

WE'VE MOVED!

Yeah! I'm listening in this lovely new room with 10-foot ceilings and more. It's 25 by 16 feet, an ideal ratio according to the informative *Audio Encyclopedia* by Howard Tremain, available at local book stores for a lot of money. The builder didn't think much of the suggestion of double-layered drywall with an interlayer of lead sheet, but we'll get by somehow. We now have much nicer facilities as opposed to our old 'pre-modern warehouse look'. Where is this new haven? Please change your address books on the computer, Rolodex, tissue or whatever, to **Musical Design** or **Musical Concepts**, 49 Jason Court, St. Charles, MO 63304. Phone numbers remain the same, 314-447-0040 for Musical Concepts and 314-926-9266 for Musical Design. So, if you're in town, stop by and hear our neat stuff and some Meadowlark Audio speakers, most likely. No cover charge, but lavish gifts are accepted with grace.

A World's First Event!

These are exciting days in 'Digital' with the new '24-bit no matter how they sound' models popping up. In their usual bravado, **Musica Exceptionale Nonpareil (MEN)** will leapfrog the rest of the industry with a stunning new product introduction. Exciting news of the first 33-1/3-bit CD Player emerged from a home-based press conference held at the Lisbon, Portugal, company. At a press reception, complete with wine and cheese, the company's president and founder **Bunco Olivier Yaquez Zapato (BOYZ)** announced the forthcoming product. While I'm not a wine fancier, I gleefully noted that it was the kind with a cork. Since the finishing touches on the product were still in progress, Mr. Salerno promptly returned to the factory after the press conference. You know, **(BOYZ) to (MEN)**.

Paraphrasing other members of the U.S. press I spoke with, "Why not proceed directly to the 78-bit standard. After all, more is better, right! Who do these guys think they are? I can count!" While mumbling something to myself about counting and Sesame Street, I reminded them that a quick stopover, of a few years duration, at the 45-bit standard would give eager retailers the chance to sell a new generation of product to the same weary customers. In addition, they were writers after all, and writers need things to write about. Not to mention that bold innovation by the numbers makes the reporting even more exciting. At that point, they all seemed eager to embrace the 45-bit standard, but of course, they would never disclose dream-based technology to mere readers. Then too, some seemed opposed to the larger centering hole. Members of the European press were more reserved, though one writer muttered darkly, "You pathetic yanks can count, but you can't hear. Why do you think we are still using the 16-bit, 4X Philips chipset?"

The aptly named **MEN CD 33.33** has other unique features with four separate 24-Karat Gold-Plated toggle switches with associated volume controls for flawless, time-random digital generation of presampled ticks, pops and general groove noise plus pre and post groove echo *sampled as you play*. Note that this requires three pickup lasers, DAC chips, etc. These features are expected to lure anti-CD listeners by the thousands. Bob Carver eat your heart out! This kind of sophistication does not come cheap, so if you're a man interested in **MEN** be prepared to spend \$33,333.33 USD. Just in case this seems expensive remember this includes a sturdy marble coffee table and 50-lb. stainless-steel remote control with wheels. That will keep those other guys trying to offer the heaviest remote control busy for a while. Unfortunately, **MEN** was not able to make the projected ship date of April 1, 1998.

The following is not an April fools thing, okay. Hey, maybe a t-shirt, or yeah, a \$50 custom CD that costs 3 bucks to make. Nah, I don't think the NEA is listening. Many of you have expressed enthusiasm over this newsletter. Many have called to hurry us to get this issue out ASAP. Well, you can see how much effect that had. We're slow as molasses. Since this is sort of an advertising vehicle and sort of not, we do try to mix in the general interest stuff like the pithy CD reviews, we are not above asking for a handout to defray some of our costs. Hopefully, this would allow the newsletter to get out four times yearly as originally envisioned. Hey, maybe we could go from cheesy four-page format to cheesy eight-page format. We might even do a color graphic now and then. The mind boggles! So if you feel the urge, send us a donation by cash, check, microbrew 12-pack or whatever. This is not to be thought of as a subscription, just a donation. Please write "Donation" on your check, \$20 bill or 12-pack. Better yet, send us \$69 and we will send you the best 1M interconnect you've ever heard. Of course, this is a free country so you can vote for the \$50 CD or a really twisted t-shirt. We're listening!

