, featuring Antonini’s other band, the Basel CO, we get two more big “theatre” works plus the early Symphony No. 9 and Mozart’s incidental music to Thamos, König in Egypten K345. As ever, the performances are passionate, precise, and easy on the ears. A bonus comes in the form of musicologist Christian Moritz-Bauer’s concise but helpful essays putting each album’s music in context.

A CD and downloads were released in March; more recently a deluxe limited package with two 180g LPs appeared (it includes a CD and download coupon). Alpha has released vinyl in this series before. Some volumes are still available: here’s a convenient link (Naxos online may also have a few earlier copies). When I compared CD, 24-bit streaming, and LP, I got a shock. The vinyl offered more density in the sound, better timbral distinctions, gorgeously “natural” stereo separation, and surprising dynamic responsiveness. (I realize this makes me just a bit late to the party.) My favorite spot featured not this album’s admittedly thrilling natural horns, but rather a solo wooden flute with strings:

Here’s Antonini and the Basel CO doing Symphony No. 65:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvL4u4U4v2k

Cues: Andante (second movement) at 8:15; Menuetto-Trio at 14:05; Presto at 16:53

Symphony No. 65 was long suspected of being “theatrical” in origin. Now we know for sure. Moritz-Bauer has located a printed copy of Cornelius von Ayrenhoff’s play, Der Postzug, which premiered in Vienna in September 1769 and was mounted at Eszterháza later that year. In his liner notes, he tells us he’s reserving “enumeration of all the compositional peculiarities” that give No. 65 what HCRL called (forty years ago!) “a whiff of the stage”:

Nevertheless, the esteemed audience will easily be able to infer, for instance, the point in the Andante at which Major von Rheinberg says he “would rather hear a hundred words” from his sweetheart, Fräulein Leonore, than “just one” from Count Reitbahn, whom the bride’s mother
For what it’s worth, HCRL was just as taken by the Menuetto-Trio, in which he heard “Gypsy influences (those curious grace notes and same slightly unsettling quality [present] whenever Haydn turns to the language of the Balkans).” My own takeaway was more obvious yet also “slightly unsettling”: lots of triple-as-duple, i.e., a minuet that often becomes a march. (Moritz-Bauer links that to the antics of the play’s Baroness, who “goes into raptures” over the way her tavern musicians deliver “Styrian dances.”) The presto Finale, HCRL noted, “is a hunting piece . . . with difficult parts for the horns.” True that.

And finally, we get Symphony No. 67, “one of the most boldly original symphonies of this period.” (HCRL) It begins right off the bat with a hunting motive, which makes sense if you know it originated as incidental music for Charles Colles’ play *La Partie de chasse de Henri IV*, Germanized and given at Eszterháza on July 12, 1772 for the visiting French ambassador. In the performance below, we also get spoken excerpts from the play (alas, no subtitles).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYNoLyEG2k8

Cues: Adagio at 8:40; Menuet-Trio at 20:00; and Allegro di molto at 23:44.

In the piquant Trio, two solo violinists, both muted, one re-tuned to provide a drone accompaniment, enter “almost like the wandering Gypsies in *Háry János*” (HCRL). The Finale also features a major surprise.

Moritz-Bauer gives plot summaries of the plays mentioned above, as well as background details about Mozart’s charming music for *Thamos*. As in every volume, a set of photographs by a noted Magnum photographer—in this case, an American, Peter van Agtmael—is bound with the essays and recordings. The photos tend to make subtle comments relative to the overall theme of the album. (For vol. 7, see the booklet, pp. 10 and following).

Now try to imagine what those photos look like at nearly three times the size of the CD booklet. Or just get the LP set.

For the past week, I’ve been thinking a bit more about the issue of system synergy – and its opposite. I have a sort of “wild” idea about what may lay behind the sonics of what’s going on (and the equipment).

A reader named (presumably) Bob Worley used the expression “rounded at the edges” to describe what I was struggling to talk about, which is the sound of DSD audio played back through my system. I think that’s entirely apt. The effect is subtle, but there (or not there, as the case may be).

When Paul McGowan first heard the breadboarded version of the DirectStream DAC, courtesy of Gus Skinas and Gus’ visitor Ted Smith, he had a revelation and based on what he heard, resolved to manufacture it. Great. (Paul hasn’t been to my place in more than 20 years so I wouldn’t expect him to remember much about the sound system.)

To reiterate what I noted in my first installment (Issue 98): all the electronics in my system are now PS Audio’s top-of-the-line stuff. And it’s coherent; beautifully so. It reminds me of a time years ago when Allen Perkins (of Spiral Groove) and I were strolling in Pasadena with our wives. Someone nearby but out of sight was playing a violin. I called his attention to it, and remarked, “We’ll never get it.” But in fact “it” is now closer to attainable now than it was then. Reality is rounded at the edges, for the most part.

Great, right? Not so fast.

What was it about my old set-up that maybe I liked more? Well, this is just a theory, you understand, and to say I liked it more might be overstating things. In my current system I hear deeper into the stage, which is a good indication that things are heading in the right direction. But...

In the 90s mastering engineer Joe Gastwirt invited me over to his old studio, Oceanview Digital Mastering, to hear some Sony engineers demonstrating for him their latest thing: SBM, Super Bit Mapping. With SBM, one could clearly hear deeper into the music than with previous encoding systems. But I remarked that I thought it was the truncated depth that audiophiles would prefer, and that the things which audiophiles preferred, such as ambience and transients, were louder, more obvious, in the 16-bit versions.

The evolution of my system is kind of like that. My theoretical guess, which I now feel an obligation to try to run down, is that the system, as I had gotten to know and love it so much over more than 20 years, was, by virtue of everything coming from a different manufacturer, and by using Mark Porzilli’s stunning (but PCM-only) Laufer-Teknik Memory Player 64 CD player, was very subtly “enhancing” (i.e. not getting exactly right) the transient information. And that incredibly slight distortion – distortion, as in something added to the signal – was something I liked. I mean, Porzilli’s
player, Tim deParavacini’s EAR G-88 preamp, Richard Brown’s BEL 1001 Mk IV/V amplifiers: they’re nothing to sneeze at. But maybe, as great as they sounded, they were slightly mismatched.

Anyway – it’s a theory.

With any luck, I’ll get the newer Porzilli player soon, which will do DSD, and I can drive myself a little more nuts.
I looked down at the bowl of pasta covered with green sauce.

“Eat it!” Said Artek, “It’s delicious.” And it was.

My wife’s uncle Artek was born in Poland and after finishing high school he decided to study ship’s engineering. Apart from his interest in the subject, this was a way of avoiding the draft. At that time in Poland (mid 1930s) nationalism was on the rise, especially in the armed forces, and this did not bode well for Jews. He was accepted to an Italian university and while there, he learned Italian. This was added to his other languages, Polish, English and German. (Most educated Poles spoke German.)

Not wanting to return to Poland, he set off for Palestine and subsequently worked for a shipping line in the port city of Haifa. While on a trip to Alexandria, Egypt, he met his wife to be, Sheila. She was born of Romanian parents who had settled there. Sheila spoke French (most educated Egyptians spoke French), Arabic, Romanian and, because she attended the best school in Alexandria which was run by Italian nuns, Italian.

Their language of courtship was Italian and even though they subsequently added other languages (she English and Hebrew, he French and Hebrew) they spoke it to each other for the rest of their lives. They permanently moved to the soon to be state of Israel and settled in Haifa. There they raised two daughters.

When Israel wanted new missile boats to replace aging World War II ships for their Navy, a German shipyard was contracted for the construction. Due to pressure from the Arab League, (consisting of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, then enemies of Israel) Germany pulled out and a shipyard in Cherbourg, France agreed to build the ships. Artek along with his family moved to France in 1965. He was one of the engineers supervising construction. They spent about three years there where Artek and his kids learned to speak French. 12 boats were ordered and paid for. Seven were delivered but due to an Israeli raid into Lebanon, Charles De Gaulle, France’s president, angry
with Israel, imposed an arms embargo on the state. Shortly thereafter, he was replaced by Georges Pompidou who decided to continue the embargo.

