Opening Salvo

As we head into the third issue of Copper, we feel both relief and fatigue. Relief, because it appears that yes, we can do this, and do it on a regular basis. Fatigue, precisely because we've been doing it, and doing it on a regular basis.

Oh, well... no rest for the wicked.

We thank you for your very positive response to Copper. Being highly competitive souls, praise only drives us to be even better in the future; complacency is not an option.

Luckily, I think #3 is our best issue yet, and our regular columnists bring the goods. If you’ve ever wondered, “44.1? How did they come up with that?”—well, digital maven Richard Murison ‘splains it. Seth Godin broke his stereo, and undergoes a wave of panic all of us can relate to. Lawrence Schenbeck mashes up Gertrude Stein with Gustav Mahler, and somehow it makes sense. Dan Schwartz gives us a bit of background we don’t want to miss. Duncan Taylor ponders timing, of the musical variety. WL Woodward takes us back to 1967 and I haven’t stopped laughing since. My pair of columns form a Straussian couplet of death and transfiguration: theft of music, and the growth of audio from the humble beginnings of the telephone.

Our feature articles are well worth reading, as well. In the second installment of our series Over There, Flemming Rasmussen tells us why there are so damn many audio companies in teeny little Denmark (Flem puts it in more dignified terms). We interview Elizabeth Newton, whose provocative piece The Lossless Self ran in Copper #1. Ken Kessler returns with the first installment of What Too Many Have Missed, his list of influential musicians who have been unfairly overlooked or forgotten. There will be more from Ken on this subject in the future, and we’d be interested in your lists, as well. Finally, Bill Koch tells us what he has In My Room.

Thanks again for your support, and your criticism. Don’t worry, we have thick skin. We even have lotion for it. Honest.
Aging Audiophile

I’m an aging audiophile / music lover. I was seduced by this hobby in the mid-fifties. Now, I try to find my way through an overwhelming choice of options in the search for the BEST SINGLE SOURCE of digital downloads. Then again, maybe I’m better off sticking with vinyl and silver discs, they don’t overwhelm me at all.

Anyway, I look forward to pleasant reading and the opportunity to eventually replace confused indecision with an informed decision. I wish both of us good luck.

Miguel

No More 8th Grade Stuff

Well I enjoyed Copper #2. However I do have to say that Kesslers fire bombing of a whole group of people with nothing but name calling and bullying is less than I expected. Please spare us any more of that 8th grade stuff.

Jay Avril, Esq.

Questioning the Emperor’s Tailor

It’s you acting like the little child Ken; how dare you question the Emperor’s tailor?

Next, you’ll be claiming that the greedy “Robber Barons” did more to improve the standard of living for the masses than all the Marxist ideologues.

B. Jan Montana
San Diego, CA

Trumpian Insecurity

I have no objections if some titan of industry wishes to pamper themselves with a $100,000 turntable.
Better that than despoiling the rainforest, forming a private militia, or whatever mischief the 1% amuses themselves with these days.

What I object to is cheap, lazy writing, trotting out and toothlessly displaying the tired flashcards of the usual suspects: Hillary! Bernie! Huffington Post! The New York Times! (twice, for good measure). Ken Kessler: we get it. You’re a conservative. Can we move on?

It’s doubtful any of us will be turning to Copper, or Ken Kessler, for insightful political comment. I’d like to read about music and audio. I can shut down my stereo and watch Fox News if I want to ratchet up my stress level.

Anyone who describes themselves in their byline as “in all likelihood the world’s most widely published hi-fi writer” displays a certain Trumpian insecurity, doncha think?

See how easy it is?

Jamie Haynes
New London CT

Unsubscribe Me

I really disliked Ken Kessler’s article and with all the politics I’m already getting from the the news and TV, I didn’t want it to get injected into an area of my life I get so much pleasure from. If he is a contributor to Copper, then I would rather not subscribe to it.

Gary Rogers

Kessler Rocks!

Ken Kessler rocks! It takes real guts to take on the all-too entrenched leftists that seem to rule the high end roost. My alter-ego, Dennis Prager, approached what Mr. Kessler did in a TAS piece a while back, but I am sure he pulled a few punches based on the political slant of most high end journalists in TAS and its editors. It’s nice to know that not being center-left or hard left does not disqualify one from being
Phil Slepian

From the Left Coast

OK, either your cover cartoonist (Mr. Damico) knows a great deal about amplifiers - or very little at all.

Everyone except Victor the dog seems to be impressed by the “jaw dropping” weight of the tube amp in Audio By The Pound. Yet somehow that was achieved without the added weight of any transformers! So was this an inside joke with an OTL amp, or did he not realize that most tube amps have sizable line transformers and even larger output trannies?

Now seriously, thanks for the great beginnings with Copper. And I agree with your revised schedule of bi-weekly. At my age that passes by quickly enough thank you.

Tim Price
Left Coast

Bloody Fabulous

Feedback on the magazine. I’ve not read it all, either issue. I can imagine reading some segments “now” (Seth Godin; the Digital music series) & getting into other segments / streams later & going back and reading from the beginning.

The digital music series is bloody fabulous. I have bothered, previously, to look up the Shannon-Nyquist theorem but felt uneasy (despite having a math background) in articulating why I felt it was insufficient, practically speaking (not theoretically).
The exposition regarding 24-bit V’s 16-bit was wonderful. Simple. Cogent. I’ve previously said that I could pick only minor differences between Bjork’s 16- & 24- bit recordings, but that I was fine at the 16-bit level & assuming The DS DAC handles points two & three well, I can now appreciate why. Very Slightly improved accuracy, and less noise. With actual dB levels corresponding to the two information levels.

I’m looking forward to the rest of the series.

Cheers & Thanks for the magazine.

Damien

Staggering

Had to say “Thank you!”. Love the magazine and I totally agree with the feedback. Great move going bi-monthly. For so much effort to go into a magazine for no gain is staggering in today’s environment. All the best with your endeavours! Looking forward to enjoying issue two.

Kind regards

Peter

Auckland, New Zealand

Put it on Tape!

Hey,
I really dig what your doing and I think the blog format is awesome. But, I also spend a lot of time listening to podcasts. I really think a companion podcast with the stories being read, would be awesome. For all of it’s popularity it’s still conveniently constrained enough to not get overlooked. If I subscribed to your podcast I’d always have your podcast in my phone, just waiting for me to find it as I wrap my night up and look for something to listen too while I play a video game or chill out on the couch. Just some food for thought and kudos for a cool idea.

Cam
Singular

Other than the great charge I get from reading the articles in Copper it is coupled, (color copies) next to my On Deck Record/CD box. Recently, friends have noticed the last 2 issues as they go through music that they want to hear. They pick it up and start Reading. In the last week we have had some great discussions about our Hobby and have spent more time talking than listening to Music.

Copper is Simply, singularly unique as a magazine!

From the marvelous musical ideas and thoughts from the minds of many, the Fabulous Cover, your vision and your Talented have created; it is the magazine that I have been looking for and thoroughly enjoying! Thank you to you, your Team and our Community!

Paul Stevenson

Who’s in Charge?

Loved the article. With so many new ways to listen to your music, it’s really a choice of how you want to hear the music. As you know, listening to music with different things allows you to choose the music that fits your mood and situation at the time. For instance, if I wanted to “feel” the music down to the bone, then I play it on the Big Rig. If I am just commuting in the car and need to take my mind off the traffic, then then car radio/cd player does just fine (also my personal favorite when stressed out to blast the heavy metal in such a small confined area). If I want to really hear the music as I am doing other things then the ear buds cancel out the outside noise and allows me to hear things sonically that I am not able to with the other ways. As we all know, all the choices that we have will change how we hear our music. You play a favorite song on the big rig, through ear buds, headphones or the car will change how the song is reproduced. Your ears will tell you which your prefer.

Aloha
Randy
My Stereo is Broken

By Seth Godin

It’s not the buzzing of a ground loop or the scratching of a bad stylus. It’s silent. Merely silent, staring at me with reproach, speaking not a sound.

Okay, I’m a geek, I can handle this.

Let’s start on the Mac side. Check the output settings on Roon. Fine. Check the system preferences. Yep, they’re correct, the Dragonfly is set.

And yes, the Dragonfly is lighting up.

Let’s switch to the other USB port. No difference.

Okay, not the Mac. Not the DAC.

It must be the amp. Tube amps! What a pain in the neck.

But both channels at the same time?

I check the switch and the fuse. No luck.

Okay, maybe the amp is dead. Fortunately, I have another one, a little 300B SET amp. I swap the cables, the inputs and the speaker cables too.

Nothing.

Yikes.

Must be the DAC. I have this old DAC somewhere, oh, here it is, swap it in.

Nothing.

It must be a dead USB port. I Google and find the secret instructions for restarting the SMC. It’s not that hard.

Nothing.
About then, my wife (who’s considerably smarter than me), walks into the living room.

“How come the speakers aren’t connected to the speaker cables?” she asks, pointing to the four cables (all four of them!) disconnected on the floor, a foot from the speakers.

Well, how about that. It wasn’t me. It wasn’t the dog. What’s going on here?

I’m busy coming up with people to blame, and not having much luck.

Then I look at the cables. The spades have sheared off.

It turns out that my new speakers, the extraordinary DeVore O/96s, have the speaker posts on the bottom. They might be the only speakers I know of that have this unusual set up. I’m at a loss for why they were designed this way.

As a result, though, the speaker cables take a 90 degree angle just before being connected. And my old speaker cables couldn’t handle it. Over time, they stressed, stretched and finally broke.