MCINTOSH C22 PREAMP: Truly, an oldie but a goodie. You know, working on 30-year old preamps with hardwiring is a trying affair. Still, the owner said something about a high budget, so we did. This unit had been previously modified by the good people at Audio Classics. As far as it went, the modest mod looked pretty good (kudos to A.C.), but our customer wanted so much more. We completely replaced the power supply with mostly Hi-Voltage BlackGate WKZ series parts at much larger values than stock. This looked very cool when completed. HyperFast diodes handled the rectification for both the B+ and the heater power supplies. The line stage was highly streamlined by eliminating the tone controls, filters, etc. The 'Big' Alps volume control was added - no small trick given the room. Various cathode bypass caps were replaced with BlackGates. Around \$900 when completed, it sounded great and, the owner was delighted.



CONRAD-JOHNSON MF-200: We screwed up! We forgot to snap a picture of this very trick PA-3 installation into the CJ all solid-state 200W power amp. Therefore; we let rampant commercialism have its day instead, and have shown a neat picture of various BlackGate caps and Musical Concepts film caps. These were used in the mod, so there is a connection. No, the Musical Concepts film caps don't enjoy quite the hype of some other brands, but we take solace in the fact that they sound better. Back to those PA-3 boards that looked so nice mounted piggyback on the original CJ driver cards. We performed an enormous amount of modification to the CJ unreg/reg power supply

board, replacing just about all of the CJ bypass caps and adding many of our own as new part designations. Hyperfast diodes were used in the regulated and unregulated power supplies. And, of course, the PA-3 provided the drive for the 6 Hitachi power MOSFETs per channel. The amp became much more natural and sweet. Bass became more extended with a palpable solidity and dramatic expression of acoustical energy. The mids and highs had the natural sweetness and delicacy, plus extension, that the PA-3 is always comfortable producing. The costs were around \$500. And yep, it finally sounded like a 200-Watt amp.

COUNTERPOINT SA-220 AMPLIFIER: Here a small batch of PA-3 boards are being finished. Note the super-tight matching on transistors, if you can make out the gains on the foam pads. Do we know no shame? Now we're putting the PA-3 boards into hybrid amplifiers. Yep, those perty glowin' tubies will have to party somewhere else. The owner wanted maximum reliability and sound. He knew firsthand of our services and the results to be had. He didn't hesitate to improve a sound to which he was not particularly attached. Having purchased the amplifier "sound unheard," he was displeased that it did not remind him too much of the venerable, though mercurial Counterpoint SA-12 amplifier. We completely disconnected the front-end and driver stages from both the power supply and signal.



Then we used the ± 70 volt power supply and MOSFET output stage with the PA-3 boards mounted in daughter board fashion for the usual splendid results. We offered the customer three different mod variations from just under \$500 to \$1200. The latter route he chose included, of course, BlackGates in abundance, HyperFast Diodes, Oxy-Free RCA inputs and Cardas binding posts. Plenty classy for the price, don't ya think!

Coming in the next issue will be an exciting look at modifying an ancient Sansui tubed integrated amp. Bud, they don't build them like they used to, so stay tuned!