Israel really needed the boats and decided to acquire them by brazenly stealing them from under the noses of the French. In a very successful plan, all five boats sailed out of Cherbourg harbor on Christmas Eve 1969. The escape was so effective that the French didn’t realize what had happened until 12 hours later. By that time the Israelis were in international waters and even though the French Defense minister had ordered an air strike on the flotilla, the prime minister prevented any escalation.

When the boats arrived in Haifa, the crews were greeted as heroes by the Israelis. In a video of the arrival, Artek can be seen waving and smiling from the deck of one of the boats.

Shortly before the Israeli war of independence, my mother-in-law to be travelled the arduous route from Jerusalem, where she lived, to Haifa. In those days, the buses were armor plated because it was very common to be attacked when driving through Arab villages. Resultantly the bus ride was extremely hot. On arrival in Haifa, Artek met her and offered her two things: a hot shower, and tickets to hear Leonard Bernstein perform in Haifa. She accepted both. Many years later, on meeting Leonard Bernstein in New York, she told him the story. He remarked that he was sure she enjoyed the shower more than the concert.

I got to know Artek when my wife and I moved to Israel in 1971. Visiting them was always a pleasure. The language spoken round the table was a blend of Italian, French, Hebrew and English. The whole family was multi-lingual and the constant use of foreign phrases seemed natural. I could pretty much follow what was going on, but if I got stuck someone would rescue me in fluent English. (Unsurprisingly, when playing Scrabble in English with Sheila, she would often beat both my wife and me.)

At this time, Artek had a regular gig for Zim Lines, Israel’s commercial shipping line, sailing weekly between Haifa and Trieste in Italy. His regular shopping was done there. Resultantly, his larder was stocked with Italian groceries including pastas, sauces, cheeses, sopresatta and cold cuts. None of these items were available at that time in Israel. Coming from Glasgow, I had certainly not heard of, or ever seen green sauce (pesto). Never nervous about eating new things I tasted the pasta and fell in love.

His interest in good food and especially wine inspired me to indulge my nascent curiosity of cooking. I have cooked ever since and this love subsequently inspired my son to become a successful chef.
When the British band The Yardbirds split up in 1968, guitarist Jimmy Page was left with contracts to perform shows in Scandinavia but no band to play them with, so he had to put one together quickly. Page admired session bassist John Paul Jones, so he was an obvious first choice. Finding an available singer was harder, but a friend recommended a guy named Robert Plant, who then recruited drummer John Bonham. And off they went on tour, calling themselves The New Yardbirds.

The name was soon ditched for legal reasons, but the quartet was destined for the rock and roll stratosphere.

Their debut album, *Led Zeppelin*, was released in January of 1969. The band hadn’t been together long when they started recording tracks in 1968. Still, they’d done a fair amount of rehearsing and performing as a quartet on the tour. They wrote some new material and filled out the balance with covers of blues and folk songs. It was a strong start, featuring numbers that are still revered like “Communication Breakdown” and “Dazed and Confused.”

Page produced (as he did all their albums), and their musical comfort with each other allowed them to play live in the studio and take advantage of that particular ambiance. Some overdubs were added later.

Despite the heavy rock tracks that made them famous, Zeppelin has legit folk roots, and Plant has always been able to sing with a delicacy that brings out the beautiful acoustic melodies. Page was a great fan of folk guitarist John Renbourn, and he pays tribute on this first album with the haunting track “Black Mountain Side.” They brought in guest artist Viram Jasani to play the Indian tabla drums. (One problem, though, is that Page’s playing bears a suspicious level of resemblance to Bert Jansch’s original guitar part on his version of the folk song “Blackwaterside,” recorded in 1966.)
1969 was a busy year for the new group, with another album, *Led Zeppelin II*, coming out in October. This effort featured a much heavier sound (exemplified by the huge hit single “Whole Lotta Love”) and a stronger blues influence.

“Ramble On” was by Plant, inspired by the novels of J.R.R. Tolkien. The band never played it live until they regrouped for a special concert in 2007, but Plant has always liked performing it in solo shows. It opens with a typical Zeppelin paradox: The verses are intricate and light, almost lacy, but by at the chorus it explodes into a thunderous roar. Yet somehow it’s a convincing transition every time.

*Led Zeppelin III* came out in 1970, introducing the world to “Immigrant Song” and “Gallows Pole.” The latter was a folk song they’d learned from the singing of American singer and guitarist Fred Gerlach, and it was a favorite when Plant and Page toured together in the post-Zeppelin days.

“Hey Hey What Can I Do?” did not appear on the album, but was used as the B-side for “Immigrant Song.” The mellow, strolling style has echoes of Southern rock. But once in a while, when Plant kicks it up to the next octave, you know it’s Zeppelin for sure.

For an album that originally had no title at all, *Led Zeppelin IV* (1971) sure had a massive impact. Imagine a world without “Stairway to Heaven.” Amazingly, this song was not released as a single. Its eight-minute length was impractical (not impossible) for a seven-inch 45 rpm. Besides, record executives assumed no radio would play something so long and complicated. (This was four years before Queen won the battle to make “Bohemian Rhapsody” the first single from *A Night at the Opera.*) How wrong they were!

A lesser-known track from *IV* is “When the Levee Breaks,” borrowed from a 1929 recording by Mississippi Delta blues duo Memphis Minnie and Kansas Joe McCoy. Here’s the original:

Zeppelin recorded their version in the lobby of the recording studio because Page wanted a reverb on Bonham’s drums that he couldn’t capture in the studio itself. As you’ll hear, the drums make this track, which slows the song down to a train-like rumble:

While the band focused on their heavy sound for *Houses of the Holy* (1973), they continued to be stylistic chameleons. A dissonant headbanger called “The Crunge” was the B-side to the folk-like “Over the Hills and Far Away.” Could they have picked two more different songs to send out together?

“The Crunge” was a group effort, developing out of a jam session where the band was trying to mimic the funk style of James Brown. [Where’s that confounded bridge? - Ed.] Usually they performed only sections of it, as part of extended medleys of their songs that could last up to 25 minutes.
The album *Physical Graffiti* (1975) marks the first Led Zeppelin album released by their own label, Swan Song Records. (It was not, in fact, the label’s first release, since it had put out records by Bad Company and Pretty Things the previous year.) With complete artistic freedom over their own work, they made the decision to expand the eight-song *Physical Graffiti* into a double album that included unreleased tracks from some older sessions.

One of those outtakes was “Down by the Seaside,” originally intended for *Led Zeppelin IV*. The most striking feature is Page doing a faux Hawaiian steel guitar sound on his Fender. It’s an unusually laid-back number that fools you into wondering whether it’s a Zeppelin recording at all. But just after the 2:00 mark, the drums and guitar take a heavier turn. That’s just a brief nod to the Zeppelin sound, and in less than a minute we’re back on the beach with an umbrella in our drink.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvGxEP4aF9E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvGxEP4aF9E)

Plant was still in a wheelchair following a serious car accident when they recorded *Presence* (1976). This is the only Zeppelin record with no keyboards and with acoustic guitar limited to one track (“Candy Store Rock”).

The album did not land well, getting torn apart by the critics while not selling many copies by Zeppelin standards. Still, there’s some good stuff to explore on it. My favorite is the album closer, “Tea for One,” with its time-signature-defying guitar riff. Along with most of the songs on the album, it’s credited to Plant and Page. Given the depth of sound, it’s no surprise that this nine-minute number was chosen for an orchestral backing on a later Plant/Page tour.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvGxEP4aF9E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvGxEP4aF9E)

*In through the Out Door* (1979) was Zeppelin’s last album. They recorded it quickly, over a three-week period, and used it as a means to express the various levels of angst all of them were feeling. Plant, in particular, was overwhelmed with emotion, has survived two traumas over the previous few years: the car accident followed quickly by the death of his son from a stomach infection.

