



# Grace Notes™

No. 14 • Fall 2002

Music & Audio News and  
Information from Gifted Listener Audio.

## What do you recommend?

The caller began this way. "What's the best speaker for the money? I'm thinking of getting back into my music and thought I'd upgrade my speakers. What do you recommend?" He went on to explain that sometime in the 80's he bought a stereo system but has recently begun reading the magazines and hearing about new devices and new formats, as well as the opportunity to watch movies at home. "It's a little overwhelming" he said. "I don't know where to start. Maybe I should get a new CD player instead. What's a good one cost?"

We get a hundred phone calls throughout the week, many from people we haven't met. This type is by far the most common. Unfortunately, it has no easy answer. Definitely not until we know something about you.

I'm reminded of a good customer from Bethesda (a stock broker) who, back in '94 while shopping for speakers, told me that people ask him what stocks to buy. He explained that without knowing the questioner he could provide no useful answer. He said he was impressed that we took the time to find out a little bit about him before zeroing in on any particular speaker. (I'm guessing we found the right pair because when we last spoke, he was still enjoying them.)

Who will use the system? What are your expectations? What do you listen to? How, when and how often do you listen? Do you want to upgrade all at once, or start with the most efficacious and grow into the perfect system? What do you have now that can be utilized? And probably the most telling: Why do you want to change? The audio equivalent of "Where does it hurt"? There are at least dozen more questions, and then a dozen more for each answer.

The point is that without knowing you and what you want, we can't help much. Sure, we can sell you something, but the more you talk, the better we can discern if it's the right something.

But we're biased, you say. You bet we are! On the next few pages, you'll read about new products on the market. Are they all the best? Well, I think they are all worth owning, just not by everyone. We are strongly biased because a lot of thought went into our selection and purchase. If there were a better purchase, we'd make it.

There is no shortage of magazine articles about A/V equipment. Unlike reviewers who know nothing about you and unlike well-meaning but maybe ill-informed friends and relatives, we have a very real stake in making good recommendations. It's our livelihood.

It's what we do. If we succeed, you come back and you tell your friends about us.

With that, I must take this opportunity to thank you for your patronage and for telling your friends. Looking back on nearly fifteen years in business, and the number of repeat customers and referrals, I sometimes like to think that we do OK by you. Even so, accept my invitation to write to me at my personal mailbox [GLAinc@att.net](mailto:GLAinc@att.net) and tell me how we might do better.

See you soon?

Tom Unger

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# Very Musical Evenings

*We hope you can join us!*

**W**ow! Have we got a couple of good ones for you this time! I sure hope you can make it. As usual, doors open at 7 PM. Music and talks begin around 7:30 and should be over by 9:00. Come by for some light refreshment. Chat up the experts. Get a jump on what's new. Hear some good sound and have all your questions answered.

It's free, but **reservations are required**, so please call ahead (703-818-8000, anytime) or email [GLAinc@att.net](mailto:GLAinc@att.net) to put your name on the list. I realize that it's way out in January, so if you'd like a reminder call later on, just say so. Either way, be sure to leave your phone number so we can contact you in case of inclement weather.

## LINN

*Thursday, January 16, 2003*

Hear from the company that continues its 30 year impact on our enjoyment of music (and motion pictures) in the home. Mr. Bill Livingston will visit from Scotland to tell you where the state of the art has been (the Sondek LP12), how it got where it is (the Sondeck CD12), and where it's going (Sondek ??). A tall order, but these folks have been around long enough to explain it all and do it from their unique perspective.

## BRYSTON

*Thursday, February 6, 2003*

Bryston of course is known for well-built electronics that sound good and last a lifetime. With the stunning array of new audio and home theater products introduced this year, I had to ask the company president **James Tanner** if he would travel from the great white north to talk with you. He thought it a great idea and accepted immediately; he said our old friend Mr. **Dana Carlson** would likely visit too.

# What's that you're playing?

**C**hances are you need only ask that question once, since we tend to play things we like over and over. So we always need a supply of new albums to keep things fresh. Here's the current hot rotation.

## Ella & Louis

You can't have enough Ella in your collection. *April in Paris, Cheek to Cheek, A Foggy Day, The Nearness of You*. If you're like me, the titles alone evoke unique feelings. This is Hi-Fi as Time Machine: hear these two greats at the peak of their talents singing some of the most classic of popular songs. Recorded in 1956 (and remastered in 2000). Fantastic!