Tech Talk

Using the 6N1P tube... The latest in line preamp/driver tubes from Svetlana is the 6N1P. Quoting now from the Svetlana tech sheet, **“The Svetlana 6N1P is a miniature glass-envelope small-signal dual triode intended for use as a line-level amplifier or driver in high-quality audio amplifiers. Except for higher heater-current consumption, it is a direct plug-in replacement for the 6DJ8, ECC88 or 6922 in most high-level audio applications. Features include very low distortion-optimized for line stages; medium transconductance; internally shielded between sections, allowing their use at differing signal levels; higher plate-voltage and dissipation rating than 6DJ8 types; and larger cathode than 6DJ8 types, giving it longer life and more transient current capability.”** YUM, YUM! Sounds good, but I think ‘similar’ is a better description, than “direct plug-in”. We were rather skeptical that this tube would work well in the Musical Design SP-2B. It has a higher rated heater current, in fact twice as high at 6.3VDC and 600 ma. Consider for a moment that if our power transformer had a 800 ma heater winding rating, instead of 1500 ma, that the two tubes combined 1200 ma might be a bit much. This situation could occur in some other brand of product. It seemed likely that the higher current could be a problem in terms of heat dissipation for our heatsinked heater voltage regulator. Yes and no! The higher current which is supported by the original power transformer had led to a voltage drop in the low voltage secondary of the transformer, yielding about 2.5VDC less unregulated heater voltage. Remember $P(\text{power}) = E(\text{voltage}) \times I(\text{current})$. While our I had doubled, our E (voltage drop) was nearly halved, so P was only slightly higher. The lower unregulated voltage is still adequate for regulation and adds only slightly to the dissipation requirements of the heatsinking. Plate current was reduced to about 1/2 the 6922. This tube requires a higher plate voltage than provided in the SP-2B, and almost any other 6DJ8-based circuit, for a similar plate current to achieve the most linear performance. Still and all, it's the listening that counts and the 6N1P scores high, regardless. It is very dynamic, clear and liquid. And yes, it will plug-in to a SP-1, SP-2 or SP-2B. At the time this is being written we plan to further investigate this very promising tube. We may have a 6N1P conversion available by the time you read this. And we intend to have stocks of this tube available at \$36.00/match pair for those who want to have a listen even unconverted. **Check with the manufacturer of your product before using this tube!**

Sovtek 6922 tubes seem to sound clearly better than the previous versions. The latest tubes have a shiny black silkscreen, while the earlier units had a flat charcoal gray silkscreen. I hear a warmer, more vibrant quality reminiscent of good NOS (New Old Stock) tubes. Congrats to Sovtek for continually improving the product! As always Musical Design has matched pairs for only \$40.00.

What's new

We showed a new **Musical Design SP-3** (\$1295) solid-state preamp at the CES show. An optional plug-in phono stage will be available for \$395. A maxxed out version will be offered with larger power supply, extra bypasses, BlackGates, extra panel strengthening/damping and more. The **Signature SP-3** will be \$2250. Many, many visitors assumed that it was a tube unit when listening. They



were shocked that those little black transistors sounded like that. Of course, those who have heard our **Musical Concepts MC-3** preamp board over the years appreciate that we know how to make musical and natural solid-state preamps. Also shown was the **D-150C** (\$1695) power amp with slightly different power supply and output stage compared to the current **D-150B**. The **Signature D-150C** will be \$2495, complete with BlackGates, exotic resistors, HyperFasts, Oxy-Free RCAs, Cardas speaker posts and custom power cord.

Both units have a very attractive Mist Grey wrinkle paint finish and a sandwiched faceplate, i.e. the rear faceplate (larger) is in wrinkle paint and a smaller stainless steel face panel with silkscreen is the secondary (or front) panel. The acceptance of the new cosmetics was beyond our wildest expectations at the CES.

www.musicaldesign.com...should be online later this summer. This site will also cover products and services available from Musical Concepts. We will likely post these newsletters. Enter it in your browser now, so you won't forget the address.

“What have you heard lately?”

Meadowlark Shearwater speakers... No I don't own stock in this company, ok! The Musical Design room at the CES show featured the Shearwaters with the new D-150C amp, new SP-3 solid-state preamp, T-1 CD transport, DAC-1A Signature, Musical Design Aura Speaker wire and Musical Concepts SuperConnect IV interconnect. We bought 'em! Do you really need to know more?