Here’s the thing: Without a doubt, my music must have been degrading for weeks as this was happening. Without a doubt, they must have sounded strained, and then there’d be just one speaker and then none.

Which is precisely the opposite of the narrative I’d been living with. The legend of the Devores is that they get better over time, that the break in period is this marvelous extended period of better and better every day.

And so I’d been telling myself that they were getting better every day.

I guess deep down I realized what I was actually hearing, that the reality of the sound being presented, was beginning to undermine my giddiness with my new speakers.

But the mind is far more powerful than the electron. It took silence, complete silence, to wake me up.

A few minutes later, the system was back together, the cables were newly snipped and reinstalled and the stereo sounded better than ever.

Of course it did.

The number one audio tweak of all time is simple: persuade yourself your stereo sounds great.

Seth Godin majored in engineering at Tufts a long time ago. But he didn’t actually take many engineering classes. Should philosophy count toward an engineering degree?
The CD standard has become the de facto standard format for digital audio, with its 16-bit word length and 44.1kHz sample rate. When the CD was introduced back in 1982 this format produced file sizes that were considered to be prodigious. A typical CD consumes 500-700MB of file storage. To put that in context, the first 3.5" Hard Discs were only introduced in 1983, and their capacity was a paltry 10MB. It was not until the early 2000’s that HD capacities had increased to the point where the size of CD-quality audio files was no longer a significant barrier to their adoption in computer-based audio with high-end pretensions. Today, HDs with capacities upward of 4TB are commonplace.

Now that storage capacity (and its partner-in-arms, download bandwidth) is no longer a significant limiting factor, we no longer feel constrained to limit ourselves to those 16-bit words, or to 44.1kHz sample rates. Both can be significantly extended if there are any benefits to be gained from doing so. And there are indeed such benefits. Audio formats with more than 16-bits and/or greater than 44.1kHz are referred to these days by the generic term “Hi-Rez”, meaning High Resolution. Indeed, such formats are now beginning to dominate in high-end audio systems.

Perhaps the greatest, and least controversial, route to increased resolution comes from increasing the bit depth from 16-bits to 24-bits. This is the equivalent in ordinary everyday numbers of increasing from about five significant figures to eight. I mentioned in a previous column that this is broadly equivalent to have an analog tape deck whose tape hiss is below -140dB. Putting this into perspective, the very best you can get from the analog audio circuitry to which digital audio devices must be connected is in the region of -125dB to -130dB. And the best human hearing can achieve is in the region of -120dB. So 24-bit audio can accommodate everything that we might need in terms of dynamic range for serious high-resolution audio applications. And the only cost we have to commit to swallowing is a 50% larger file size.

Of course, 16-bit and 24-bit are just arbitrary numbers. They could have been any number deemed appropriate, but the fact of being multiples of 8 makes them particularly convenient to handle. Some of you will be aware that many studio mixing desks use 32-bit audio data internally (and sometimes even more). Wow, you might think, that must make them even better yet! But no, it doesn’t. It just makes...
the business of managing a digital mixing desk a lot more accurate. When it comes to mixing multiple tracks and performing digital signal manipulations, those extra bits allow such operations to be performed more precisely.

So if increasing the Bit Depth is a no-brainer on the road to high resolution audio, what about increasing the sample rate? The main argument here is that the limit of human hearing is considered to be no higher than 20kHz. However, there have been experiments which show that the subconscious brain is able to respond to audio stimuli at frequencies higher than 20kHz, even as the conscious brain fails to register that it can hear anything. The problem is that, to my knowledge, these experiments have not been independently verified, and are therefore still open to skepticism and challenge. So, if all we need to capture are those frequencies below 20kHz, and Nyquist-Shannon theory shows that a sample rate of 44.1kHz (together with a bit depth of 24-bits) can fully and completely encode everything within that range of frequencies, what need do we have of higher sample rates?

Unfortunately, I can see the bottom of the column rapidly approaching, so I will have to leave the discussion I had in mind until next week.

I'll fill in the last paragraph with an answer to the question: Why 44.1kHz? Why not a nice round number? The answer boils down to when the format was first nailed down, in the late 1970s. Clearly the number had to be higher than 2 x 20kHz, plus a margin for the transition band of an anti-aliasing filter. So something in this vicinity of 44kHz would be ideal. Anything much bigger, and the already formidable data requirements would become totally unmanageable. The earliest implementations of digital audio used VCR cassette tapes and transports. It was the only available technology that could manage the data and bandwidth requirements. It was cost-effective to have these VCRs run at the same speeds as they would run at for video applications. At the time there were 2 dominant video standards, PAL and NTSC. PAL’s video format used 625 lines at 50Hz refresh rate, and NTSC’s used 525 lines at 60Hz refresh rate. If the transport would write 3 audio fields in place of every video line, the required audio sample rate for PAL (set to use 588 active lines out of 625) would be (588/2) x 50 x 3 = 44,100, and for NTSC (set to use 490 active lines out of 525) would be (490/2) x 60 x 3 = 44,100. Either format of VCR transport could therefore be used as digital audio transports with minimal modification.

Thus it is that the ghosts of analog video standards devised in the 50’s and 60’s, and long obsolete, still live on in the sample rates that are used for the very latest in cutting-edge digital audio.

Richard Murison enjoyed a long career working with lasers, as a researcher, engineer, and then as an entrepreneur. This enabled him to feed his life-long audiophile habit. Recently, though, he started an audiophile software company, BitPerfect, and consequently he can no longer afford it. Even stranger, therefore, that he has agreed to serve in an unpaid role as a columnist, which he writes from Montreal, Canada.
When is Stealing Music Not Stealing?

By Bill Leebens

Life is unfair, and hypocrisy abounds: like it or not, those two implacable, immutable truths persist. Today, the CEO of Nestle’ (which bottles and profitably sells millions of gallons of California’s drinking water every day, while the state suffers a historic drought) states that access to water isn’t a human right. Meanwhile, the works of musicians, who sweat and die for their art, are deemed to be a natural resource which should be available to all without payment to the creator. It’s hard to decide which attitude is more outrageous... but stealing from musicians is nothing new.

Long before Woody Guthrie, songs were used to protest injustice and covertly rebel against authority. To protect them, identities of the authors and composers of such songs were often concealed. Songs spread by repetition, and their origins often became lost. The arrival of the printing press made it easier to distribute musical scores and to assert ownership, but also made it easier to steal and sell music on a massive scale.

Even after the arrival of printed scores, minstrels, performers, and just regular folks played songs they’d heard, without knowing who created them. History refers to such tunes as “traditional”, and in that context, ownership of music was a non-issue, and songs often evolved and changed as they circulated. How often have you seen the notation, “to the tune of ‘Greensleeves’” in a songbook? Think whoever first played ‘Greensleeves’ got royalty payments? Yeah--- no.

By the late 19th century, song-popularity was measured by sheet music sales. Then as now, there were unauthorized copies of compositions, and as recorded performances on discs and cylinders became more popular, losses to composers and arrangers skyrocketed. In 1914, ASCAP (the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) was formed to monitor sales of sheet music and recordings, collect royalties, and distribute them to the copyright-holding members.

ASCAP’s reach extended to radio in the 1920’s, as the group collected royalties for record airplay. The
rates charged broadcasters rose for nearly 20 years, until the NAB (National Association of Broadcasters) revolted in 1939, forming their own royalty-collection arm, BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.). BMI would pay copyright holders for on-air usage, but at a much lower rate of royalty than ASCAP.

So: did we go from random theft of music by individuals to systematic theft by large, powerful organizations? By paying a lower rate than that paid by ASCAP, was BMI stealing from the artists?

In the 77 years since BMI’s inception, little progress has been made in ensuring that musicians are paid for the use of their work. We’re not talking about ensuring fair payment for live performances, which is a completely separate, possibly hopeless, battle. But the organizations that were set up to protect published and recorded musical works---how are they doing?

In short, not well. Every decade seems to have a battle for artist’s rights, or a horrible story of theft and manipulation. The ’50’s rise of the disc jockey made DJs gatekeepers to public exposure, and thus sales. It became commonplace for DJs to solicit bribes for on-air play, resulting in the “payola” (a mash-up of “pay” and “Victrola”) scandals of the mid- to late-’50’s. To have any chance of success, artists and record companies had to pay to get on the air.

Simultaneously, a number of well-known black artists were left nearly penniless by their management or record companies. Among them were Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and most of the blues artists recorded by Chess Records. Exploitation of blacks by whites was of course nothing new, but as the dollar amounts grew, so did the frequency and extent of the exploitation.

Another form of theft became widespread due to the rise of rock ‘n’ roll: white cover versions of songs created by black artists. These days, the term “cultural appropriation” is applied to everything from hoodies to sushi, but Elvis Presley singing “Big Mama” Thornton's Hound Dog, copying her phrasing and even her body language, was certainly appropriation...maybe theft. Even more absurd was the transformation of Tutti Frutti, a manic shout originally performed by the androgynous black artist Little Richard, into a harmless novelty song performed by the equally-harmless Pat Boone, who could’ve passed for a junior insurance salesman.

Stealing? Not just stealing, but a humiliating dismissal of the original context, intent, and integrity. Is “rape” too extreme a term?

With the baby boomers and the British invasion, the stakes in music grew even higher. There were unauthorized copies of Beatles records, loads of bootleg memorabilia, and (proving that theft-by-management doesn’t always cross color lines) the Beach Boys were almost bankrupted by their father/uncle/manager, and both the Rolling Stones and the Beatles were nearly cleaned out by the infamous Allen B. Klein. Ironically, Klein was brought to justice by the IRS for having undeclared income from the sales of promotional copies of Beatles records.