Again, much of the album is credited to Jones and Page, including “South Bound Suarez.” This high-energy number uses rockabilly-style chords to drive it along, but with a more frenetic drumbeat than you’d hear on, say, a Jerry Lee Lewis single, which lets the piano dominate the rhythm.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqgE__H3JAM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqgE__H3JAM)

The end was brought about by the death of Bonham in 1980 of alcohol poisoning and asphyxiation. The surviving band members got back together occasionally for special appearances (including Live Aid in 1985 and the Ahmet Ertegun Tribute Concert in 2007).

Plant and Page recorded and toured as a very successful duo act in the ‘90s, and they are still actively recording and performing solo artists today. Fans have never stopped hoping for a Led Zeppelin reunion.
The Great Christmas Hymns

MUSIC TO MY EARS

Written by WL Woodward
I was brought up Catholic because my mother was Irish and my father didn't care. I never saw him in a church. At a certain point my mom stopped going. But the kids were still kicked out of bed every Sunday and mom drove us until eventually everyone but me stopped going. I continued to walk to Mass until I went off to college. At one point I actually considered the priesthood, a fact that causes general hilarity among those who know me.

I was enthralled with the Bible stories, the messages of hope and redemption, as well as the pomp and ceremony which no religion does better than the Catholics. And at no time of the year is that more impressive than at Christmastime. My heart would almost burst from my chest as I sang those hymns with the congregation. The big pipe organ would swell the air with the power of the melodies and carry the joy of the birth of a savior into our souls and back out through our lungs. The season still carries that joy for me, despite my missed calling, and the music continues to sing.

As a kid I looked forward to the season so much that with the first snow I would haul out the only Christmas album we had and play it. Since I grew up in Connecticut the first snow could fly in early November. But mom would lose her mind if she heard the sound of Bing Crosby come out of my room before Thanksgiving.

The album was Bing's classic White Christmas. The first side had the hymns and side 2 the fun songs like "Jingle Bells" and "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." I've written about these two songs before because the tracks were recorded in the ‘40s with wonderful swing arrangements and Der Bingle backed by the incomparable Andrews Sisters. If you've never heard these renditions and you think you'll gag if you hear one more recording of either of those old sappy songs, swallow your pride and check this album out. It's a gas.

Let's talk about the religious Christmas songs in various versions like on White Christmas.

"Adeste Fideles" or "O Come All Ye Faithful" is perhaps the oldest. This one goes back so far we're
talking before the printing press was invented, when manuscripts were written by monks who also
gave us beer. God bless ‘em.

The original printing has been attributed to multiple sources. It’s possible the text goes back to the
13th century but the first printed manuscript was discovered in the library of the “Musician King,”
King John IV of Portugal and dated in the mid-1600s. In modern hymnals, authorship is credited to
John Francis Wade from the mid-1700s but the song was probably much older than that.
Fortunately, I couldn’t care less how old it is or who actually wrote it. The power of this song is
evident with sweet entreaty. Here is "Adeste Fidelis" from the Bingman himself.

http://youtu.be/VVDkWTpHnW0

"Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht," or "Silent Night" to heathens, came much later. I love this story. On
Christmas Eve in 1818 the pastor of the St. Nicholas Church at Oberndorf bei Salzburg in Austria
was desperate. The Salzach River had flooded damaging the church and had put the pipe organ out
of commission with Christmas Eve service coming up that night. That pastor, Joseph Franz Mohr,
walked to a friend's house in the next village looking for a guitar accompaniment to a poem Mohr
had written. Franz Xaver Gruber wrote the melody in a few hours and the new song was performed
for that night's service. One of the most popular Christmas songs ever composed was done in a day
and immediately began gaining fame.

By 1832 the song was being performed by traveling Austrian folk singers and a few notes of the
melody were changed. The hymn is considered a national treasure in Austria and traditionally should
not be played there before Christmas Eve. But being a heathen I will break with tradition and let you
hear it now.

http://youtu.be/eeq943_IH6s

"O Holy Night" is one of my favorites to sing. It is filled with such passion and a pleading that you
can imagine falling to your knees with joy at the miracle being performed. Sung from the
perspective of a shepherd seeing angels rejoicing in the heavens on the night of the birth of Christ,
its power is so compelling it stirs the greatest singers to exquisite heights.

"O Holy Night" was commissioned as a poem in 1843 by the pastor of the church of Roquemaure in
southern France. He knew a local wine merchant who was also a poet and the pastor asked Placide
Cappeau to commemorate a renovated organ with a Christmas poem. Amazingly Cappeau was not a
particularly religious man. But he nailed this one. Later that year music was added by Adolphe
Adam.

One of the great Christmas singers is Johnny Mathis and he does this sweetly.

http://youtu.be/G_5ysIoPZgk

Another wonderful Christmas album is The Christmas Song originally recorded by Nat King Cole as
The Magic of Christmas in 1960. My parents bought the disc after White Christmas and it became a
favorite in my childhood and again for my kids. On that album is a recording that is very special and
for me defines the start of the season.
"A Cradle in Bethlehem" was written by Larry Stock and Alfred Bryan. This is an obscure song; if you look up Alfred Bryan you will see a long list of titles but this is not on it. I have never heard another recording of it. Yet this is the most gorgeous of the Christmas songs and sung with perfection by Mr. Cole, arguably the greatest singer of all time and certainly one of the most expressive. Please enjoy. This one is superb.

http://youtu.be/So33yWSG2kU

Finally a recording of a song written in 1948 by Billy Hayes and Jay W. Johnson, popularized by Elvis Presley in 1957.

In 2012 I was driving a truck long haul for Trans Am as an independent contractor. I would own my truck once I wrestled her away from the bank but until that happened I wasn't making a lot of money. The lease on the truck was $900 a week. You were paid by the mile so the only way to make money was to keep the wheels rolling. You gotta stay out there.

Christmas has been and still is a very special time of the year. The season kicked off by Thanksgiving is full of joy and wonder. But being on the road constantly is rough; the loneliness has a hard edge to it that you have to deal with every day. That edge becomes sharp during the holidays. For many folks and for many reasons.

During Christmas 2012 truckers for Trans Am were offered a bonus if they stayed out until after the new year. We needed the money so I had to do it. Christmas Eve found me at a truck stop on US 55 just above the Tennessee border and in a raging blizzard. I had eaten at the truck stop and was trudging back through a foot of deepening snow to my Kenworth T700. My mood was low. Knowing back home everyone was gathered and missing me as much as I was missing them puts a lump in my throat even now as I tell the story.

I had been planning to record a special Christmas song for my wife. I had a guitar in the truck. When I got back in the truck and shook off the snow I downloaded a copy of Audacity for recording and learned how to use it in about an hour. I recorded "Blue Christmas" with the background vocals for Diana since it told the story of our situation and because she is a huge Elvis fan.

If you listen closely you can hear the booming of the wind against the truck.

For some reason, she doesn't like this rendition. Women.

Happy Christmas to every one of you!
Before Coleman Hawkins, few musicians took the tenor saxophone seriously as a jazz instrument. Once Hawkins hit the scene, everyone clamored for it.

Hawkins was born in 1904 in St. Joseph, Missouri, and grew up mostly in Topeka, Kansas. His mother, who played piano and organ, made sure he started music lessons very young. By the time he got his first saxophone at age nine, he could already play piano and cello. By age 12 he was gigging at dance halls around Topeka and jamming with music students at a local college. During breaks from school, he would go to Kansas City to show off his chops.

During one of those Kansas City visits, he got a chance to play for blues singer Mamie Smith. She was so impressed that she tried to hire him on the spot, but Hawkins’ mom said he had to wait a year, until he turned 17. It was during his 1922 tour with Smith, playing alto, tenor, and baritone sax, that he decided tenor was the one he liked best.

The Harlem Renaissance was blossoming when Hawkins moved to New York City in 1923. He soon landed a job in the band of Fletcher Henderson, who was doing innovative work combining tight arrangements with the improvisational tradition from New Orleans.

Defying the accepted focus on clarinet, piano, and trumpet as solo instruments, Hawkins worked on his tenor sax tone until it was rich and expressive enough to garner solo turns. Everyone in the industry noticed, and he was soon in demand as a solo musician for the likes of Benny Goodman and Django Reinhardt. He appeared on dozens of albums on many different labels until his death in 1969.