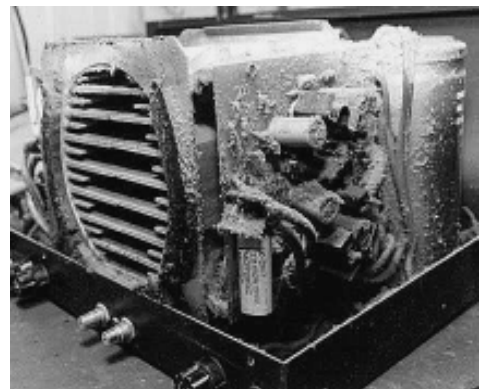
Speaking of CES, everything we used but the speakers was of our manufacture. The comments were great. Some said we had the best sound at the show. Some said we were in the top five. Yet, some wouldn't even listen since it was below their station in life to spend so little on a system (less than \$7000). This fact was not lost on those who love music more than expensive status symbols.

Back to Meadowlark for a moment. We have a pair of the eagerly anticipated **Blue Heron** (\$7500) models on order for the showroom. They should arrive before you see this newsletter. It has two Shearwater woofers in tranny line, the Heron Aero-Gel mid and, I believe, the exotic Audax gas-piezo tweeter. This tweeter is very expensive (about 3x the woofer price) and unmistakable as it looks like half of a golden egg coming out of the baffle board. Yeah, it is oblong instead of round. Hmmm! Bizarre, but beautiful. I have heard it in the top-end **Meadowlark Ibis**, which will be introduced to the public soon. Don't ask the price!

What's all this \$200/Watt stuff anyway? While talking to another amplifier designer about the most well known and purchased Single-Ended Tube amp, he was trying to describe his disgust with the sound. Paraphrasing his comments, he said, “I felt like I needed to floss my teeth after listening to the thing!” I love it, “floss my teeth”, wow! We've heard this amp. A local dealer bought one and brought it to our factory asking us to test it out. He thought it was defective, it sounded so rank. Sorry, it met specs and nothing appeared to be wrong. Yet, we noticed problems in three areas - bass, midrange and treble. Another engineer friend for a Canadian company weighed in on the listening experience with a well known British 9 Watt single-ended rig. He had heard it through 102dB efficient Lowther speakers. Although he said the top-end and mids were clear, natural, pristine and sweet, he couldn't work up much enthusiasm over the bass even with the ultra-efficient speaker. What's the moral to this story? Simple! If you take this road, you might want to let another amplifier do bass. You need one with tube naturalness and sweetness so that the “cross over region” is not audible. That's right, you need a Musical Design amp with solidity, pitch definition and clarity in the bottom octaves, but without the dryness of ‘solid-state’ sound. Then you might try it full range. Soon you might have a single-ended tube amp for sale when you realize that natural sound, complete with bass, is available without breaking the bank.

Check this out... <http://www.netassoc.net/spielbergaudio/>. Mark Spielberg makes some great ‘Direct CDs’ from hard drive recordings, reviewed next issue. The CDs include what must be a ‘State of the Art’ sounding drum record with crushing dynamics. He records a local group that sounds like Steely Dan, too. Mark's speakers range from small monitors to multi-driver subwoofers. He likes the speed and transparency of planar-magnetic mid and hi-frequency drivers.

Beauty or beast?... We loved it the minute we removed the lid and so we named it ‘Old Shag’. If you have a Hafler DH-500, XL-600 or any amp with a fan you might try cleaning it once a decade. Hey, wait a minute! How about this image in color silkscreened on the t-shirt and the caption - **My other amp is a Musical Design.**



Ok, we'll keep workin'.

USED COMPONENTS

- 3 - CD-2(1Used, 2 Demo), minor cosmetic flaws, Orig. \$1495, Sale \$995 (Demo), \$895 (Used)
- 1 - CD-2 Signature(Used, Orig. Ver.), some flaws, Orig. \$1995, Sale \$995
- 1 - Pioneer PD-65 with Orig. Ver. Signature mods, mint, Sale \$995
- 2 - D-150(black, Latest B Ver.), Demo, very minor flaws, Orig. \$1495 Sale \$1195
- 1 - SP-1A Demo, good cosmetics electrically upgraded to SP-2B - \$649
- 1 - SP-2(black, Latest ver.), Demo, minor flaws, Orig. \$995, Sale \$699
- 1 - SP-2B(black, Latest ver.), Demo, minor flaws, Orig. \$995, Sale \$795
- 2 - DAC-1(black, not Latest 1A), Demo, minor flaws, Orig. \$995, Sale \$495
- 2 - D-75(black, Latest B ver.), demo, minor flaws, Orig. \$795, Sale \$595
- 1 - DM-100(black, Latest B ver.), Demo, minor flaws, Orig. \$1195 Sale \$895
- 1 - D-140 with latest “Special” update, awesome sound, Sale \$795
- 1 - D-140i with latest “Special” update, awesome sound, Sale \$895
- 2 - Audio Alchemy DDE 1.0 with mods, surprisingly great sound, Sale \$199