The tech revolutions of the last 40 years brought with them unparalleled opportunities for duplication and distribution of audio and video recordings. Prerecorded cassettes could be mass-duplicated, or LP-owners could make copies that could be played in their car---or illicitly sold. The “Betamax” suit brought against Sony by Walt Disney Studios and Universal Studios yielded the “fair use” doctrine, stating that recording a broadcast program on a VCR solely for personal viewing at a later time (“time-shifting”)
was not copyright infringement. In addition, the manufacturer of recording hardware could not be held liable if the device was used for illegal duplication or distribution of copyrighted material. (It's difficult to discuss cases like this without sounding like a legal brief.)

As computers became ubiquitous, copying of CDs became an issue, and a rapid succession of developments created enormous markets for music---both legal and illegal---that were unforeseen only a few years earlier. Among those developments: the MP3 compression format in 1993, which made storage and transmission of digital recordings easier with the era's bandwidth restrictions; the creation of SoundJam MP in 1998 (bought by Apple and transformed into iTunes in 2000); the launch of Napster and similar peer-to-peer file-sharing networks in 1999; the launch of the iPod in 2001; and finally, the succession of streaming services, starting with the founding of listen.com in 2001 (which became Rhapsody), Spotify in 2006, Qobuz in 2007 and WiMP in 2010 (which became Tidal in 2014), among many others—the opportunities for artists to sell their work have never been greater.

Unfortunately, as we often see in news stories with headlines like, “My #1 Hit Was Played 4 Trillion Times on Spotify, and I Was Paid 8 Cents”...the opportunities for creative bookkeeping and theft have also never been greater. For artists like Taylor Swift or Beyonce’, these are very good times indeed. For most other musicians...not so great. Next time you run into a musician acquaintance, buy them lunch. They may need it.

**Bill Leebens** is Editor of Copper and Director of Marketing at PS Audio. He has been in and out of the audio business for over 40 years. Each time he returns to it, he becomes more cynical. He does not intend to go quietly.
We Were Talking

By Dan Schwartz

Back, before the beginning, I was going to be a visual artist; drawing and painting, those were my things. Music was just sort of there: a little classical, a little pop. I remember remembering the Beatles on Ed Sullivan, but the impact on my life was seemingly small. Music was like TV, kind of ubiquitous, sort of cool, but not really important or important to me. But while obsessed with the visual, a tune called “Eleanor Rigby” caught my ear: the arrangement – double string quartet - here was something I had not quite heard. My kid’s ears, unsophisticated as they were, knew this wasn’t supposed to be classical, but it also wasn’t pop - yet it was.

And then, the next year: Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band. A great album of course, but there was a tune on there that was REALLY something I hadn’t heard: “Within You Without You”. What was this? Some kind of instruments and strings and a voice. It would be years before I understood the elements of the song, but from the summer of ‘67 on, from the moment I heard it, I was on the path.

So much has been said and written about the album, but much less has been said of that remarkable (and in some quarters, vastly underappreciated) song. The Beatles had discovered performing their songs was proving impossible, and that gave them the freedom to discover the truly new. On WYWY, it’s just George Harrison, a few Indian musicians and a small orchestra. He and George Martin were inventing a new kind of music, seemingly before our ears: a hybrid of east and west, of pop and classical and Indian. To my ears, it wasn’t (and isn’t) just new, it wasn’t only revolutionary --- it was stunningly beautiful. It still is.

Now I hear it, I know what I’m hearing, how it was all done, and I’m more impressed than I was. Sitar (recorded with automated-double-tracking), tanpura, swarmandel, dilruba, tabla (and bayan, with an unprecedentedly close-micing), strings overdubbed, playing pizzicato on the five-pulse and then “trading fours” with the dilruba and sitar, doing the melody they had been doing... all on a couple of Studer 1-inch 4-track machines. Stunning.

Eventually Ravi Shankar would be revealed to me, and then the great Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, who would
eventually be my teacher. But as a 10-year-old, the mystery was deep; the beauty was evident.

There are things we all go through, whether we go through them alone or not. Playing music offers community in the creation. You HAVE to do it with others. A visual artist can be solitary and yet others, if it’s appreciated, may enjoy their work. But with music, at that time, well, there’s little to no choice. At least that was the goal --- even with an artist like Glenn Gould. Back then record-making was expensive, and laborious, and records were made for others to play, the community got created that way.

Not that I thought about it --- I was a kid; I just did what felt right. I still do.

Dan Schwartz is a parent, sort of a husband, and has been a musician of some years, having played on quite a few records - and even a few good ones. He’s recorded or played with Rosanne Cash, Bob Dylan, Jon Hassell, Brian Eno, Bernie Leadon, Dave Navarro, Linda Perry, Sheryl Crow, Stan Ridgeway, and was a member of the Tuesday Night Music Club. In his spare time, he used to write for Harry and Sallie at the absolute sound and the Perfect Vision. Professionally, he keeps trying to leave music, but it keeps coming to get him.
Mahler Venti

By Lawrence Schenbeck

Gertrude Stein on her deathbed: What is the answer?
(No response.)

Stein: In that case, what is the question?

I’ve always cherished this anecdote. It’s often invoked to sum up Stein’s legacy as the founding mother of modernism: Mama Dada, you might say. But with this brief non-exchange, Stein also implicitly referenced the two things we most want from art: meaning and pleasure.

At the least, a great novel or movie or symphony ought to raise great questions about life, maybe even suggest an answer now and then. It should also provide some diversion in the asking—we need to enjoy hearing the question, take delight in any hint of an answer. If you think about it, Stein’s follow-up line offers pleasant formal symmetry with a witty twist; it’s (unexpectedly) playful even as it (unexpectedly) probes further. And—this is crucial—it’s not the words themselves that provoke extra pain. They are simple. No, it’s their form, the particular way they are shaped, that give Stein’s parting shot more acuity.

And so to our topic this week, Big Mahler. If we define big by length alone, his biggest work is the Symphony No. 3, which clocks in at 99 minutes. Next, Symphony No. 9, a mere 81 minutes long. It may seem longer because it begins with an Andante and ends with an Adagio, and because it is considered the composer’s “farewell to life,” which grossly oversimplifies this often life-affirming work.

Just slightly shorter: Symphonies 2 (“Resurrection”) and 8 (“Symphony of a Thousand”) at 80’ apiece, then 6 and 7 at roughly 77’ each. (Timings courtesy of David Daniels’ Orchestral Music: A Handbook.) But there may be better ways to judge big than sheer length. Besides demanding larger-than-usual orchestras, even by Mahler’s standards, both 2 and 8 call for multiple choruses and vocal soloists. The latter requires eight soloists, double chorus, and boys’ chorus. Their texts also focus on huge concerns. The subtitle “Resurrection” announces 2’s topic, whereas 8 asks a question that Mahler answers with
That’s right. Mahler’s “Symphony of a Thousand” consists of just two movements, the question and the answer. Think of them as yin and yang, male and female, war and peace. If all music tends toward patterns of tension and release, this work absolutely epitomizes that. Yet Mahler seems not to have held even that basic consideration when he arrived at his south-Austrian retreat in the summer of 1906. Later he wrote: “On the threshold of my old workshop the Spiritus creator took hold of me and shook me and drove me on for the next eight weeks until the greatest part of my work was done.”

He was referring to Veni creator spiritus, an 8th-century Christian hymn that begins with a vivid plea:

Veni, creator spiritus,
Mentes tuorum visita,
Imples superna gratia,
Quae tu creasti pectora. . . .
Come, Creator Spirit,
Visit these Thy souls,
Fill them with heavenly grace
Whom Thou has created of Thy spirit. . . .

Accende lumen sensibus,
Infunde amorem cordibus. . . .
Kindle our Reason with Light.
Infuse our hearts with Love. . . .

The composer responded to this ancient text, sung by Catholics at the Feast of the Pentecost, with a burst of raw energy, all hands on deck:

At the words Accende lumen, a complex double fugue—counterpoint stacked on counterpoint—redoubles the fervor of the assembled multitude. (It begins at about 12:27 in the clip above.) This entire movement resembles a coiled spring, though, roiling with tension from beginning to end.

As stirring as it is, Veni creator spiritus occupies little more than a third of the symphony’s time. The rest is taken up with Goethe’s visionary Faust drama. An archetypal symbol of ambition and frailty, Faust—especially in the old tale involving Gretchen and Mephistopheles—became an obsession for Romantic artists. Goethe, however, had vastly expanded the legend’s philosophical import, reaching backward into antiquity and forward to the universalisms of an age yet to come. In Faust, Part 2, the hero is ultimately consumed not by arrogance but by aspiration.

Musically, the raging torrent of Veni creator spiritus gives way to the vast, quiet sea of eternity, the calm of an imagined hereafter. Goethe’s stage directions call for “Mountain glens, forest, rock, solitude. Holy Anchorites [hermits] sheltering in the clefts of rocks . . .” At some length, deliberately but with gathering power, a host of angels and other symbolically freighted characters now intervene on Faust’s behalf, wresting away his “immortal essence” from hellish forces. At the end he is drawn upward by a nurturing spirit that Goethe called the “Eternal Feminine”:
Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;  
Das Unzulängliche,  
Hier wird’s Ereignis;  
Das Unbeschreibliche,  
Hier ist’s getan;  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan.

Everything that perishes  
Is only an illusion.  
All we could not attain  
Is here achieved.  
The indescribable,  
Here it is done.  
Eternal spirit  
Draws us on.