Enjoy these eight tracks by Coleman Hawkins.
1. Track: “Midnight Sun”
   Album: *The Hawk Talks*
   Label: Decca
   Year: 1952

This recording of the Lionel Hampton/Sonny Burke number “Midnight Sun” is a great introduction to the Coleman Hawkins sound. His melodic lines are densely textured, with clear phrasing. He also had a habit of applying wide vibrato when he’s “singing” a lyrical tune, even on shorter notes. This might have been his response to the general opinion early in his career that the sound of a tenor sax as “flat” or “rubbery,” so he developed his vibrato to enliven the tone. It’s quite a different timbre from that of Coltrane, for example, who came into the jazz world when tenor sax was already acceptable.

This recording features Danny Mendelsohn on celesta, an appropriately vibe-like instrument to include on a Hampton tune. Mendelsohn also arranged and conducted on this album.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN94HIuYETA

2. Track: “His Very Own Blues”
   Album: *The Hawk in Hi-Fi*
   Label: RCA Victor
   Year: 1956

Bill Byers arranged and conducted this tight, jumping Hawkins-penned tune, “His Very Own Blues.” Hearing Hawkins play at a faster tempo, you can really appreciate the astonishing control Hawkins had over his horn. It’s more than just being able to play all the notes accurately with apparent ease; just listen to the range of textures he produces, from sweetly thin to a humorous wet blatting, all at high speed.

The big band-style Coleman Hawkins Orchestra took many of its stylistic cues from the energetic piano work of Hank Jones. And the blended sound of five trumpets, five saxes, and four trombones hits you square in the chest.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CvrwxEgjRk

3. Track: “Tangerine”
   Album: *Coleman Hawkins Encounters Ben Webster*
   Label: Verve
   Year: 1957

Singers Helen O’Connell and Bob Eberly had made this Victor Schertzinger/Johnny Mercer number a hit with the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra in 1942, and it had been recorded by other crooners, including Sinatra. But this two-tenor-sax rendition of “Tangerine” by Hawkins and fellow sax master Ben Webster is something special.

And while since were gathering jazz greats anyway, they made the rhythm section out of the best in the world: Oscar Peterson on piano (who opens this track with his usual elegance), Herb Ellis on guitar, Ray Brown on bass, and Alvin Stoller on drums. As for the sax solos, Hawkins crafts some beautiful ornaments in his opening solo, and then Webster lays out the tune in his signature breathy
tone.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P75ujfUWw20

4. Track: “I Want to Be Loved”

Album: *Coleman Hawkins with the Red Garland Trio*
Label: Swingville
Year: 1959

Not only is the playing on this track worthy of inclusion here, but “I Want to Be Loved” is also a rare example of a swing-era jazz tune by a woman composer, the singer Savannah Churchill. Hawkins clearly loved the song, having recorded it several times.

The album is a collaboration by Hawkins and the Red Garland Trio (pianist Red Garland, bassist Doug Watkins, and drummer Specs Wright). Hawkins takes on a tone breathy enough to be a tribute to Ben Webster.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QDx2xbNY2k

5. Track: “Night Hawk”

Album: *Night Hawk*
Label: Swingville
Year: 1960

Another great Hawkins collaboration is this one with fellow tenor sax player Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis. “Night Hawk” is a wistful, bluesy composition by Hawkins, evoking the wee hours of the morning. You can practically smell the wet city sidewalks after an overnight rain shower. (The only other song I can think of that captures that scene so well is Frank Loesser’s “My Time of Day,” from the stage version of *Guys and Dolls.*) Tommy Flanagan, who often played piano with Hawkins gets the spare, lonesome sound just right.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHpbRUyXs84

6. Track: “28th and 8th”

Album: *Jazz Reunion*
Label: Candid
Year: 1961

Pee Wee Russell was a jazz clarinetist of the same generation as Hawkins, known for his tireless musical curiosity and ability to play in any style. *Jazz Reunion* pairs his clarinet with Hawkins’ sax. It’s always a treat to hear these two single-reed instruments – so similar and yet so different – work together, especially in such expert hands.

The gentle bop tune “28th and 8th” was composed by Russell and Nat Pierce, who plays piano on the album. Milt Hinton makes an especially dynamic contribution with his ceaseless walking bassline.
7. Track: “The Man Who Has Everything”  
   Album: *The Jazz Version of No Strings*  
   Label: Moodsville  
   Year: 1962

This is an unusual idea for a recording, the Hawkins quartet playing an arrangement of the songs from the of Richard Rodgers Broadway show *No Strings*. The musical was Rodgers’ first after the death of his collaborator Oscar Hammerstein II. None of its songs are well known today, but Hawkins arranged eight of its fifteen songs into a classic instrumental album.

Hawkins would have been introduced to “The Man Who Has Everything” through this rather twee recording from the original Broadway cast album:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQGyJ_jqvU4

Yet somehow Hawkins makes it cool, with help from Tommy Flanagan (piano), Major Holley (bass), and Eddie Locke (drums). The offbeat arpeggios are an interesting touch, more classical than jazz in style.

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

8. Track: “O Pato (The Duck)”  
   Album: *Desafinado*  
   Label: Impulse!  
   Year: 1962

Hawkins tried his hand at Latin jazz on the album *Desafinado*, named after an Antonio Carlos Jobim tune and meaning approximately “Off Key” in Portuguese. The song “O Pato (The Duck),” by Jayme Silva and Neuza Teixeira – they had developed it with João Gilberto -- was already a crossover hit thanks to a recording by Woody Herman’s big band.

Hawkins’ group has only one Latino player, Willie Rodriguez on percussion, yet this ensemble of swing and bebop specialist does a nice, laid-back bossa nova. It may lack the energized syncopation associated with Latin jazz, but Hawkins’ eighth-note figuration around the melody in his opening solo is some fine work.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvuCBK1GsJM
Three Solid Hits!

TO BE DETERMINED

Written by Tom Gibbs
David Bowie— *Space Oddity (Tony Visconti 2019 Remix)*

David Bowie’s *Space Oddity* has something of an *oddity* of a history; Bowie’s first album, *David Bowie*, was on the Deram label, but didn’t make much of a splash with the record-buying public and he was dropped by the label in 1968. He shopped labels for his next album, landing on the Philips (UK) imprint; and in the meantime, the single “Space Oddity” was released to worldwide acclaim, reaching the number 5 position on the UK singles chart. Producer Tony Visconti felt that “Space Oddity” was simply a novelty record intended to cash in on the Apollo 11 lunar mission, so he handed the production job for the single down to Gus Dudgeon. An album was soon ordered by the label, and Visconti felt the album should also be eponymously named *David Bowie*.

Here’s where the confusion comes in: released in the UK as *David Bowie*, it was simultaneously released in the US as *Man of Words/Man of Music* on the Mercury label. The initial release of the album—despite good reviews and the popularity of the single—was a commercial failure, and at some point the rights were transferred to RCA. The record was repackaged and re-released as *Space Oddity*, probably to capitalize on the still-popular title track. Which was re-released as a single, and made it to number 16 on the US charts, and eventually, number 1 on the UK charts! The album has been known by the RCA moniker ever since, although a couple of remasterings in recent years have reverted to the *David Bowie* title. Everything all clear now?
Session musicians employed for the album included the likes of a young Rick Wakeman (soon part of Yes) on keyboards and mellotron; Herbie Flowers on bass; Tim Renwick, guitars; Terry Cox on drums; Paul Buckmaster, cello; and multi-instrumentalist and producer Tony Visconti. The genesis of the song “Space Oddity” had begun years earlier, and its production by Gus Dudgeon gave it a very different sound from the remainder of the Visconti-produced album. Giving the record an overall disjointed kind of feeling, and probably contributing to its poor performance on the charts. The reissue on RCA gave the record new life and an opportunity for the public to reconsider the work; it also received a significant performance boost, also reaching number 16 on the US charts.