Music Reviews

There will be no learned dissertations here, just positive reviews of music we like. The emphasis is on sound quality, but not above substance. We have added valuable descriptions of the sound quality, so you can judge whether your system is doing its job. Note: There was no room in this issue for comments on the following gizmos, but obviously we do approve. All discs are 'cleaned' on the *Nitty Gritty CD Cleaner* (more essential than ear wax remover) and spun on the *Bedini* before evaluation. We use the *AudioPrism CD Stoplight* (green ink pen) and *Audio-Prism Blacklight* disc damper. Your comments are invited. **Important:** It has been said that 'Ye Editor' has eclectic, some might say weird tastes, so pursue the more adventuresome discs here at your own risk.

Correction: I called attention to David Sutton, "a Canadian reader," in the last issue. Mr. Sutton is a U. S. citizen from the Chicago area.

FOREVER PLAID, FOREVER PLAID [RCA 60702-2-RC]

Are you old enough to remember the 50's or you just wanna hear more of the everyday pop music of the era? Remember the word 'silly'? *FOREVER PLAID*, 'The Heavenly Musical Hit' may be just your time travel ticket to that bygone and unforgettably musical era. Check the 'whacky factor' before buying!

Quick, before you lose interest, let me say that this is a very fine sounding CD, a true audiophile collectible. It is a very correct presentation. By that, I mean that it evokes a sense of the stage so that you can almost see the ensemble on stage performing just for you. This CD has a towering dynamic range. Wow, is there a difference here between soft and loud. Your system will face a tough test. The medley of *Sixteen Tons/Chain Gang* with clanging metal and soaring vocals will give notice to your system's midrange. "Play or get out of the way!", it says to wimpy drivers and dynamically constricted electronics. Even if you only listen to this CD once a year I think you won't regret buying it.



THE ERA: From the liner notes, good liner notes at that, we read. "...we think of Rock 'n' Roll, greasers, hot rods, Elvis, Fabian, D.A. haircuts and teenage rebellion. But there was a "flipside" to this era - the side of harmony, innocence and the sincerity of dreams. It is the side that's been lost in the shuffle of progress. It was a time when most parents and kids listened and danced to the same music; when families partook of the ritual of gathering in front of the TV to watch their favorite variety shows, like the Ed Sullivan Show... It was a period when Four-Part Guy Groups harmonized their way across the airwaves, jukeboxes, and hi-fi's of the country. Throughout the land they would stand at a quartet of microphones, crooning a multitude of chaperoned prom-goers into dreamy romance."

THE STORY: They worked hard! "Finally, they landed their first big gig at the Airport Hilton Cocktail Bar-THE FUSEL-LOUNGE (February 9, 1964). En route to pick up their custom-made Plaid Tuxedos, they were slammed broadside by a school bus filled with eager Catholic teens. The teens were on their way to witness the Beatles make their US television debut on the Ed Sullivan Show and, miraculously, escaped uninjured. The members of FOREVER PLAID were killed instantly. It is at the moment when their careers and lives ended, that the story of FOREVER PLAID begins." So begins the musical, FOREVER PLAID.

ONLY THE LONELY, FRANK SINATRA [CAPITOL CDP 7 48471 2], Arranged and conducted by Nelson Riddle

I really wanted to beat the 'rush to gush' over the work of Frank Sinatra, but here we are mourning the passing of an American musical giant. There has never been anyone like him and I'm sad that there may not be another. Unless your idea of music is electric guitars ablaze at 120dB, you've surely heard of him. My older brother has been an admirer for years and now his son is discovering Sinatra's singular musical talent. Surely my son is next as a whole new generation realizes that the basic themes of life remain timeless. Romance, love, yearning, desire and disappointment are some of the



emotions unfolding as you listen. And with Frank, you don't just hear those emotions, somehow he makes you feel them. If you have any inkling that you would enjoy him, just buy this album. It's that simple! Sonic commentary superfluous!

