



» **WE HAVE A 3D TV WINNER**
Panasonic's Theater-Quality 3D Plasma
» **PAGE 48**

» **THIN AND FABULOUS**
Def Tech's Super Mythos Speakers
» **PAGE 56**

HELP THE GULF
... By Purchasing This Issue
» **SEE PAGE 8 FOR DETAILS**

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the home entertainment authority

Apps For Us

How to Control Your Gear with iPads, iPhones & iPods » **PAGE 24**

» BUDGET ACOUSTICS

Setting Up a Great-Sounding Room for Under \$250 » **PAGE 36**

EXCLUSIVE

The S+V Interview:
Jakob Dylan
on the Merits of Vinyl
and the Secrets of Sequencing
» **PAGE 42**



Savant's Rosie 4i App: An Apple-Friendly Multiroom Controller

*** Plus**

Your Toughest 3D TV Install Qs Answered

» **PAGE 18**

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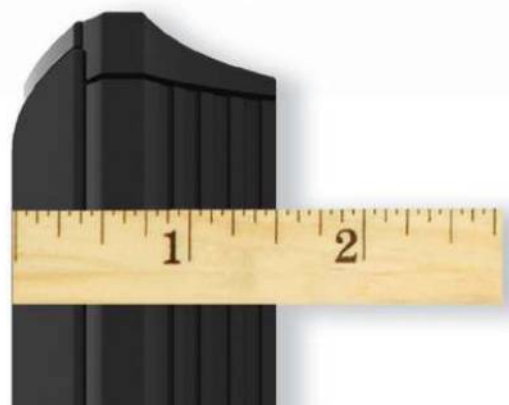
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Panasonic DOES IT ALL

BRINGING HOME HIGH PERFORMANCE IN BOTH 2D AND 3D

A *Avatar*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Toy Story 3* are among the blockbuster 3D movies that brought audiences in record numbers into movie theaters in 2010. 3D movies have been around since the 1950s. Do any of you remember *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*? But now we are seeing the evolution of 3D from the movie house to the consumer's home. 3D television is poised to make a major impact on the entertainment landscape, and as more 3D content becomes available, the next frontier in home entertainment will provide the consumer with very high performance. In addition, the technology developed by Panasonic to insure Full HD 3D with no crosstalk and to provide

immersive 3D programming has the added benefit of improving an already excellent 2D Plasma picture. In order to assure the pristine 3D picture quality, Panasonic engineers were challenged to develop a Plasma TV with a very fast refresh rate. This was accomplished by developing new technologies such as faster-acting phosphors. An added bonus to this revolutionary technology is that in the 2D mode the Panasonic VT25 Plasmas improve the already-outstanding motion resolution and reduce phosphor lag. Resolution remains 1080 lines regardless of whether the image is static or in motion.

This terrific 2D picture was recently recognized by the influential CNET site and prominent analyst Rob Enderle, both of whom praised the VT25's state-

of-the-art 2D picture quality. Enderle selected the VT25 Full HD 3D as his product of the week. "Panasonic has done the most to eliminate glare and assure the quality of the video image for both 2D and 3D content," wrote Enderle. "This is important, because if you are buying a TV this year, you are buying it for 2D, not 3D, given there is very little non-gaming content yet. In short, you don't buy a TV this year for 3D, you buy for 2D—and this line is great for 2D, with 3D being a potential plus." The VT25 Plasma series is Panasonic's top of the line and as such also includes features like Panasonic's internet solution, VIERA CAST, VIERA Image Viewer, allowing the consumer to view digital still images and HD video recorded



on a SD memory card, and it is THX certified. The Full HD 3D series is Energy Star qualified. For 2010, the

**PANASONIC PROMISES
TO BE IN THE VANGUARD
IN CREATING THE
ULTIMATE IMMERSIVE 3D
IN-HOME EXPERIENCE.**

VIERA CAST functionality has added Netflix, Twitter and Skype connectivity. The Skype application allows the user

to employ the communication service on a large-screen TV, rather than a smaller computer screen. Panasonic also produces an optional communication camera that increases the field of vision during the call. Another outstanding feature of the VT25 series is the inclusion of two USB ports, enabling the viewer to use a wireless keyboard.