The album features such classics as “Unwashed and Slightly Dazed,” “Letter to Hermione” and “Memory of a Free Festival,” as well as what’s widely regarded as Bowie’s first true masterpiece, the rambling “Cygnet Committee.” All in addition to the classic “Space Oddity.” The original tapes included two...oddities; “Don’t Sit Down,” a hidden (and unnamed) 48-second instrumental that appeared following “Unwashed and Slightly Dazed” and “Conversation Piece,” which was cut from the LP original release due to time restrictions, but later released as a single B side. The former is still missing in action on this new release, but “Conversation Piece” makes its first appearance here in its original album context.

I actually like the new remix/remaster; it’s a tad compressed, but in the spirit of the Beatles’ 50th Anniversary reissues, there’s a much greater clarity imparted to all the vocals, and the instruments are less congested and more visibly placed in the soundstage. Visconti’s mix perhaps takes a few more liberties with the original intent than Giles Martin did with the Beatles—especially on the title track, which is waaaaay more spaced-out than the original release. I guess he wanted to put his own stamp on Gus Dudgeon’s original job. My listening was done via the 24/96 MQA version available on Tidal and the CD-quality transfer on Qobuz; they both sounded pretty fantastic. This 50th anniversary reissue is very highly recommended!

Rhino/Parlophone, CD/LP (download/streaming from Amazon, Tidal, Qobuz, Google Play Music, Apple Music, Spotify)
Big Band of Brothers - A Jazz Celebration of the Allman Brothers Band

When I first laid eyes on this new album, my initial response was whaaaaata?! I know there’s been a recent trend with all the “pickin’ on” albums that do bluegrass takes on Metallica, AC/DC and the likes, but a big-band tribute to the Allman Brothers? Let me tell you—from the opening notes of “Statesboro Blues,” it’s completely obvious that this new record is no joke—it totally sucked me in, like, instantaneously! The playing is just over-the-top ridiculous, crazy good, and Marc Broussard’s soulful vocal on the opening track does Gregg Allman proud—this is as well-considered a tribute album if there ever was one. Then you go straight into their cover of the “Don’t Want You No More/It’s Not My Cross To Bear” medley with Texas blues maven Ruthie Foster screaming out a hyper-authentic offering of this classic—could it possibly get any better? Wait—that’s immediately followed by a heavily horn-infused “Hot ‘Lanta” that swings hard, with an even ridiculously good drum/conga break that would get both Jaimoe and Butch Trucks up and clapping! Right into another Marc Broussard over-the-top vocal on “Whipping Post,” with a wicked trombone solo in the bridge, and—somebody pinch me—then Broussard absolutely screams out the final chorus. It’s freaking unbelievable!

New West Records is a Nashville-based label, and the sessions were recorded in Alabama’s Bates Brothers Recording, with Eric Bates handling the engineering and mixing chores. All of which strikes me as an even more odd source for a collaboration like this to spring from, but, hey—one
listen will provide all the proof you need. As I’m writing this, “Dreams” is playing in the background, where trombonist Chad Fisher’s instrument replaces the vocal parts, and absolutely slays it. He’s just one of a cast of shockingly talented musicians who help make this album a must listen for fans of the Allmans, big-band jazz, and just remarkably well-recorded, really great music. Wait—you have to hear the crazy good horns on “In Memory of Elizabeth Reed”—you just want to lunge for the remote and crank the volume, especially in time for the drum break at the end. And then try and manage to keep your seat—I wanted to get up and dance with just about every track!

My listening was done via the 16/44.1 version on Qobuz and the sound was magnificent and incredibly dynamic. And hey, there’s a limited edition peach-colored vinyl release available! When was the last time you heard an album you just couldn’t get enough of? For me, this is it; A Jazz Celebration of the Allman Brothers Band comes very highly recommended!

New West Records, CD/LP (download/streaming from Bandcamp, Amazon, Tidal, Qobuz, Google Play Music, Spotify, Deezer)

Jimi Hendrix - Songs For Groovy Children

Prior to hitting the big time with the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Jimi had done session work as a studio musician in 1965; about the time he decided to carve a name for himself, he signed what he thought
was a release form from his session obligations. In actuality, buried deep within the legalese was a contract that bound him for three years to PPX Industries. Jimi was made beholden to it from the point he broke onto the charts with *Are You Experienced* in 1967, but a one-album deal was eventually brokered with PPX, with Capitol Records handling distribution. PPX and Capitol were bearing down hard on him to deliver the record, and in late 1969, Jimi decided to give them a live album. Much earlier in the year, Jimi had sold out Madison Square Garden, but the Fillmore East was determined to be a better location acoustically for a live concert recording. The concerts would span two shows on New Year’s Eve, 1969, and two shows on New Year’s Day, 1970.

Jimi’s meteoric rise with the Experience had already come to a close prior to his legendary performances at the Woodstock festival mere months before the Fillmore shows. And for his set at Woodstock, Jimi had assembled a large ensemble group that happened to include longtime friend Billy Cox on bass. Jimi split the large band afterwards, retaining Cox and adding Buddy Miles on drums to form a new group he christened Band of Gypsys. This was the band he showed up with at the Fillmore to finally get out from under this nagging contractual obligation.

Four shows over two days seems like a lot of material to fulfill a single-LP contract, but Jimi—ever the showman—didn’t just fill the shows with rehashes of previous material. He debuted almost a dozen new songs that had never been commercially released; songs like “Machine Gun,” “Izabella,” “Ezy Ryder” and “Burning Desire.” Hey, and if you were lucky enough to be at the New Year’s Eve late show, you got to hear Jimi play “Auld Lang Syne” at midnight! To round out the shows he played reworkings of classic, older material like “Stone Free” and “Purple Haze.” And there were numerous opportunities for Buddy Miles to spotlight his body of work, especially his hit, “Them Changes.” The original live shows were recorded by Wally Heider with Eddie Kramer at the control panel.

The result of these remarkable shows, the original *Band of Gypsys* album, was eventually edited and mixed to include only six(!) songs from the forty-three songs that comprised the four shows. Many of the extended jams had to be significantly edited for space considerations on the LP, and the song selection was also chosen to help reflect the flow of Jimi’s then-current live shows. Capitol Records and PPX couldn’t have been happier, and the record peaked at number five on the US charts, going gold in just two months and eventually reaching double platinum sales status.

This 5-CD or 8-LP collection marks the first time the series of four concerts in their entirety have been made available commercially. Now within the provenance of Experience Hendrix, the project was co-produced by Jimi’s step-sister Janie Hendrix, original recording engineer Eddie Kramer, and John McDermott. This is the trio that has been responsible for every Experience Hendrix project that’s been made available since their formation in 1995. And the set was mastered by multiple Grammy-winning Bernie Grundman, so you know the results are completely legit. It’s a whole lot of Hendrix to take in, but with the exception of a handful of tracks scattered across a couple of releases, most of these tunes have never seen the light of day. And they’re presented in what is undoubtedly superior digital sound, especially compared to the original, truncated LP and CD releases.

I did all my listening via Qobuz’s outstanding 24/44.1 PCM stream—the sound was magnificent. True Hendrix fans will want to get either the LP or CD box sets, both of which include a large-format booklet with tons of rare photos from the concerts. But for strictly streaming, the Qobuz experience was incredible, and there’s enough variation from show to show to keep things completely interesting. Very highly recommended!

Sony Legacy, 5 CDs/8 LPs (download/streaming from Amazon, Qobuz, Google Play Music, Spotify, Deezer, Apple Music)
John Meyer, Part 1

THE COPPER INTERVIEW

Written by John Seetoo

John Meyer is a legendary pioneer in the field of sound reinforcement. Many of you have heard Meyer’s gear without knowing it – Meyer Sound equipment is the choice of professionals from arena rock artists like Metallica and Ed Sheeran, touring productions like Cirque de Soleil, concert halls, and theaters of all sizes and configurations around the globe.

Beginning his professional career when he designed an amplification system for the Steve Miller Band that was used at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, John Meyer went on to work with the Grateful Dead on their legendary (and never duplicated “Wall of Sound,” and he’s amassed a truckload of patents as he pursued linear sound reproduction amplification and loudspeaker systems for live performances. He would even design customized subwoofers for Francis Ford Coppola’s Zoetrope Studios in order to reproduce the ultra-low end frequencies required for screenings of *Apocalypse Now*.