## Dixie Chicks

### *Home*

The Beatles of Country Music? Yikes! That's strong! I can see the point though, but on a smaller scale. These three arrived on the scene with exemplary musicianship, harmonies, and songwriting skills, not to mention a sound so uniquely theirs that they have become tastemakers in modern popular music and find themselves with such wide appeal that their concerts fill arenas with fans from six to sixty. Personally, I think they are incapable of making an *amusical* sound. If you don't know what they're about, this all acoustic mix of traditional bluegrass and modern ballads is a good place to start. (It's available as a double LP too.) Sound on either format: B. Music: A+

## Louis Armstrong & Duke Ellington

### *The Great Summit | The Master Takes*

In 1961, I didn't know much about Duke and Louis, beyond an occasional appearance on the Ed Sullivan show. Now, I can appreciate the greatness of these two. Remastered in 2000, this CD collects 17 tracks from two albums, all written by Duke, and performed by a sextet led by Duke with Louis on vocals and trumpet. This is the most durably enjoyable album I've bought in years. I can't imagine ever tiring of it. Hope you like it too. Oh, and the sound earns definite A+.

## Norah Jones

### *Come Away with Me*

With the worldwide promotion behind this 22 year old pianist/singer/songwriter out of Texas, I doubt that anyone has not yet heard of her. Very warm, relaxed vocal stylings, but with something extra. I've heard it called "jazz with a Texas twist". I'm not sure that's right, but it is pretty and it's definitely mellow. I especially like her arrangement of Hank Williams' *Cold, Cold Heart*. The sound is decent too (B+) although a little shouty on the close-miked vocals now and then.

# New Arrivals

## The Strauss

New from Vienna Acoustics.

**S**o you loved the big Mahler. You're not alone. You're also not alone if you desired a more compact enclosure, or maybe a lower price. With the Strauss, you get both. I know, I know. You're thinking "But what do I have to give up to get this?" As you'll realize after a short listen, something, but not much. Not much at all. However, at \$6,000 for the pair, you will have some cash left over.

We got our pair in August and after fiddling with the placement for about an hour, I sat down to listen. It sounded so good, I didn't really feel like tweaking anymore. The Strauss has its woofers placed on the side, like the Mahler, in order to maintain the sonic benefits of a narrow front baffle. This means that reversing the L/R pair places the woofers in a different relation to room boundaries. I placed them Out and decided to worry about it later.

I called out the crew, Miles, Trisha, Vlad, Louis et al. and had them play or sing a little bit for me. Wow. This is nice, I thought. It does just about everything right this easily? The bass was a little out of kilter, not quite as rhythmic and punchy as I would like, but the vocals were so smooth and clear that I decided that I would deal with the bass later.

Next day Sumiko called (actually it was our long-time friend and speaker-tweaker, Bill Peugh) to ask if they arrived and how I liked them. Immediately, if not right away, he got to the \$64 question: Woofers in or woofers out? Hmmmm. He knows a little about me, doesn't he. He knew I hadn't tried it both ways yet. OK, so I got ambitious enough to make the swap. It's not hard to do, after all. The answer was immediate. The bass locked in, strong and tuneful. That's the way they've been ever since.

We have the Strauss set up with either the Ayre or Bryston electronics. The Bryston pair (BP25/4Bsst) exerts its control and shows the speaker to have the snap and sparkle that brings music to life. The Ayre combo, though lower in power, shows that the Strauss is capable of outstanding liquidity. Whichever is hooked up, it's really nice. I think you'll be taken by it as quickly as I.

Strauss seems easy enough to drive that I would try just about any decent amp it. If you are thinking about a speaker upgrade and would like to try the Strauss with your amp, just give a call and we'll arrange it.

## Klimax Kontrol

The Linear Preamp

**A**bout three years ago, I went on a rave about Linn's new Klimax amplifier, the 500 watt unit in the diminutive 20 lb. Package, the so-called Solo version. It's been all over the audio press since then, so you've probably read about it. If you haven't, come by and see it. You still have a treat in store for you. At \$19,000 for the pair, the Klimax is not for everyone, even if the sound is.

Since then, the new Klimax Twin arrived, two channels in the same package, lower power (2x125W/8Ω) less than half the price (\$8,950). Same pure sound.

And at last we have a preamp (or controller) of the same quality, the Klimax Kontrol. Housed in the same CNC machined billet aluminum chassis as the amps, and styled to match the face of the Sondek CD12, the Kontrol is strikingly handsome. Really. But how many times have we had our heads turned by a pretty face, only to be disappointed as soon as the first sound is uttered. At \$9,850 I expect more (a lot, really) and this time there is no disappointment.