The old question was How shall I be saved, Lord, except through your grace? Goethe and Mahler answer in this way: Not by grace alone are you saved, but by every one of my creations, real and imagined, Life and Art.

Want to read more? Start with Michael Steinberg’s illuminating essay in The Symphony: A Listener’s Guide. There’s also a lengthy Wikipedia article with sound bites. Brush up on your Goethe with Cliff’s Notes for Faust Part 2.

And hear more, of course. We have been sampling Solti’s landmark 1971 recording, now available in remastered RBCD and Blu-ray Pure Audio. I can also recommend Antoni Wit’s sturdy Naxos Blu-ray audio, which offers spacious, up-to-date sound. Jonathan Nott’s recent release (Tudor 7192) also combines strong performance with a wealth of detail. Ask any of your Mahlerite friends for further instructions—you’ll certainly get them.

Lawrence Schenbeck was born on a mountaintop in Tennessee. In spite of that, he became a historical musicologist. He is the author of two books, many more scholarly articles, and countless liner notes, music reviews, and “casuals.” He lives in the Atlanta area with his family and too much music, Tchaikovsky being the least of it. Literally.
Timing is Everything

By Duncan Taylor

Many of the finest musicians who have walked into my studio have been jovial, almost nonchalant in demeanor. That type is easy to deal with. In contrast, the almost-great are the trickiest to deal with, and often the most emotional. The least-skilled musicians are the most grateful, thankful for whatever I can do to help them sound good.

BUT: it’s the journeyman musicians who are able to turn pretty good tunes into a thriving business by repeating good-to-great performances, night after night. On tour, these bands operate in a grueling, gypsy kind of lifestyle. And it’s the grind that allows these hard working groups to develop incredible musical timing together. These are the bands that are my absolute favorite to work with.

One such ensemble, Run River North from San Fernando Valley, California, was a real joy to record in my live room at Second Story Garage. With six members, several of whom are multi-instrumentalists -- think every microphone in the closet -- and with a propensity to build to earth-shaking crescendos in their compositions, my work was cut out for me with this live recording.

To rehash, in the past several years my recordings have been of one kind: live, with minimum number of takes, the whole band in one room and with the vocalist in the mix... and NO overdubs. On top of that, the bands that come in have their own thoughts about what they want to record. Most of the time we’re recording new material, and there is no way for me to prepare, aside from listening during the warm-up.

And as I mentioned before, I use relatively cheap mics, and we record in a treated office just outside the newsroom of Boulder’s newspaper of record, The Daily Camera.

I once read an interview with famed recording engineer Alan Sides of Ocean Way Studios, and I recall a remark from him about one of his guilty pleasures. He would take minimal mics and gear and go record a full live band in a difficult environment, like a poorly designed or bad-sounding club. His remarks were
that this challenge is difficult, and that’s also what makes it fun.

I have to agree, and Alan inadvertently described my situation at the Garage. As a guy who loves a good challenge, I admit I’ve been having a grand time.

So Run River North came to us fresh off a six-week tour. This was no pleasure cruise they were on; these guys and gals had been grinding away night after night. Audiences love them, and you could get a feel for their sense of artistic purpose just from hanging with them for a few minutes.

Earlier I called them journeymen, but I should qualify that a little. Really, they’re on the upper end of that scale, with some compositions and some solos taking you places which you hadn’t expected. Their drummer brings jazz fills and elements of other genres to his playing, and the violin solos can be really special.

But, much of their repertoire is also scripted, and so well rehearsed that these actors are able to perform with pinpoint precision, day after day.

Even in warm-up I was getting goosebumps---something about great timing really gets to me. I’m talking about individuals holding time in a group, not referees with stopwatches. Timing is everything when you record a big group like them: there were hidden instruments making cameos, whispered lines followed by loud choruses, and oh yeah --- did I mention five of the six musicians were singing? Despite my challenges, this band held everything together for me.

A thought I remember having while they were laying down takes, is that they were like a group of tight-knit sailors manning stations on a small ship and guiding it through a maelstrom. Before we started rolling, you see them all having a great time, goofing around, taking pictures and chatting. But as soon as lead singer Alex called for quiet, it was all hands on deck. What followed was highly choreographed, yet still a little loose with enough room for some flourish and solos.

This brings me back to my first point: world-class, elite musicians never seem to deviate from good timing, although it may not scream out at you. If they’re really good, they usually take some license to play around with the timing, especially in ways that are beneficial.

But those bands who live the hard life of traveling musicians, really benefit from performing the most often. When every warm-up and every take is near-perfect, I have to stop worrying about the band and start worrying about not screwing it up!

Duncan Taylor is a product specialist at PS Audio, and recording engineer and producer of live-track video recording studio Second Story Garage. He also plays a few instruments, pens a weekly music column for college students, and likes to build speakers and amps in his spare time.
Saved by the Bell (Labs)
part 2

By Bill Leebens

We ended Part One in 1876---140 years ago, now. Alexander Graham Bell had exhibited a working model of his telephone at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the first World's Fair. Telephone lines were strung from one end to the other of the main exhibit hall, which was the largest building ever constructed up until that time.

Later that same year, Edison first showed his phonograph, which could both record sound onto a wax cylinder and play it back, using the same transducer for what we would now label microphone and loudspeaker. Subsequent commercial units were primarily for playback, and of course discs eventually won out over cylinders, becoming the ancestors of the venerable LP.

So: the sound era had begun. While Edison went on to successfully produce phonographs for decades, the company did little to increase scientific understanding of the mechanisms of sound and hearing, or to develop technology that would extend the frontiers and formats of sound reproduction. That would all fall to the rapidly-growing Bell Telephone Company and a group of intricately-interconnected associated entities, including Western Electric and Bell Labs.

What follows is a simplified explanation of the vast Bell/AT&T (American Telephone & Telegraph) organization, and who did what, when. As might be expected for a massive entity with worldwide reach that is now nearly a century and a half old...it's complicated. The organization blazed trails in science, manufacturing, organizational structure, and in legal precedents. Our attention will be focused upon the folks who learned about sound, largely at Bell Labs, and the people who built the wonderful toys, mostly at Western Electric.

As mentioned in Part One, the spread of telegraphy inspired Bell’s development of the telephone, which he originally named the “harmonic telegraph”, based upon its ability to transmit a range of frequencies over a line (whereas telegraphs could originally carry only one signal at a time). One of the major manufacturers of telegraphy equipment was the Western Electric Manufacturing Company, founded in Chicago in 1869 as Gray & Barton. By 1881, the company had grown to $1 million/year, and that year
it was bought by the American Bell Telephone Company, and its name simplified to Western Electric Company. Western Electric then became Bell’s manufacturing arm, producing most of the telephones and other hardware for Bell.

From today’s perspective, it’s hard to imagine that a company could produce both the hardware and the network for telecommunications, but Bell and its subsidiary Western Electric did. The reason such a vertically-integrated empire is difficult to envision these days is because the US Department of Justice initiated a series of anti-trust actions against the Bell/AT&T system in the 1940’s, and again in the ‘70’s and ‘80’s, which caused the breakup of AT&T, and forced divestiture of Western Electric and other holdings. ---But that’s getting way ahead of our story.

During the century from 1881 to 1982, though, Western Electric did manufacture telephones exclusively for the Bell companies. As the phones were leased to end-users, not sold, they were expected to last, and perform flawlessly for years...a concept which may be difficult to grasp in our era of annual model changes and rapid obsolescence. Today’s cellphones are products of clean-room laboratories in which silicon wafers are grown, and are hugely complex, yet delicate. Telephones of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were clearly products of the industrial age, instruments with a single function, originally constructed with cases of heavy oak and containing bulky hand-cranked generators. Later phones were less massive, with Bakelite housings and separate receivers, but were still heavy enough to break toes if the user were careless enough to drop it.

Western Electric was also a pioneering developer of electronics for the Bell system, and built some of the world’s first amplifiers and the vacuum tubes for them. WE also manufactured consumer products associated with the growth of radio; in the ‘teens and ‘20’s, WE was one of the first to offer amplifiers and “Loud Speakers” (as they were then called) for radios. Radio operators and home users had previously had to utilize headsets for listening; loudspeakers allowed for shared listening experiences similar to today’s home hi-fis.

As the Bell network expanded and branched off into ever more complex technologies, the need grew for a facility that would undertake fundamental research into the behavior of transmitted signals, sound, and the mechanisms of human hearing, in order to improve the intelligibility of telephone conversations. That facility was Bell Laboratories, founded in 1925 from the consolidation of the Western Electric research department and several AT&T engineering groups.

Anyone who has studied audio or sound has likely read papers written by Bell Labs engineers, physicians, and physiologists. Within the Labs’ first few years of existence, groundbreaking work was done in statistical process control (Six Sigma, anyone?), synchronized sound recording for motion pictures (to which we’ll return momentarily), and for the first time, thermal noise was measured in resistors by Harry Nyquist, whose name is familiar to any EE or math student.

As the field of “talkies”---movies with synchronized sound---developed, Bell Labs and Western Electric were in the forefront, developing not just the theoretical basis by which films and sound recordings (originally on large discs) could be synchronized, but all the hardware and processes necessary to record the sound (microphones, low-noise amplifiers, cutting lathes), developed methods of reducing the noise produced by movie cameras to allow simultaneous photography and recording (camera enclosures called “blimps”), and created, literally from the ground up, large-scale sound systems that
would fill a 3,000-seat theater with clear, intelligible dialogue and music (everything from low-distortion triode amplifiers to sound-transparent projection screens, compression loudspeaker drivers and the horns they were mounted upon). The scope of the company’s achievements were staggering, and still form the basis of most of what is known about sound reproduction and the mechanisms of hearing and auditory perception.