Founding Meyer Sound Labs in 1979, with his wife, Helen, John Meyer has continued refining and engineering new milestones in audio, incorporating technology and concepts from such disparate sources as military aerospace, chemistry, and materials design. The company is celebrating its 40th Anniversary with groundbreaking new loudspeakers that were showcased in recent demonstrations at AES NYC and have already surpassed sales expectations with their increased bandwidth, improved headroom, versatile application, and reduced price points. John Meyer graciously took the time to share some of his insights with me.

**John Seetoo:** I understand your audio roots are in radio and film - your stepdad was a radio anchor and an uncle was a sound technician for Disney. Did that early exposure set your direction at a
young age, or did you develop your affinity for audio on your own?

John Meyer: Yes, my uncle was doing sound for Disney. I saw his work when I was a kid, on “The Mickey Mouse Club” with the Mouseketeers, things like that. Also, there was a radio station in Berkeley - it’s still there - called KPFA, an FM station which was doing very high quality work when I was a kid in terms of live broadcasts, binaural broadcasts and things like that. So, I got interested in technology and earned my second class radio operator’s license, which allowed me to be much more technically adept. And so, from age 12 on I was really interested in sound. I even had my own program on KPFA called “Sampson Snails,” where I told fairytales from memory. That lasted about a year.

JS: Is it true that your first date with wife Helen was a trip to a hi-fi store to listen to the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper* album? What made you think it would make for a good first date experience, and did you already foresee her becoming your partner in building Meyer Sound?

JM: I had met Helen when she was a neighbor in Berkeley in 1967. I brought her the new *Sgt. Pepper* album but she only had a tiny record player that sounded awful. I brought her to the hi-fi shop so she could hear it properly. At this stage, Meyer Sound was still 12 years away, but we were discovering much of the new live music scene together. I realized I needed to find a way for the audience to have a quality sonic experience. We went on to solving many of the challenges in live sound and also continued as life partners and business partners from that Summer of Love in 1967 on.

JS: Given your experience in building the Grateful Dead’s “Wall of Sound” with McIntosh power amps and in other more traditional installations utilizing passive loudspeakers and horns, what prompted you to come up with and focus your designs on self-powered speakers?

JM: The amplifier is a very important part of a sound system. It literally is as critical as the speakers, and the two interact with each other. It's very difficult when you buy from a third party, from a vendor that's making only amplifiers, to get the kind of amplifier you need for the speaker you want to use. It was a big challenge during the hi-fi revolution in the fifties and sixties. And it got harder and harder going forward as the manufacturers for the home hi-fi market disappeared. It became clear that if we wanted to build high quality, great sounding speakers, we needed high-quality amplifiers. So, it became a priority that we were going to have to integrate all this together. Designing and building self-powered connects all the engineering teams, the mechanical engineering and the electronic engineering people, so they work together to optimize the balance between the amplifier and the speakers. And you can modify either one to take advantage. It's kind of like cars were in the old days. You used to be able to buy a lot of parts for your cars. You could get this kind of transmission or that kind, but slowly, the car makers became less interested in having people change out things like that. It's just not efficient.

JS: Due to SPL and performance space configuration differences between theatrical productions and rock concerts, how did you arrive at your designs for the UPA-1 and other Meyer Sound loudspeaker innovations and what considerations went into the progression to the latest models like the Ultra X-40? Was it merely continuing improvements in greater handling power, lighter weight and reduced price points, or have new factors entered into the equation?

JM: Well, what really matters is that during the hi-fi revolution in the fifties and sixties, mostly in the fifties, the idea was that you'd buy a particular kind of speaker, the kind of speaker you might find more suited for jazz, or another for rock and roll. But that makes it difficult because when working for the rental companies, they'd have some speakers for doing classical stuff, some speakers for doing jazz, some speakers for doing somebody like Elvis Presley. And the idea I got was, if we made
the speakers what we call linear, meaning that they're very transparent, you could use the same system for all genres.

A good linearity example in optics would be something that would record nature and record pop art, and do it all the same. You wouldn't need a special camera for everything you want to shoot. So when we started working on the UPA, it was one of the first products that we really wanted to be truly universal, so you could use it for jazz, rock and roll and Broadway shows. We wanted to break that barrier and show that this could be solved. It would be much cheaper for a rental company to have one system that they can add to or subtract from, rather than having all of these different kinds of loudspeaker categories. So it became really part of the model, showing the practicality of linear theory. The ULTRA-X40, of course, is the new version of the UPA with everything we've learned. It's kind of like a studio monitor in a practical road package that you can do shows with. It's evolved that way.

JS: Linear sound is a goal that Meyer Sound Labs’ reputation has been successful at delivering for decades. The acoustic scientific theory and engineering design that needed to be drawn to achieve linear sound must have been a challenge. One curious aspect of one of your designs involved using ultra-low distortion drivers while incorporating intentional pre-distortion of a signal to ensure linear response. Can you explain how this principle works and how you arrived at it?

JM: I think we answered that in a previous question.

JS: Most people involved with sound reinforcement systems design would intuitively create a system with excellent sound for a small venue and then scale it up for larger spaces. If I understand correctly, you work in the opposite direction: you build mammoth systems for excellent sound in stadiums and then modularly break down the arrays to smaller components to accommodate smaller spaces. Can you explain how you developed this methodology and what elements need to be factored into the size reduction of your systems?

JM: When we first started working with the Grateful Dead, at the same time we built a big reinforcement system for a stadium in Oakland for announcements and prerecorded music playback. Then we made a modular section of that system so that we could then build up to a big system. So you want to make sure that the big system will work when you put it all together. A lot of companies would put these big speaker clusters together and then they would not work well when the installation was completely done. You want to make sure that if you're selling someone the idea that you can buy a few of these speakers and keep adding to them to do bigger shows, you want to know it will perform as planned.

With the Grateful Dead, when we were first starting with the band, I said you could buy more and more of the units over time and then eventually if you do a stadium, you could bring them all together. In fact, when the Dead really did the big stadiums, they knew Frank Zappa had our systems, and they combined them together, which was a really new idea at the time and showed that you could then do really big shows with good sound reinforcement. It was based on the fact that you don’t want to disappoint the band or run into problems, which unfortunately still happens today. You hear out there about people trying things at shows and then they don't work.

I don't like to experiment in front of the customer. That's really risky. This is their livelihood. I mean, we're technical people. We're on the sidelines, but they're on the stage. It's their show. If something goes wrong, they take the full blame, from the press, the audience, everyone. So you don't want to disappoint them.
Part 2 of this interview will appear in Copper Issue 100.
Pretentious! (No, Progressive)

An Introduction to Progressive Rock – the Most Critically Maligned Genre of Pop Music This Side of Disco

In the late ‘60s, rock music experienced a period of experimentation unprecedented in the history of pop music. Musicians became interested in pushing the boundaries of rock beyond the blues and three-minute love songs, incorporating elements from classical music that included the use of dynamics; longer, complex compositions based on themes and variations; a wider range of instruments; and time signatures that went beyond the standard 4/4. Instrumental virtuosity was on display in solos and extended instrumental passages.

Some would say that progressive rock began with the wide-ranging, eclectic sound of The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s* (1967), which was, itself, influenced by The Beach Boys’ album *Pet Sounds* (1966). Others point to collaborations between rock bands and symphony orchestras such as The Moody Blues’ album *Days of Future Passed* (1967), or Deep Purple’s *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* (1969).

The influence of psychedelia and drugs was there, for sure, but the groups that came to define the genre during its heyday in the ‘70s (led by Emerson, Lake & Palmer, King Crimson, Yes, Genesis, Pink Floyd, and others) were serious about creating more substantial works of art. Speaking of art, album covers began to move away from portraits of the artists themselves to illustrations, photographs, and paintings intended to convey or relate to the feel of the music. A prime example of this was the long collaboration between Yes and fantasy/sci-fi artist Roger Dean.
Where the guitar had been the primary instrument from rock’s earliest days, keyboards began to take an increasingly significant role in the musical compositions. The introduction of more sophisticated electronic keyboard instruments such as the Moog synthesizer and Mellotron gave bands a wider palette of sonic emotions.