QUIETLY THERE, ZOOT SIMS PLAYS JOHNNY MANDEL [JVCXR-0040-2], www.jvcmusic.com

This is, of course, one of the JVC XRCD titles. While many of the JVC titles have been re-releases of older albums even going back to the 50's, they have also released some original recordings. While it is hard to argue with the musical choices, some of the older material has been uneven in terms of sonic quality. This title was recorded in 1984 with producer Norman Granz. This is the best XRCD I have heard and it is a very fine CD by most anyone's standards.



Artist turned composer Johnny Mandel has crafted some beautiful and instantly recognizable jazz titles. You might have heard of, *The Shadow of Your Smile*. There is even one composed for Zoot Sims, simply titled *Zoot*. Victor Feldman is on percussion and doing an excellent job as always.

The CD leads off with *Cinnamon and Cloves*, a combination of brilliant excitement and relaxation all at the same time. The high-frequency percussion is both powerful and liquid. Throughout the disc there are three areas that stand out,

you know, bass, midrange and treble. We have solid, natural acoustic bass, then we move to breathy, lush Sax and finally the fast, clear, natural upper percussion. There is no point in beating around the bush. If you have been curious about JVC XRCD, this would be a great choice.

GOOD FRIENDS, LIVINGSTON TAYLOR, [CHESKY JD-97], www.livtaylor.com



Do you like James Taylor? Yes! Then go out and buy this. End of review. Wait a minute, I guess there is some elaboration due, to fill space if nothing else. I've enjoyed this disc so much, I don't know how I've put off this review for so long.

We tend to think of James Taylor as that solitary figure on a bar stool, guitar in hand. It's just him and the 'acoustic' right there in front of the world. I've never seen Livingston perform in person, so perhaps he does much the same live. Here he has an interesting array of backup

musicians playing viola, cello, flute and so forth. But the extras never get in the way. Quite the opposite. This is an intelligently and deftly arranged album. We have a wide variety songs from the *Wizard of Oz* favorites, *If I Only Had a Brain* (great fun) and *Over the Rainbow*, to more personal, deeply felt material like *Good Friends* written by Taylor himself. I hear a searcher and seeker in his voice on *Over the Rainbow*. For me, it is the most moving track here. There is bit of a tired and world-weary sadness in his rendition which makes Judy Garland's sound un-inspired. And there is the beautiful, languid piano accompaniment.

For the sonic splendors, I refer you to damn near the whole album as it is Chesky's 128-bit process circa 1993, engineered by Bob Katz with George Kaye acting as consultant. Of special interest is *Grandma's Hands*, an *a capella* piece with The Manhattans and Tony Wells on backup. There is some very low-frequency content on my sample, as though someone is tapping their foot against the mic stand. Anyway this is very audible if your system can solidly reproduce these frequencies. Then there is *Fifth and Vine* with it's offstage tenor sax playing very loud and moving about in the soundstage. You'll hear Taylor's voice resonate and reflect in the moderately reverberant Mastersound studio.

Now, if you are lucky enough to hear him on his mostly east coast summer tour 1998 (posted on his website), I expect a report on my desk promptly. In fact, anyone wishing to write a letter / review (don't forget a photo) of the concert might just get it published here. Wow, your chance to be famous awaits.



And, in the mail...

These two fascinating letters, representing the 20-year odyssey of a seasoned audiophile, shows that the quest doesn't always end predictably.