Those theater sound systems are worthy of note. The Bell researchers not only had to design the hardware to reproduce sound, they had to develop a theoretical understanding of what was required for large-scale, high-accuracy reproduction of speech and music. It simply hadn’t been done before. Once theory was in place, sound systems were designed for a wide variety of theater sizes and types, using amps of different types and power output, configurations of horn arrays designed to ensure that the farthest, highest seat in every theater still received clear sound, and detailed operating instructions devised to guarantee consistently high-quality sound in every theater using Western Electric sound.

As was the case with the telephones WE made for Bell, the theater systems were leased, and built to last...seemingly, for millennia. The product designs were pure functionality, more like the equipment in Dr. Frankenstein’s lab than today’s inch-thick-faceplate audiophile darling. That industrial look holds a certain spartan steampunk appeal, as does the performance: for decades, Japanese audiophiles sought out Western Electric equipment, and the 555 compression driver and amps utilizing the 300-series triodes designed and built by WE are still widely regarded as producing incredibly-lifelike sound, despite specs that would make thick-faceplate audiophiles cringe.

The research performed by scientists at Bell Labs contributed a great deal to our understanding of human hearing and perception. Perhaps the most famous of Bell researchers in the formative years was Harvey Fletcher, whose research with Wilden Munson led to the so-called Fletcher-Munson curves, which detailed how the frequency-response of human hearing varies at differing levels of volume. “Loudness” controls on audio gear contour sound according to these curves. Fletcher was also performed fundamental research in audiology, and designed some of the first electronic hearing aids. As director of research at Bell Labs in the early ‘30’s, he made dozens of stereophonic recordings with Leopold Stokowski, earning him the nickname, “father of stereophony”. As a grad student at the University of Chicago, Fletcher devised the oil-drop experiment for determining the charge of an electron, for which his faculty advisor Robert Millikan won the Nobel Prize for Physics.

The basis of much we understand about the physics of music and sound, and how to reproduce sound, came from the work of Alexander Graham Bell, and especially from the lab that bore his name. There is no facility in the world today which does similar, fundamental research into sound; awareness of the legacy of Bell Labs and Western Electric is necessary to understanding the history of audio and sound reproduction. It may also engender a sense that perhaps we haven’t progressed that far, since.

In later years, Bell Labs and Western Electric contributed to the birth of the transistor, as well as the brands Altec, Altec-Lansing, and JBL. But those are stories for another day.

Bill Leebens has bought and sold vintage gear since the days when it was new. He regrets that a goodly number of classic American components now reside in Japan, because of him. Mea culpa.
1967

MUSIC TO MY EARS

By WL Woodward

That summer I was 13 and living through, unbeknownst to me, the last free summer of my life. In Connecticut where I started, you could work on farms if you were 14. Can't work someplace safe like Bud’s Café, but you can work in the tobacco fields and learn the first important lessons in life: how to work, how to lie, how swear, and how to smoke. The next summer I was a working man.

1967 was also the year I passed, or made, or consummated my Catholic Confirmation. Interesting way to put it. In celebration, my parents got me a record player. It was one of those 'open the lid' jobs about the size of a toaster oven. It was completely decked out with features. It sported two knobs on the front, and a switch inside so you could change the speed of the table to an infinite number of settings as long as you wanted 33, 45, or 78. Also, a pot metal sticker announcing it was StereoPhonic. I didn't know what that meant, but it had to be better than Unstereophonic.

That player was really sweet. Up to that point the only music we had in the house was the radio in the kitchen where I thrilled to the classics, like 'Winchester Cathedral'”. It sounds silly today, but this was like getting a color TV.

My parents, being proud to support and define the Generation Gap, also got me two albums. Gary Lewis and the Playboys Golden Greats and Herman Hermits' Both Sides of Herman's Hermits. God Bless 'Em. They were trying.

This was 1967. That year redefined rock forever. Alright, alright, stop with the e-mail ideas. WhatEVER you have to say is wrong. Period. The time zone that was ’67 through ’70 was crazy. I know, I get it, all that stuff was on the shoulders of giants. But my friend, 1967 kicked some shit in the ass.

The Beatles, Sgt Pepper. Gotta start with that. The fab lads pointed back at The Beach Boys' Pet Sounds that was released in mid 1966, attributing the work they did on the Sarge to the ideas and the studio genius that was Brian Wilson. Both great albums, but the Sarge was a tad more mind blowing. Suddenly, things moved so fast that by the end of 1967 Wouldn't It Be Nice was playing on the AM oldies station along with Neil Sedaka.

Meanwhile I'm listening to Gary Lewis, and His Dad's Money. I think I listened to the Hermits' album once. If you only have two albums, you give it a shot. But that thing was like kicking a fresh turd on a hot day. You learn.

Two wonderful things happened that year and through that record player. First. My dad, when choosing Gary and the Nutjobs for me, picked out an album for himself. The sound track to The Glenn Miller Story. Ripped the top of my head off. I swung for swing, big time. This had a decided effect on me, but it did not make me more popular. My friends thought I'd been hit by a tractor. But to this day, one of my top 10 is Benny Goodman with that crazy 1938 Carnegie Hall band, complete with the quartet. Teddy, Lionel, and Gene. RIJ: Rest In Jazz, man.

One day the next miracle occurred when I opened up the latest issue of Boy’s Life. I think I got a free subscription when I won my Fish Skinning merit badge. A flyer fell out of the rag. Apparently I could get something like 470 albums for a dollar from a charitable organization called Columbia House. I knew I had discovered a twist in the universe. What saps.

Checking off the choices was really a blast. I got Hendrix, Cream, my first copies of Bill Cosby who stapled together my story-telling for good, the Who, the Doors, etc. etc. Bye Bye, Gary Lewis. Of course... there was a catch.

Procrastination had been a family genome for generations. Our family crest has an icon depicting a dried up lawn. I was perfect for these guys. Once a month you got a card in the mail telling you which album of the month you HAD to have, like the Ray Conniff Singers, or Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. You had 12 days to send the card back or you got the thing at a bargain price like $12.99, a lot in those days. Usually the album of the month was revolting enough you'd immediately put a stamp on the return card with polite denial, but sometimes you forgot and found in your mail Robert Goulet Sings the Blues.

One day an album came in the mail, from a card I'd forgotten to send. I opened it up. On the cover was a guy in a parka with the hood pulled over his face, and in simple type in the corner, Paul Simon. Great. Another beauty.

Of course, that album was the first solo album from a guy who used to be in Simon and Garfunkel. Just never knew his first name, and he had that damn hood pulled over his face. Listening to that album still hits me like walking through the living room when It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World is on the TV. Can't look away. Beautiful, masterful songwriting.

I have no idea what happened to that record player. I still have a few of the albums, scratched and warped and wonderful. I suppose the player went the way of my baseball card collection. I blame Mom. Right?
Danish Modern Audio

By Fleming Rasmussen

As part of our continuing series examining worldwide perspectives on audio and the audio industry, we spoke with Flemming Rasmussen of Gryphon Audio, in Denmark. Besides Gryphon, there are a large number of Danish audio companies, including Bang & Olufsen, Dynaudio, and Vitus Audio, to name just a few. We asked Flemming about how the Danish way is different, why we see so many Danish audio companies, and why America is such a tough market. Thanks again to Flemming for his time and his insights! ---Editor.

Copper: Denmark is a small country, about twice the size of our state of Massachusetts, with fewer than 6 million people—yet it is known worldwide for its large number of audio companies, especially in design and manufacture of loudspeakers. Why do you think there are so many audio companies in Denmark?

FR: Denmark is a tiny country with no real natural resources. We have no oil, gas, coal or minerals. Farming and fishing were historically the backbone of the economy. Today, both farming and fishing are struggling to survive and basically exist due to government support. Without natural resources, heavy industries such as car manufacturing or shipbuilding were not possible, so the focus was turned towards innovation and design. Super high taxes (25% sales tax, 40-70% income tax, 180% tax on cars and so on) and very high minimum wages did not allow any competitive mass production.

Being such a small market, Danish manufacturers have to see the world as their marketplace from day one, as the home market alone cannot support them. This is a fundamental difference in business outlook and approach.

An era followed where Danish designers were recognized worldwide for unique “Nordic” styled furniture, architecture such as the Sidney Opera house, daring industrial design such as B&O electronics, and the list was long.

Danish companies invented the tape recorder, the moving coil cartridge, and other important sound devices, and Bruel and Kjaer manufactured their famous microphones and measuring systems, so consequently, a forest of smaller electronics high-end manufacturers grew up.

The huge Danish furniture industry died due to competition from the south and east, and phenomena such as IKEA, and today it is only a shadow of what it was. A flourishing traditional clothing industry was lost to the Eastern European countries, where costs were much lower. The result was a huge unused capacity in wood machinery and tradition for high quality cabinetmaking. Many of those companies started to manufacture speaker enclosures due to their vast experience from the furniture days and because of the high Danish wages.

Danish cabinetmakers were highly automated and efficient. Danish cabinetmakers was soon making speaker enclosures for Infinity, JBL, B&W, KEF, ProAc, Cerwin-Vega, and the list is very long. At the same time, local manufacturers such as Dynaudio, Jamo, and Dali also took full advantage of the Danish cabinet know-how and capacity. As a result of this, many driver manufacturers such as Vifa,
Scan-Speak, Dynaudio, Seas and others, captured clients that could get a fully-assembled “Made in Denmark” speaker system. 90% of that business is now lost to China.