Although they were complex, early synthesizers were monophonic, meaning that only one note could be played at a time, not chords. The Moog that Keith Emerson used on his early tours bore a strong resemblance to an old telephone switchboard, sometimes requiring the unplugging and plugging of various wires during play to achieve different tones.

The Mellotron, on the other hand, was actually a collection of three-track tape drives and pre-recorded loops, each of which was controlled by an individual key on the keyboard. Players could choose three sounds among somewhat eerie recordings of flute, brass, strings, or choir voices. The Mellotron was a complex mechanical arrangement that, while allowing chords to be played, had an eight-second limit on sustained notes. Along with a slight mechanical lag that precluded rapid playing during solos, the Mellotron was notorious for tuning problems, as it was susceptible to tape stretch as well as changes in humidity. Today’s more sophisticated sampling synthesizers can mimic the sound of a Mellotron with none of the limitations. Here’s a brief demo of the Mellotron’s voices:

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

With the exception of The Beach Boys, all of the artists mentioned so far utilized both Mellotrons and synthesizers to greater or lesser extents. The Beatles used a Mellotron on “Strawberry Fields Forever,” but that other-worldly sound in “Good Vibrations” actually came from an Electro-Theremin, a variation of the Theremin, one of the earliest electronic instruments. The Theremin, named after its creator, Russian physicist Léon Theremin, was patented in 1928. It looks like a small box with two antennae, one a vertical pole and the other a horizontal loop, and is played entirely without contact. The proximity and location of the performer’s hands to the antennae control both pitch and volume. (The Electro-Theremin, developed by Paul Tanner and Bob Whitsell in the late 1950s, was similar to the Theremin, but used knobs to control the sound.)
Although The Moody Blues had already released several albums by 1969, King Crimson’s *In the Court of the Crimson King*, with its unforgettable red “screaming” cover art, was a landmark of the progressive rock genre. The leadoff track, “21st Century Schizoid Man,” opened with strange, low-level sounds, followed by an in-your-face blast of Robert Fripp’s distorted guitar and Ian McDonald’s saxophone leading to Greg Lake’s deliberately harsh vocals. It was impossible to ignore. The musicianship and ensemble playing was unlike anything that had come before in the Rock world. The unison start/stop instrumental break at around the 4:40 mark still impresses:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLstJH23p7k

They followed it up with the beautiful, mellow, utterly undistorted “I Talk to the Wind,” featuring some gorgeous flute work by McDonald (who later became a founding member of Foreigner):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPZw5ko-7aY&list=PLfdMKJMGPPtyujGy4_cvpvp7oK7PrQxbO

The epic anthem “Epitaph” closes out the first side with impassioned vocals and lots of Mellotron:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-C-HytsGYg0

King Crimson continues to this day in a much-altered form. Founder-guitarist Fripp is the only original member in the current incarnation.

Lake left King Crimson after the second album to be part of Prog’s first supergroup, Emerson, Lake & Palmer. Keith Emerson came from The Nice, a British keyboard-based trio known for rock adaptations of classical pieces. He was an organist and pianist who displayed a level of virtuosity previously unheard in rock. Greg Lake supplied the vocals and played bass, as well as acoustic guitar. Carl Palmer had played with Arthur Brown (the “God of Hellfire”) and Atomic Rooster (which included Arthur Brown’s organist, Vincent Crane). In the prog world, this was analogous to the formation of Cream.

Emerson quickly added the Moog synthesizer to his arsenal of keyboards. ELP’s first hit was “Lucky Man,” a song that Lake had written while still in his teens. Most of the track featured guitar rather than keyboards, but the coda showcased a wild synthesizer “freak out” that was added as an afterthought:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89g1P_J40JA

Aficionados of early synthesizer music will notice a strong similarity between that passage and parts of “The Minotaur,” a track from *Moog – The Eclectic Electrics of Dick Hyman*:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uuv5gNRVbQ

ELP expanded on Emerson’s desire to fuse rock and classical, performing a complete rock adaptation of Mussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition.” This was recorded live and the album was released after their debut LP. They went on to become one of the most successful bands in all of progressive rock, with best-selling albums and an elaborate stage show.

Another early prog band that went on to great success was Yes. Their self-titled 1969 debut album included notes from Tony Wilson, a writer for England’s premier rock magazine Melody Maker. Wilson, along with the rest of the staff, had been asked to choose two new bands destined for stardom. His picks – Led Zeppelin and Yes – were right on the mark.

Although the first two Yes albums hinted at what was to follow, it wasn’t until the arrival of guitarist
Steve Howe, who replaced founding member Peter Banks for their third disc, entitled *The Yes Album*, that their musical vision took a great leap forward. The fourth album, *Fragile*, found Rick Wakeman taking over keyboards from another founding member, Tony Kaye. Wakeman was an in-demand session player and member of *The Strawbs*, and his keyboard technique rivaled that of Emerson. The leadoff track from the album, “Roundabout,” was a huge hit, and the rest of the LP cemented their status as prog superstars:

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

Their subsequent album, *Close to the Edge*, has topped surveys naming it the greatest progressive rock album ever. In an unexpected move, original drummer Bill Bruford left the band after that album to join a new incarnation of *King Crimson*. Yes also still performs, albeit with Steve Howe and no original members. For many fans, a more satisfying concert experience comes from ARW (Anderson, Rabin, Wakeman). Original vocalist Jon Anderson, guitarist Trevor Rabin (who was behind their biggest album, *90125*), and Rick Wakeman have been performing *Yes* music with a solid new rhythm section. In 2017, they were given permission to call themselves *Yes featuring Jon Anderson, Trevor Rabin, Rick Wakeman*. Here’s that lineup on “Perpetual Change” from *The Yes Album*:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3h_8f0AAWY

**Genesis** began as a group of schoolmates from Charterhouse, a British boarding school. Peter Gabriel (vocals and flute), Tony Banks (keyboards and 12-string guitar), Anthony Phillips (guitars), and Mike Rutherford (bass & guitars) attracted the attention of Jonathan King, a pop record producer. The band’s name flip-flopped between *Genesis* and *Revelation* due to the discovery that others had previously claimed those names, so the first album was released as *from genesis to revelation*. It sounded a bit like early *Moody Blues*. They were ultimately able to use the name *Genesis*, and their second LP, *Trespass*, was a much more confident and mature outing that laid the foundation for what was to come. Much like *Yes*, the third *Genesis* album, *Nursery Cryme*, included new members (guitarist Steve Hackett and drummer/vocalist Phil Collins), contributing to a significant evolution of their sound. Here’s an epic live performance from 1973 of “The Musical Box”:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GXQTEtAc1w

That record and the studio albums that followed (*Foxtrot*, *Selling England by the Pound*, and *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*) are universally considered masterpieces of the genre. *Genesis*’s live shows were groundbreaking, with innovative lighting, stage sets, and Gabriel in stage makeup, changing various costumes related to the songs. When they performed *The Lamb* live in 1975, over 1500 slides, timed to go with the music, showed on three screens spanning the width of the stage. Some of the tour was apparently filmed, but no full-length movie/video ever got assembled. The premier *Genesis* tribute band, *The Musical Box*, has performed a complete recreation of *The Lamb*, even incorporating the original slides:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlX4moDYEmA&t=146s

Although the band had been building a significant following, Peter Gabriel left *Genesis* after *The Lamb* tour, and went on to a hugely successful solo career. Phil Collins took over the lead vocals and, over time, moved the group away from prog to a more commercial, pop sound that brought them platinum albums and massive arena shows. He, too, has had an incredibly successful solo career.
So much has been written about **Pink Floyd** that there’s no need for detail here. Their first album, *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, was more psychedelic than prog, the result of troubled founder Syd Barrett’s influence and songwriting. David Gilmour replaced Barrett on guitar for *Saucerful of Secrets*, and their sound took on a spacier, more experimental vibe. *Dark Side of the Moon*, their eighth album, became one of the most successful records in all of rock music.