Linn Kontrol

I've always held that the best components do nothing. (Oh no, you're thinking. Here he goes again on his components-that -do-nothing rant.) It's true though, don't you think? Good components have no effect on tonal purity; they preserve dynamic gradations, large and small, *without exaggeration*; they maintain phase relationships in the music without distorting them or shifting them in time. This last item is particularly important if we are to achieve both harmonic and rhythmic integrity. Harmonic integrity means that the timbre of each instrument or voice is correct, making it unmistakable as *that* instrument or *that* voice. Rhythmic integrity means that the timing and phrasing of the performers are reproduced correctly, tonal qualities of one note flow naturally into and prepare us for the next. This is vital if we are to sense forward motion in the music. Great musicians hear this

*Continued on page 4.*

# New Arrivals

*Continued from page 3*

inside before or as they play it. If our systems are doing their jobs, we get to hear what they played, the very soul of the music. We experience the greatness of great performances.

Other parts of the system have jobs to do: the CD or LP or DVD player is *making* the sound; the amps and speakers playback what was made and relate only to each other, oblivious to all that's going on around them. I know that's an oversimplification, but you get the point. In between is the preamp, and there is no better place in a system for a do-nothing component.

After about a week of warm up and several weeks of listening, my ears tell me this: the Linn Klimax Kontrol does very little, so to speak. Above all else, it is linear. There is no exaggeration of anything. Every instrument, every voice, day after day, record after record, sounds right. Not almost right. Not really right. Just right. In my estimation, it is one of only two or three preamps of which I would say this. If you've ever heard the Sondek CD12, you know it to be the sweetest, most well-rounded player extant. With the Kontrol in the system, I now hear that the CD12 is even better than I thought.

But the preamp is a very practical thing, you say. It's nice that it sounds good, but it has to do more. It must tie the system together and, with all the advances in recording, it must be able to adapt. You are correct, sir! And you'll be pleased to find that the Kontrol has all the I/O needed for any reasonable system today and will soon become even more versatile. It comes from the factory with both single-ended (RCA) and balanced (XLR) outputs. Thus it can connect to and properly drive any Linn or non-Linn amplifier. It has four inputs, one of them balanced. Each input can be named separately, and any of them can be set for unity gain (for buffered pass-through of external processors). The really cool thing that makes Kontrol a long-term keeper is its ability to grow into a multichannel controller. Linn will soon introduce the switching extender, controlled via the RS232 port, which will add additional inputs to be used in pairs or configured for six-channel switching. If you are looking forward to multi-channel audio, such as that promised by DVDA or SACD, you realize how important this extension will become.

Whatever you are looking forward to, if you can see a component like this in your system, talk to us about your application. Or of you like, check out [www.linn.co.uk](http://www.linn.co.uk) for more details and maybe some reviews. Then come in for a listen and, if it's something you think would fit, do what I did. Arrange to take it home for the weekend.

## The Great White North

The Bryston Boys have been busy.



9Bsst

What's the deal with these Canadians? We never hear much about them. Just when we think they are quietly going about their days herding moose or collecting buffalo chips for the next hockey game, we find out they've been in the lab working overtime on some of the highest tech, highest quality electronics made today.

For over 30 years, Bryston has been quietly making robust, good sounding gear that stands the test of time. The weird part is that probably half of all Brystons (I'm guessing) are used professionally, say for sound reinforcement or recording studio applications. I don't know of another company that has succeeded on both the pro side and consumer side of the hi fi chain. Usually, the big power and ruggedness that pros require obviates the sweet, clean, detailed sound that people like us demand. Somehow Bryston seems able to keep us all happy, especially this past summer with a wave of new gear. If you haven't visited in a while, this is a good time to do it.

Among the new arrivals was the first of the new "B" series of amplifiers, including new high power multichannel amps that are perfect for the best home theaters. All have been revised for cleaner, higher power, and with additional input controls to handle just about any configuration.

The most famous of the B's, the venerable 4B is now the **4Bsst**. This is the famed two channel amp, now rated at 300W per channel (though all come through with individual test reports indicating higher actual power). At \$2,795 it is still remarkably priced for this level of quality in today's world of high end audio. For the same quality with a little less power you might use the **3Bsst** (2x150W, \$2,095).

# New Arrivals

If you need more channels, you have some choices. The **9Bsst** (\$4,295) is rated at five 120W channels. If you have a larger room or speakers that require more, you can have the same 300W for each of your three front channels with the **6Bsst** (\$4,295).

If you're alarmed at the variety of system controllers on the market, don't be. I know, everyone seems to be making a surround sound preamp and everyone claims that theirs is the best and the one that does everything now and in the future. While nothing made by man will ever be future proof, Bryston has done pretty well with their new system controller. With its multitude of inputs and outputs, its state of the art internal processing and its programmability, I think it will hold up. I'm certain that it is adaptable to any configuration one might imagine for the foreseeable future.

The **SP1.7** (\$4,295) now handles every input type and decodes every signal type commonly available in home applications. Fortunately, it is not designed to be merely a gadget laden box. Its understated appearance belies the sophistication inside. And it retains that pristine sound quality that Bryston preamps are known for.