This constant struggle to survive in mass-production has left Denmark focused on developing innovative high-end products. Denmark is one of the largest manufacturers of Windmills in the world.

The country has a very large number of electronic sub-suppliers, working for space, military and medical companies worldwide that demand ultra high quality, and are prepared to pay for it.

Today only a handful of Audio companies are left, and those who manufacture in Denmark are entirely focused on being innovative and unique, providing cutting-edge products at higher prices.

Copper: In the US, cold-weather states like Minnesota and Colorado have a disproportionate number of audio companies. Might that be part of the explanation of Denmark’s many audio companies? Cold nights with lots of time to listen to music?

FR: Nobody really knows. A good guess is that we naturally spend a lot of time indoor over the year due to the long winters. Another guess could be that given the size of the country, a concert or places with live music is never very far away, so music is a part of our culture. Denmark has a very healthy music community with many talented musicians in both classic and contemporary music.

Copper: Gryphon and many other audio companies have done well worldwide, yet have found the US a very difficult market. Can you share your observations as to why the US is such a tough market to enter?

FR: This could be a very long philosophy, and I guess that many who have failed have their own theories.

USA was the cradle of High End Audio and enjoyed world domination for a very long time, European and Asian manufacturers were not really making such products. The perception of High End was forged by US publications such as Stereophile and The Absolute Sound. Exposure of non-American brands was rare, because they were few and with so many US brands, who needed Euro brands?

The list of European brands that have failed to get any foothold in USA is very, very long. Many have several failed attempts, some even made their own US set-up, just to lose even more money.

There is a vast number of US dealers – and they are used to dealing direct with their US manufacturers with nobody in between. That makes a lot of sense.

In Europe a distributor is a go-between between the manufacturer and the retailer; he is importing, doing marketing, stocking the products and handle the service for the dealer. He is not in contact with the consumer. That is entirely left to the retailer. In the USA, there are only a few distributors in the European definition of the word and function. Most of them are (like the majority in this business/hobby) real nice people with a heart beating for great gear and great sound. Most are also underfinanced and may lack fundamental business skills, so it is a small group that often struggles, despite hard work. Some of them may sell direct. This is also the case in Europe.
The traditional dealers (disrespectfully IMHO coined “brick and mortar” dealers) are often tied up with a select group of manufacturers and may also depend heavily on them financially, making it very hard for foreign brands to get in, especially if they have a large portfolio of products. Why would a dealer risk his good relationship to a US brand with consistent sales for an imported brand, regardless how good it may be?

In desperation, many European brands end up with an arrangement with a retailer. Often the result is that will not get any nationwide sales, and a dealer with a large group of brands do not have the capacity and focus to play the role of the distributor and do real marketing that the US manufacturers are doing in the absence of a distributor (which they do not need).

This is a model that perhaps works for some, but others ---such as Gryphon--- it is not the solution. We have tried it many times.

Some may claim that the European business culture is very different to the American way, we may be too rigid and are asking for too much,. Not being pragmatic enough, and being too obsessed with a focus on the long term.

All have had their own experiences. At Gryphon, we do not wish to see any owners anywhere left hanging with no support. In the end, regardless if it is the partner that fails to play his part, or who it is, it falls back on us and our brand name, which is our most valuable asset.

Copper: Do you find that in Europe, families seem more interested in listening to music in the home (compared to US)? For example, at the Munich High End show, there are many women and children amongst show-attendees, something that is rarely seen in the US.

FR: I do not believe that it has much to do with listening culture, but more to do with a family culture. When the man wishes to go to a show, he will try to get the family with him, to make it a day for all. It is more easy for him to get acceptance for his audio obsession if he makes the family a part of it.

Copper: Brief anecdotes regarding difficulties you’ve encountered while traveling the world on behalf of Gryphon would be welcomed, along with any observations or comments on different national characteristics.

FR: I could tell many tall tales after nearly 40 years in high end (in both importing and manufacturing), but the essential lesson is that the cultural differences are much larger than people realize, and it explains many, so many, challenges in business--- and even wars.

Personally I love ethnic diversity ---with its own set of challenges---but on my many holidays in the USA I have enjoyed so much hospitality from all kind of nationalities being so patriotic. This is not a big thing where I come from. When coming from a tiny country, you develop a different perspective on the world around you ---you need that to survive.

Copper: Thanks, Flemming, for your time and for your insights!
FR: My pleasure.

Flemming Rasmussen graduated from the Academy of Arts with a degree in painting, and went on to teach graphics and painting. He worked as a designer of imprinted sportswear, and owned Sky High where he sold hang gliders, and was a certified instructor of pilots. As an audiophile, he founded audio-importing company 2R Marketing, and founded Gryphon Audio Designs in 1985, where is still CEO and chief designer.
Interview Elizabeth Newton

By Elizabeth Newton

What follows is an interview with Elizabeth Newton (EN), author of “The Lossless Self”, which appeared in Copper #1. I’ve tried to distill the essence of our 40-minute conversation into a readable summary.
--Bill Leebens, Editor, Copper (C).

C: Elizabeth, what’s your background?
EN: I’m at the Graduate Center at CUNY (City University of New York) as a Doctoral candidate in Historical Musicology. My Bachelor’s degrees—I had a double-major, and my degrees were in Music and International Political Economy...

C: Oh, dear God.
EN: --Yeah, it’s a bit of a mouthful. Then I did a Master’s in Musicology at Indiana University.

C: It wasn’t clear from your piece what your angle of attack was—why you wrote it. It seemed to be more from the side of philosophy, than musicology.

EN: These days the discipline of musicology is fairly broad, and open---a lot of the courses I’ve taken have actually been centered more about philosophy or critical theory, or feminist theory, where people are reading philosophers, or people who are inspired largely by philosophers.

C: Oh. To cut to the chase: why did you write this?

EN: Why did I write it? Well, I’m very interested in audio quality; my research for my dissertation concerns Lo-Fi, and the aesthetic of low-fidelity recordings. And so I’ve done a lot of reading about the social histories of audio quality throughout the late 19th and into the 20th centuries, the development of audio quality, the emergence of high fidelity as a marketing concept into the ’40’s and ‘50’s, and so the piece sort of emerged from an interest in Lo-Fi...and obviously, in order to talk about Lo-Fi, you have to talk about Hi-Fi.

C: Okay....

EN: My research into Lo-Fi coincided with reading I was doing in a critical theory course by Bruno Latour, and that was actually drawing on philosophy that was concerned with the concept of fidelity in the super-abstract sense, like fidelity of oneself to a previous self...having nothing to do with music, or audio, or sound reproduction. I felt that those ideas...well, they just really resonated with my thinking about sound. They’re not exactly the kinds of ideas we usually think about, when we speak about fidelity.

C: That’s probably getting a little abstruse for your average audiophile. One of the things that has struck me for many years is that we casually throw around the term, “high fidelity”, and there’s a tacit assumption that it means “fidelity to the original event”. Certainly, Neil Young in his push for Pono makes a big deal out of presenting the artist’s “true intentions”. That’s all well and good if we’re talking about [recording] a live performance in a bandshell... but when you’re talking about something that’s constructed in a studio, track by track, that’s a whole ’nother matter. What are you being true to?

EN: Right! Because you can think of “trueness” to the original in two ways: you want crowd noise to capture the spirit of a live performance...and sometimes jazz musicians enjoy having a mistake on a recording because it documents the moment....I’ve thought about that a lot, when you transfer that to the studio, where everyone there is all trying to be very silent, and the performers are all trying to be perfect—but the minute you introduce overdubbing, that all falls away.

C: The distinction is often between all playing together at once, as an ensemble, and instrumentalists
each playing by themselves in an isolation booth, listening to the other players through headphones. It’s completely different, and you end up with a completely different feel...and how can you ever create a “real” acoustic when you’re piecing together dozens of different pieces recorded in dozens of different environments? It’s a construct, not a replication of reality....Anyway, we’re probably getting into that “bunch of college sophomores drinking wine and talking about ‘art’” mode....

EN: (laughs) Yes, indeed. What I’ve seen in some of the forums, it seems that some audiophiles are interested in that.

C: I looked at the comments after Stereophile posted [your piece] on Facebook, and was struck by the raw nastiness of many of the posts. There was a sense that many felt the sanctity of their little domain had been violated by this academic approach, this analytic approach. You’d mentioned sexism to me... do you think that sexism is at the heart of their responses?

EN: Are you curious about my response to the forums, or the reception to the piece in general?

C: Well, yes. Both.

EN: Sure. With regards to the forums... I have spent some time on audio forums in the past...I’m not a recording engineer, but I have recorded with friends, and I’ve been in recording studios as a musician. So I sort of understood the tone that a lot of these forums take on, which is, from my perspective, sort of masculine—a lot of the posters seem to be men, though I’m sure there are women there...

C: Not Many! ...Sorry.

EN: ...Yeah, not many, that’s right. The tone is often a little bit...I find it sort of aggressive at times, and competitive; I was struck by people comparing their gear, and talking about prices...but I found the tone a little bit defensive, when talking about my piece. A main critique of my piece, which is understandable, was that it was “subjectivism run amuck”....It seemed like the piece prompted this response of, “well, if we just say everything is subjective, what are we gonna DO?”...One of the comments ended by saying, “what if the piece IS right? Then what are we left with?” It’s almost like people are worried that if fidelity isn’t possible, and it is all a construct...then it’s like they’re left without a mission in life. That strikes me as sort of...