Finally, on a lighter note, in contrast with the serious disdain heaped upon the genre by so many rock critics, progressive rock was hilariously skewered by the **National Lampoon** on its 1976 album, *Good-Bye Pop*. The track “Art Rock Suite” was written and performed by Paul Shaffer, Christopher Guest, and others:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzIHT9gnZrM

Future articles will explore some of the lesser-known prog bands, including those from Italy and elsewhere in the world.
New York has been host to audio shows for a very long time – since the 1950s. The 1954 New York Audio Show marked the introduction of Henry Kloss’ landmark Acoustic Research AR-1 acoustic-suspension loudspeaker, the first-ever of its type. The first Consumer Electronics Show (CES) was held in New York in 1967. Other audio shows continued, with some missing years, through the 1970s and 1980s. Stereophile magazine picked up the baton in the late 1980s.

However, in the 2000s attendance started to decrease, and Stereophile’s then-owners decided to opt out in 2007. In 2011 the Chester Group started hosting shows in New York. They’ve been much smaller than the glory years of the Stereophile era, when a who’s who of audio companies would exhibit. In fact, after the 2018 outing I and others wondered if there would even be a 2019 show.

Whaddya know. The 2019 New York Audio Show, while still far from the same size as AXPONA, Rocky Mountain Audio Fest and others, felt more upbeat than last year’s. (I went on Friday, the first day. I didn’t receive confirmation of attendance figures as of press time.) And, like the recent Capital Audiofest (CAF show report in Issue 98) there was a varied mix of people in attendance.

As noted before, I don’t make definitive judgments at shows. There are so many variables an exhibitor has to deal with, from less-than-optimal rooms to far worse: airport people ripped open the Onkk turntable upon its arrival to the US, looking for contraband (there was none) and Onkk had to patch it together and soldier (solder?) on. (it worked!) If the demo material is unfamiliar you don’t know what a system’s supposed to sound like. I’ve been in rooms where the sound changed from hour to hour. (Old industry joke: you get the best sound 20 minutes before the show ends.)

I wasn’t stringent about getting pricing for every component. (My editor is going to bust my chops for that. Oh, wait...) Some rooms were too crowded to hear the music properly. I missed a few. Some peoples’ opinions about the sound of a particular room were different than mine. (Part of being an audiophile.) So, take any sonic commentary as one person’s impressions, YMMV, call me crazy if you’d like...

Some highlights, in no particular order:

**Robyatt Audio** showed a compact, high-end system that would be perfect for apartments, smaller
rooms and people who just don’t want a lot of equipment in their living space. It included the Rogers LS3/5A monitor speakers (these just look like the classics they are in their rich wood finish and textured grilles), along with the Mytek Brooklyn Bridge streamer/DAC/preamp and matching Brooklyn amp, Robyatt stands and Finley Audio cables. Just add a source and you’ve got a fine system for around $8,500. I have a weakness for the sweet sound of LS3/5A speakers and this system only fueled that feeling.

**Alexus Audio** and **Bache Audio** showcased a wide variety of their tube electronics and loudspeakers including Alexus’ impressive 845SE pure Class A single-ended mono power amp ($24,995), Perfect Line V2.0 dual-mono preamp ($13,995), Multi-Standard phono stage ($11,995) and more. It was a big room with a big sonic presence, fueled by the authority and scale of the tower speakers that were playing at the time, and the sumptuous sound of those amps. Honestly, I don’t know a lot about either of these companies yet. I intend for that to change.

The **Blink High End Audio** room had a vast array of gear on exhibit including Technics turntables, Fink Team loudspeakers, Aavik Acoustics amplifiers, Linn gear, Illusonic digital components and processors, Kroma loudspeakers, HiDiamond cable and more.

The Fink Team Borg loudspeakers (and they looked like something out of *Star Trek*; $30,900/pair), featured Air Motion Transformer (AMT) tweeters and other high-tech drivers and delivered remarkably clear sound with no distortion that I could hear, even at volumes which literally rattled the walls and had the exhibitors in the adjoining room barging in and pleading with the Blinkians to please turn it down. (To be fair, this was partly because of an odd resonance effect that amplified the bass in the other room.) Music was reproduced with a sense of purity I’ve heard from very few systems, and I’ve heard hundreds. No surprise that Blink’s Tim Lukas told me the Borgs are being adopted in professional recording studios.

**Triode Wire Labs** along with **Well Pleased AV** and **Vinnie Rossi Audio** displayed a large-scale system featuring an Innuos Statement music server ($13,750), Vinnie Rossi L2 Signature Edition integrated amplifier, ($18,995, options available) Gigawatt power management, QLN Prestige Three loudspeakers, SGR audio racks and more. My friend Harris Fogel asked them to play “To Sir With Love” by Chaka Khan and we heard a soundstage that was immense, absolutely vast and enveloping with vocals and instruments seemingly everywhere and far beyond the boundaries of the large room.

You have to admire **Ohm Acoustics** for sticking to their unconventional loudspeaker design principles since they founded the company in 1972 to offer speakers based on inventor Lincoln Walsh’s patent. Ohm speakers utilize an inverted cone driver they call the Coherent Line Source or CLS, which is said to maintain perfect phase and time alignment and uniform frequency response. The audible result in their room was what they claim – a “3D” sort of sonic presentation throughout the room, with a spaciousness that was the antithesis to “head in a vise” speaker designs where the listener has to stay in a tightly defined sweet spot to hear the best sound. Ohm’s thing may or may not be everyone’s cup of tea but the Ohm sound certainly has its adherents, as evidenced by 47 years of manufacturing.

Personal show highlight: I sat with my friend Gene Tambor in New Hampshire dealer **Fidelis AVs** room, which included **Acoustic Signature** Maximus and Signature Double X turntables ($3,495 and
Einstein The Preamp and The Power Amp ($22,000 and $20,000) and the Harbeth 40.2 Reference Monitor loudspeakers ($15,495) among other gear. Conventional wisdom on the Harbeths is that they’re great for classical, jazz, folk and other kinds of acoustic music. However, when Gene and I sat down they cued up Jeff Beck’s “Brush with the Blues” from the Who Else! album. It’s a live cut, well recorded.

Well, it was astounding. Beck is an extremely expressive guitarist and we heard the nuances of his playing on this cut as never before – his myriad variations in attack, note-shaping, dynamics, string and tremolo bending and the humanity in his playing. These are the nuances that make the difference between a nice-sounding audio system and one that can fool you into thinking you’re hearing “into” reality. We were completely blown away. We couldn’t stop raving about it. This room reinforced what so many speaker designers have said over the years: a good speaker is a good speaker, period. It should be able to reproduce all kinds of music equally well.

In past years Sound by Singer has exhibited in larger rooms and this year was no exception. Their room featured an impressive array of top-shelf gear including the Stenheim Alumine Three loudspeakers ($30,000/pair), CH Precision 1 Series electronics (the I1 integrated amp ranges from $38,000 - $48,000 depending on configuration), a selection of Dr. Feinkert turntables including the Firebird ($11,000 without arm), and My Sonic Lab cartridges (the Signature Gold was playing), Audience cables and power conditioning (full disclosure: I do PR for the company) and Solid Steel equipment racks, all surrounded by Mobile Fidelity LPs. Since I was there during press hours, before the public was let in, the room was relatively quiet (except when Copper’s J.J. French, Andrew Singer and I got carried away talking about vintage guitars) and I finally had a chance to hear the CH Precision components that so many people have been raving about.

Now I know why. The sound was clear, present, detailed, transparent in the true sense of the word (I know, it’s an overused audiophile cliché but when you can hear into the sound that deeply, you know it), tonally neutral, just there. While I was there I heard Thelonious Monk’s “Monk’s Music” and the illusion of reality was strong – I wasn’t listening to, I was absorbing his playing. Neutrality is a prized attribute in a system (well, unless you like certain colorations and you know what, sometimes I do) and this system had it, and not in an analytical or “cool” sense but as a quality of being right.

Part Two of the New York Audio Show Report will appear in Issue 100.
Blue Mood

PARTING SHOT
Taken by Frank Doris