A Tale of Two Transports... I could have just as easily called this letter "Reader beware", an offshoot of the old axiom of how we 'buyers' are supposed to behave. I owned a Pioneer PD-65 cd player modified to a CD-2 Signature status as of '95. I recently got the bug to upgrade my system, and ended up carrying around my Stax Lambda Signature headphone system, tube amp and all, to an audio store to check out some of the best digital front ends out there. I came away feeling that my cd player still held its own, even without the latest upgrades. Still I did hear one digital component I liked well enough to buy in the used marketplace, since it is no longer available. I ended up using the modified Pioneer as a transport. Much to my amazement, it turned out to be some of the very best sound I'd ever heard, period! Unfortunately, I thought I would be upgrading the modified Pioneer unit by ordering another transport, based on rave reviews in *STEREOPHILE*, and I did find someone interested in purchasing my cd player. My Musical Design player now gone, I attempted to make the best of this new transport - but to little avail. You don't know how much the transport affects the overall sound until you hear it for yourself! That d/a unit sounded NOTHING like it did with the Musical Design modified Pioneer cd player used as a transport. My stomach sank to the floor, and this after all that effort to check out processors, etc., before making a purchase. First of all, I had no idea the transport could make THAT big a difference. Second of all, it was stupid - to say the least - to go strictly by a review of a component when making a purchasing decision. And third, Musical Design apparently makes a superb transport, one that performs WAY beyond what one is likely to expect anywhere near the price; hell, I'll venture to say - based upon what I heard with the modified Pioneer player used as a transport - that Musical Design may be making one of the BEST transports out there, regardless of price! But the happy ending is that with Musical Design, one doesn't need to go by the reviews; one can try out the component at home for 30 days! I thought I had done it all, been through it all after 20 years of involvement with high-end audio, but I guess it was a case of *deja vu* all over again. Hopefully I have learned my lesson this time, which has come at a price, to be sure. Needless to say, I ordered a Musical Design transport to replace the player I had sold. S. Glick

Overcome with curiosity, Mr. Glick purchased a D-75B power amplifier about 2 weeks after we received the previous letter. His comments follow.

John Hillig of Musical Design must have access to a magic wand. It seems that every piece of audio gear he lays his hands on turns to, well, the audio equivalent of gold. Having been mightily impressed by his digital designs, I wasn't prepared for how blown away I'd be upon hearing his little D75B amplifier. Now, just to put things into perspective, I have owned at one time or another the following well-known amplifiers: B&K ST140, Audio Research D76B, Meitner STR50 and 55, Adcom GFA555, Audio Research Classic 60 (a great amp!), Classe DR15, Quicksilver GLA, and a Conrad Johnson MV50. As you can see, I have a love for tube equipment - although some tube amps can sound remarkably like solid state (not meant as a complement!) This INCREDIBLY inexpensive amp from Musical Design is probably the most impressive piece of gear I have come across in some time. I really did love what the Classic 60 could do to an audio signal, but it ran those output tubes to within inches of their lives, and I got tired of lugging that beast to my local repair shop. It also tended to sound a bit bright in the lower treble region (I HATE a bright sound..... there, you know my prejudice! The Meitner amps - no longer being made, the company itself being out of business - were very good for solid state, smooth, dimensional. And the GLA was also a good sounding little amp. But, none of the amps I've described - except maybe the Classic 60 (at \$3500!) impressed me as much as this D75B amp. It has all the virtues of tubes plus killer bass. Now I know we've heard that one a million times before, and there is usually a caveat of some sort well, there is none here. I just can't believe there is not a tube to be found anywhere in this amp! Everything I play through it sounds at least great, some things are downright startling. I was ready to play one familiar cd after another to put the amp 'to the test', but after a couple of cds, I was left to just sinking into the music - how humiliating! I thought I would find something not to like about this amp, but instead I just got sucked into the music! When has that happened to you before? Yeah, I'm keeping this amp but with Musical Designs' 30 day return policy, I could have returned it after finding something negative to report..... but I just fell in love with the damn thing! As I recently put it to John Hillig, at \$795 (shipped), this one is a 'no brainer'! S. Glick

Note: Mr. Glick does not live near a dealer We ask those living within 60 miles of a dealer, to visit them for demonstrations. Support your local dealer!

MUSICAL NEWS

Our Newsletter

MUSICAL DESIGN
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INSIDE: Belated April Fools issue, indispensable knowledge, more CD reviews