C: Pathetic?? (laughs)

EN: ...I don’t mean to be condescending, but it strikes me as sweet, almost, that they care so much (laughs).

C: That sounds a little sexist, right there: “oh, look at those cute boys right there, all wrapped up in their own little hobby, isn’t that sweet...." There does seem to be this polarization...where it’s analog/digital, objective/subjective, and there doesn’t seem to be a lot of middle ground. Something that is supposedly based on the love of music certainly gets incredibly hostile and snarky—and I don’t quite get it.

EN: Yeah. I’m interested, certainly, in the quest. It does seem to me that if you look at fidelity, hi-fi, in a historical perspective...people felt that with every new technological advancement, that they were one step closer to pure, faithful replication of the sound.

C: There does seem to be a quest for the holy grail attitude, and that does presuppose that there is a hard and fast objective goal that can be reached.

EN: I say this with a real appreciation for high sound quality, but some of the responses brought out—and I don’t think it was necessarily directed at me, but there was kind of a generationalist critique, of millennials who listen to their iPod headphones and have no appreciation of sound quality. You hear that a lot. As you can imagine, in musicology there’re a lot of people who say, “kids today don’t understand music”... I appreciate the appreciation of pristine or perfect sound or whatever the adjective is, I guess the issues come in when people start talking about one recording being quantitatively better than another. It’s comparable to people talking about wine, one wine being better quantitatively than another. I also think it becomes a problem when people start to care more about their gadgets and their gear than musical performance or musicality.
C: This whole argument of, are we able to achieve better fidelity now than we were 30 years ago, 50 years ago, whatever, is muddied-up by the fact that the sound quality of material that's generally available has gotten so much worse, in terms of MP3s and most downloads...we've got a whole generation coming along that has to be not just introduced to the technology of high fidelity, but to the concept of high fidelity, just the idea that there is something better out there, is something that doesn't even occur to most people.

EN: I notice that in the classroom, teaching undergraduates, especially about classical music... where my inner audiophile comes out is with classical music, because compressed sound ruins it—you need the contrast in dynamics and in everything else. I find that a lot of younger students I encounter in music history, undergraduates, maybe really can’t hear the difference. And I start to sympathize with some of the griping on the forums about young people losing their sense of discernment about sound. It does seem to have some historical lineage in that idea, that every era worries that young people aren’t listening as well, or as closely...I wonder what the answer is, given that lots of hi-fi gear is cost-prohibitive, especially for younger people.

C: And there does seem to be an awful lot of hostility towards high-end audio, in general. We may have done ourselves, and the world in general, a disservice at the way audio has become so niche-y and insular...but the general attitude of young people isn’t that there are people who love music and so spend a lot of money on equipment, but that “it’s all a fraud, it’s all a sham”. At least those are the sentiments that get posted online.

EN: In defense of...people involved in high fidelity, there does seem to be a double standard, where people will spend lots of money on, say, a cello or violin, assuming that the quality will be astronomically higher than that of a less-expensive instrument. So, there is a bit of a contradiction, that they won’t acknowledge that there could be discernable differences in quality, just as there are with instruments.

C: Part of it may be a reaction against some of the hype the industry has generated...you look back at how the CD was introduced, as “perfect sound forever” and there’s no way to react to that positively if it’s not 100% true. And of course it’s NOT 100% true...but there does seem to be disbelief that one can have trained ears. We’re willing to accept the visual evidence of high-def TV, we’re willing to accept food critics, wine critics with trained palates, but the idea that someone can have better listening skills or hearing is somehow snobby and elitist and fraudulent.

EN: Within the debate about fidelity, the response of some of the people who accused me of being a subjectivist, was that they apparently thought that I felt there was no difference between [different qualities of] sound. My view is that we certainly can tell the difference between different sounds, and that there some people can train their ears to be even more discerning or nuanced than others. The key question is the difficulty in ranking sounds, as opposed to it being a matter of taste.

C: I go back to music classes in grade school, where the teacher played music selections and said, “listen to the bassoons here” or “listen to the violins”...at first, everything was an amorphous blob of sound, but eventually I could pick out an individual instrument, and follow that line. As fewer kids receive any kind of music training, I’m not sure they have that capability, or even believe it’s possible. We’re not taught listening skills; if anything, we’re taught to shut down our listening, in order to isolate ourselves from the world And plugging in earbuds to block out the world around us is the ultimate act of that. At least it is for me. It’s the opposite of “being here now”, or being present: it’s detachment.

EN: Right now, there’s honking outside my window...there can be so much noise that it’s overwhelming, and you just need to shut it all out. So I’m not sure that that’s always a bad thing.

C: I do find it worrisome, though, when we spend so much of our time isolating ourselves from one another. I think of a bunch of teenagers in a room, texting one another, not speaking at all. I think that as a society we have that same sort of detachment, where it becomes difficult to connect with another
person without the intercession of some kind of bizarre technology. –But now I’m lapsing into the “college sophomores on wine” bit again. EN: (laughing) That’s okay, that’s my thing.
C: Well, we’ve discussed a lot of topics, and covered a lot of territory. Thanks for your time.
EN: Thank you. I enjoyed it.
C: Next time I’ll bring Danish.

Elizabeth Newton is a Doctoral candidate at the City University of New York (CUNY), in the field of Historical Musicology. She holds undergraduate degrees in Music and International Political Economy, and attained a Master’s degree in Musicology at Indiana University.
What Too Many Have Missed

Part 1

By Ken Kessler

Got this sudden urge to create a list of fave artists of the past that too many people ignored ... For some reason, I haven’t been able to escape Kanye West this month, in the wake of the Grammy Awards, as he continues to lower the intellectual potential of the world’s youth. This is, therefore, a crusade of sorts, a list of some antidotes to that buffoon. They’re here in no particular order, appearing merely as they came to me. I’ll feed them to you in batches of 10.

By default or definition, the majority of these artists are not currently active. It stands to reason that if they are still with us, they are easily accessible and have yet to fall of the radar. Some of those on the list are still performing, most are not, but all are worth (re)discovering. The point I’m making, in undiluted grumpy-old-bastard form, is that very few contemporary performers are in this league. As good as is Adele, she’s no Dusty Springfield. Listen to Coldplay? I’d rather have a colonoscopy without anaesthesia.

(And please – so you don’t merely label me an old fart incapable of “getting down with the kids” – you absolutely must check this out before you read any further:

None on this list are in the Dylan/Beatles/Stones/Sinatra/Elvis league, though many had huge hits, or were megastars in their day. You’ve undoubtedly heard of the vast majority. But they’ve simply faded from view for a number of reasons, e.g. most people only think of Doris Day as a movie star, not a singer, while Mike Nesmith’s masterful solo career will always be overshadowed by the Monkees (another underappreciated act). Despite having either a run of hits or even just one, most are now recognised, if at all, for not much more than meriting any cult status they may have acquired after they retired, fell from public gaze or passed on.

Some past geniuses below the Elvis/Beatles level don’t need my boostering because their cults are rock-solid: Big Star, Love, Gene Clark, Badfinger and other defunct bands or artists that suffered high mortality rates (literally or figuratively) remain much-loved and oft-reissued. But hell, some of the following don’t even have cult support ... just this miserable ol’ cult of one. Who knows? You might fall in love with these artists as I did. If so, no thanks necessary...:

**Michael Nesmith:** Ex-Monkee, pioneering force in country rock, amazing songwriter: he penned “Different Drum” in 1965, later a hit for Linda Ronstadt. “Río” is a minor masterpiece, and most of his LPs piss all over Gram Parsons. From a great height. His style is gentle, folksy, like a rock’n’roll Will Rogers, and a pox on those who dismissed him because he was in the Monkees. (Who, by the way, would be on this list if they weren’t so famous, still touring and continually reissued/remastered. All the TV shows have just been transferred to Blu-ray, by the way.)

**The Left Banke:** Founders/practitioners of a minuscule genre that some dubbed “Baroque Rock” or “Bach Rock” – but it yielded “Walk Away Renee” (a hit for the Four Tops) and “Pretty Ballerina”, two
songs so gorgeous that they’re almost too poignant to listen to if you’ve had a few drinks. A couple of staggering albums, followed by a few thrown-together, cult-worshipped, posthumous albums, and a legacy that includes Stories. Live, they could be a shambles, but when I saw them, oh, how they rocked.

**Howard Tate:** Musicologists say this genius’ phenomenal debut on Verve came out just as his brand of gospel, blues and R&B-flavored soul was fading out of fashion, but it still comes across as “the best Stax album not released on Stax.” Every song is magnificent, the band (all session superstars) is the equal of the Stax maestri and even BB King and Janis Joplin saw fit to cover some of the tracks. Thanks to Chad Kassem for recording Tate live after the singer was rediscovered in the 2000s.

**The Turtles:** Disrespected because they had chart hits and showed too much of a sense of humour, this band interpreted Dylan, Zevon and others with joyful panache. One of the best live acts I ever saw, the two frontmen metamorphosed into Flo & Eddie and earned hip credibility by working with Frank Zappa. If you love pure pop with an edge, this is peerless. Unless you can name something more delightfully, joyously infectious than “Happy Together”?

**The Youngbloods and Jesse Colin Young:** Known only for “Get Together”, the Youngbloods segued from coffee house/jugband/folk-blues to experimental stuff by Album No 3, Elephant Mountain, with the unbelievably eerie “Darkness, Darkness”, classily covered by Robert Plant. Live? They understood intimacy with an audience. Jesse Colin Young possesses one of the most-arrestingly clear voices you will ever hear, so grab his solo LPs after you’ve exhausted the Youngbloods’ all-too-limited catalogue.