In addition to all the varieties of Dolby Digital and DTS decoding, its internal DACs will decode, beautifully, either CD or 24 bit/96 kHz audio.

The SP1.7 even has an analog bypass mode (either 2 channel or 6 channel) in which case it is the BP25 preamp. If you've heard the BP25, then you know what a good thing that is.

And not just for those of us who listen to CDs or LPs. Note that it contains a six channel bypass mode too. So, if and when the powers that be get multichannel audio right (or even finished) the SP1.7 can handle that too. Check out all the details at [www.bryston.ca](http://www.bryston.ca) or just come by and see them. We usually have two or three models around at all times. Available now, in black or silver, 17" or 19" face.



SP1.7

## Analog Adikt

Last weekend I pulled out a couple of old Fleetwood Mac albums. I hadn't played these in a while and was surprised how good one of them was (*Rumours*) and how bad the other was. The sound was so clean and dynamic on the good one and the surfaces so quiet, that I wondered for a moment if we've made much progress at all since 1976. Have you played that old vinyl recently? There may be more to it than just "old vinyl".

Years ago you sprang for the good table, maybe a Rega or the Linn Sondek, because it played your records better than anything else. You wisely kept the cost down by opting for a low cost arm and pickup. Wise, since the rotating table itself is the source of all the sound—the pickup is merely responding to the passing groove. However, if you're still using that old Grado or Linn K5 or K9, here's a way to freshen up the sound. You may even remind yourself just how good those records sounded.

The new Adikt (\$350 installed) pickup is a moving magnet (i.e. normal/high output) pickup cartridge that is compatible with every Linn and Rega arm ever made. Crisp, clean, ever so slightly warm and rounded, not quite as snappy as the best moving coils, but without that fake, irritating rising top end of cheap moving coils. We've installed one on an Akito II arm on the LP12 in the front room. If you want to check it out, grab a favorite album or two and come by. We'll clean them up on the Nitty Gritty and give them a spin under the Adikt. You'll see what I mean.



Adikt

"Take seriously your responsibility as a listener. All of us, professional and laymen alike, are striving to make our understanding of the art more profound. You need be no exception, no matter how modest your pretensions as a listener may be. ...Music can only be really alive when there are listeners who are really alive. To listen intently, to listen consciously, to listen with one's whole intelligence is the least we can do in the furtherance of an art that is one of the glories of mankind."

—Aaron Copland, *What to Listen For in Music*

# Was/Is Sale.

*A good collection of demonstrators, trade-ins, overstock items,  
and other great final markdowns. Cash prices shown.  
Warranties vary by unit.*

		Was	Is
Ayre V3a 2x100W	(U)	3,750	1,850
Ayre V5 2x150W	(D)	3,950	2,950
Goldmund Mimesis 10C D/A	(D)	13,000	3,925
Goldmund Mimesis 9/A2 2x175W	(U)	11,900	4,950
Linn AV5105 2x100W Amplifier	(D)	1,995	1,295
Mark Levinson No. 383 Integrated	(D)	6,500	4,995
Mark Levinson No. 335 2x250W Amp	(D)	8,400	6,750
Panasonic 34" Widescreen HDTV	(D)	2,850	2,290
Pioneer CTF-900 3 Head Cassette	(U)	600	150
Pioneer RT-707 4 Hd/4 Trk R-R Deck	(U)	700	250
REL Stadium III Subwoofer Cherry	(D)	2,950	2,450
Thiel CS1.5 Walnut	(U)	2,190	1,190
Transparent Bal Music Link Ultra 25'	(D)	2,450	1,450
Transparent Music Wave Reference	(D)	5,500	3,350
Transparent Music Wave Ultra	(D)	2,500	1,495
Vienna Acoustics Maestro Rosewood	(U)	1,200	750
Vienna Acoustics Bach	(D)	1,500	1,195

N: New D: New/Demonstrator U: Pre Owned

# Coming Soon

## Marantz DV-8300

### Can one machine do it all?

**H**ow nice it is to have dedicated machines to play every format. Let's see. I need a record player, a CD player, a DVD player, a DVD-A player, an SACD player, a multi-channel SACD player, maybe even one to play those MP3s my daughter burned onto a CD with her computer. Good grief. This could get complicated. And expensive!

Fortunately, Marantz is about to introduce a single machine that will play it all, as well as CDR and DVD-R. The new DV-8300 (\$1,450) should be here by the time you read this. Let me rephrase that: it ought *still* be here by that time. I haven't heard it yet. If it sounds good, it will stay. But Marantz does have a pretty good reputation in this area, and we've had good results with their top SACD players, so I'm optimistic.

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