**Rick Nelson:** Written off as a teen idol, producing country rock while Gram Parsons was still doing hootenanny stuff in coffeehouses, Nelson was a visionary. His first band included James Burton (if you need to ask, go to the back of the class) and later backing band provided members of the Eagles. “Garden Party” was one of the most intelligent commentaries on the rock scene of the day. In Las Vegas the year before he died (it was during one of my first CESes), he more than made up for a drunken Jerry Lee Lewis, who stormed off stage after two songs. (Admittedly, Lewis did more in 90 seconds with “Over The Rainbow” than Judy Garland did in 75 years…) Nelson was an absolute rock trouper. Respect.

**Jackie Wilson:** Michael Jackson admitted that he copped his moves from Wilson, and the scant video clips you can find on YouTube show you why this ex-boxer’s footwork inspired Jacko. With a vocal range one authority said had the scale of an opera singer, Wilson could turn a piece of schmaltz like “Danny Boy” into an epic of such majesty that you will experience chills. He had enough hits in the 1950s and 1960s to earn his place in the rock histories, but he died after years in a coma and is rarely remembered today. Listen to his take of “Doggin’ Around” – Pavarotti meets BB King – and then ask, “Why is Kanye West even allowed in front of a microphone?”

**Juice Newton:** OK, here’s a country chanteuse that ticks all the boxes drawn by Tammy and Patsy and Brenda 30 years before her 1980s heyday, but, my goodness, can this woman sing up a storm. She injected serious rock power into covers including Brenda Lee’s “Break It To Me Gently”, perfected “Queen of Hearts” and delivered a tear-jerker so heart-wrenching in “Shot Full Of Love” that it should come with a warning sticker. If you’ve ever secretly loved Dolly Parton (everyone’s guilty pleasure) and worship Emmylou, you must not deprive yourself of Juice.
Long Ryders: There are plenty of “Children of the Byrds” gigging around the world, ideally suited to hipster-y spots where 30-somethings pine for a taste of the 1960s. Sid Griffin and his band of Gene Clark/Gram Parsons devotees presaged alt-country and provided an edgy alternative to the Eagles. (And I am NOT one of those who trashes the Eagles, who were effin’ amazing and are dissed primarily by left-wing asshole hi-fi writers, just because they were successful.) This is the definition of a cult band, but the music will delight anyone who ever dug the Buffalo Springfield. And I worshipped the Springfield.

Nilsson: Maybe an odd choice, as he hung around with John Lennon, wrote a number of exceptional hits and isn’t really that obscure, but you hardly hear much of his stuff any more. But Nilsson, like Randy Newman, Warren Zevon and other wry/quirky composers, possessed something magical, indefinable, and above all, intelligent. One of the first rock performers to cover standards, an ideal choice for composing oddball film music, a genuine eccentric, he produced albums that need repeated playings before they give up their riches. So worth mining that I can’t praise him enough.

Ken Kessler. After working as Assistant Editor for the short-lived Stereo-The Magazine, Ken joined Hi-Fi News & Record Review in 1983, where he still serves. Ken is the author of Quad: The Closest Approach and McIntosh ... For The Love Of Music, and co-author of Sound Bites and KEF: Innovators In Sound. He is in all likelihood the world’s most widely-published hi-fi writer.
In my Room

By Desmond Fretz

Now approaching fifty years as an audiophile, I'll recount my quest for a system that fully satisfies.

Long ago I discovered a high-end stereo shop in the suburbs of Philadelphia where I grew up. It was called “Music & Sound” and what I experienced there led me to become a “high-end” audiophile. The store name says it all about our hobby which involves a passion about these two things.

In the beginning, for me, it was mostly about the sound. I was attracted to playback that I felt sounded like musicians were actually in the room. It didn’t much matter what was playing, so for years I was obsessed with “demo discs” (it was all LPs back then), recordings that sounded real. Of course much depended on what equipment was being used and in this shop, then, it was the exotic and expensive gear (Magnepan, Audio Research) that sounded most realistic to me.

Obtaining all the components of such systems became the quest. And I sought out the demo discs to show mine off to friends and to myself. Music appreciation took me a lot longer. I grew into it, helped by audiophile friends who shared their music knowledge and discoveries. I found the genres and artists that appealed to me and learned more about the music and musicians. Today, music and sound are twin obsessions, with one or the other holding sway at different times. I need and demand the best of both.
There is a rich vocabulary to describe the sound quality (SQ) of playback systems. Much of it was codified in the 60s by Gordon Holt, an early pioneer audiophile who published a then ad-free magazine called Stereophile. One important attribute is called “imaging” or “sound-staging” and I’ve doggedly pursued its improvement in the systems I’ve put together over the years. It is that three-dimensional character of SQ that adds to realism—that allows me to “place” each instrument and voice in space (in the room) in front of me as I listen from the “sweet spot”.

My transition from analog to digital, from LPs to CDs, took ten years and involved a lot of overlap, listening to both for quite some time. In recent years I’ve moved almost exclusively to ripped and downloaded digital files.

With guidance from a high-fidelity consultant, my early system included a Linn LP-12 ‘table, Paoli tube preamp, ARC D-150 tube amp, Fulton Gold speaker wires, and Fulton J Modular speakers. It served me for 40 years, but had such a low “wife acceptance factor” that it and I were banished to the garage after I got married. I worked with what I had, even employing our two cars in room treatment :)

My wife enlists me in putting on elaborate Halloween productions for neighborhood kids and parents. Garage doors open, my system plays appropriate music and sound effects out into the street. Two years ago I’d recorded effects that included a closely-miked whoopee cushion. In the heat of the event my wife kept yelling, “Turn it up!”. There was soon a great ripping sound as the pulses laid waste to all midrange drivers.

I’d nursed the J’s along for decades from a cache of spare parts. Now there were no more. I asked a trusted audiophile friend for speaker suggestions and chose Triton Ones from the three offered. Within two days the Tritons were installed :) and the J’s hauled away :( Thus began my journey to a new system—and a new understanding—that are hugely satisfying and fulfilling.

We recently moved into a larger home and I was granted the empty living room(!) for listening. It’s 13 x 34 x 8-10 feet high with a peaked ceiling—solid and with great acoustic potential.
I had read The Audio Expert by Ethan Winer and finally begun to understand the full potential of acoustic room treatment. Over the past eight months I implemented a reflection free zone and bass trapping in consultation with folks at RealTraps, the company Winer founded. No investment has returned more than these in terms of a fully-rendered sound-stage that is infused with “live” qualities.

But there were several that delivered all the information required for that rendering, with all its quiet subtleties: ARC SP-14 tube preamp, Mac Pro with LaCie Thunderbolt 2 solid state drive, Amarra/iTunes and NAD M51 DAC (for stereo PCM files); Sony HAP-Z1ES (for stereo DSD files); WyWires Blue speaker wires ($350!); and Oppo BDP-105 (for multi-channel DSD files, SACDs and DVD-A). I use an FMI 80 for center and NHT Super Zero speakers in the rear, driven by two Musical Fidelity Class D amps for multi-channel playback.

After being rebuilt a few years ago, the ARC D-150 amp carried over to drive the Tritons. All was sweet and good until its right channel failed. I swapped it out with an AVA 600R hybrid amp that I’d used with Maggies in a second system (a whole ‘nother story). At first I was disappointed in its midrange reproduction (“I knew D-150, and you’re no D-150!”) but grew to appreciate its character there and throughout the range.

So here I am in the “living” room with the best sound in my experience. And the best music, as hi-res audio pours forth for easy purchase and download. Especially now I realize that we can’t do this alone. We reach out to other audiophiles in communities like this one and get help.

It’s a new day for both music and sound and their power to enrich our lives. The real hi-res audio revolution is about awareness, opening the doors of perception, and practicing the art of listening.

I have come to enjoy a wide range of music that includes jazz, blues, folk, classical, rock, electronic and alternative. The best recordings in my collection have a quality I call “release” which means clarity, effortless dynamics and naturalness—as if unattached or unable to be ascribed to any component in the chain. They present a pristine stereo image that’s just there—the very meaning of “stereo” which is “solid”. And they come through almost any decent system. But all my work has been to fully release these presentations at home, and the tears of joy or sadness they can generate. Room treatment has enabled it. The reflection free zone is where I most want to be and, when the mid-bass is controlled, it all blossoms.

In recent weeks I’ve had the privilege of experiencing MQA decoding in my system. I bought Meridian’s Explorer 2 DAC and downloaded free tracks from 2L’s HiRes Test Bench page.

Initially I was unable to get the blue light to come on, indicating playback of Master Quality Authenticated, but the new DAC offered such improved SQ with other files through Amarra that I sold my NAD M51.

I succeeded in decoding the MQA files using Audirvana as my player and “it was on”—sound quality beyond anything I’ve heard here before. Of course the provenance of the 2L music is impeccable but the imaging and presentation proved astonishing. Larger, higher, extending farther forward to include...
the listening position, and with unrestricted dynamics and utter clarity. “Deblurred” describes it nicely.

If you came over for a listen, I’d play these files for you:

“You’ll Never Know” by David Elias from his “Rare To Go” CD

“Sisters of Mercy” by Cameron Carpenter from his “If You Could Read My Mind” CD

“Walkin’ Blues” by Keith Brown from “Hellhound On My Trail—The Songs of Robert Johnson” CD

“Bach-Concerto for Two Violins BWV 1043-Largo ma non tanto” played by Rachel Podger (DSD)

“Magnificat” from 2L (MQA)
Upcoming

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