Moviegoers have proven the viability of 3D, and Panasonic promises to be in the vanguard in creating the ultimate immersive 3D in-home experience. Panasonic's Full HD 3D system is an end-end solution, from Blu-ray authoring at its Panasonic Hollywood Laboratory facility to its 3D Blu-ray Disc players to the VT25 Plasma TV that preserves the resolution, stability, color rendition and contrast

of the best 1080p Blu-ray content, all in eye-popping digital 3D. Whether watching content from a Blu-ray Disc, cable, satellite, over-the-air broadcast or experiencing one of the myriad 3D video games, Panasonic is committed to offering the finest home-3D experience—one that will fulfill the promise of high definition, helping create worlds of unimaginable clarity and depth. And, the 2D picture is as good as it gets.

Panasonic ideas for life

Panasonic.com/3D



FEATURES

24 MISSION: CONTROL

By Daniel Kumin

PLUS...

31 MUST-HAVE HOME THEATER APPS

32 iPad APPS FOR MULTIROOM MUSIC AND WHOLE-HOUSE CONTROL

34 FURNISH YOUR iPad

36 DIY ROOM TUNE-UP

Recent advances in acoustics can help you set up a great-sounding room for the cost of a decent Blu-ray player (i.e., under \$250); here's how to do it

By Brent Butterworth

42 JAKOB DYLAN'S EAGLE EARS →

The noted singer/songwriter on the joys of listening to vinyl and the lost art of sequencing

By Mike Mettler

DEPARTMENTS

08 TRACK ONE

iAdopter

By Mike Mettler

12 FEEDBACK

Readers sound off about 5.1 music, Blu-ray concerts, 3D, and acquisitionism!

14 THE TECH ZONE

Ken C. Pohlmann rounds up some cool new products, including a Mitsubishi 82-inch 3D DLP projection TV and, from Leon Speakers, an Audiophile Living Space Theater System

PLUS Tech Bites: Tablets R Us

EXPERTISE

18 THE CUSTOM INSTALLER

John Sciacca senses your 3D TV install issues, and he's here to help

20 GADGET GARY

Gary Dell'Abate reviews the Sony DASH personal Internet viewer

22 Q&A

Al Griffin answers your questions about 3D glasses, stereo vs. surround listening, and what's up with 7.1 Blu-ray releases

92 THE FINAL CUT

Ken C. Pohlmann on what comes after the iPad

ON THE COVER

iCONTROL FOR ALL



Contents continues on page 6 »



PHOTO BY JAMES MINCHIN

Powered by music



3D PICTURE

3D SOUND

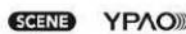
HEART RATE



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TEST REPORTS

68



48



80



ENTERTAINMENT

Transformers: War for Cybertron
for Xbox 360



THE PAPER USED FOR THIS MAGAZINE COMES FROM CERTIFIED FORESTS THAT ARE MANAGED IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY TO MEET THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

ON THE WEB THIS MONTH

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Herewith, a Transducer Quartet from "10 Strikingly Beautiful Speakers"

Cremona Elipsa, \$12.8K



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METTLER'S CHOICE THIS MONTH

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I, iAdopter

Enthusiasts cast a wary eye at the iUniverse – and we like what we see.

You know, it's no accident why we're called enthusiasts. We're intense. We're passionate. We love technology, gear, and all the software that goes with it. Whenever "what's next" arrives, we're right on top of it.

Well...

Let me clarify that: We *used to be* right on top of it. There was a slight paradigm shift for us early adopters when the high-def format wars erupted almost 5 years ago. Scores of **S+V** readers took a stand and said, "Nope, I'm waiting this one out." Wow! Waiting this one out? Hardcore early adopters had drawn their line in the sand.

Since then, we discerning enthusiasts have approached “the next big thing” with an increasingly wary eye. Now, make no mistake: We *want* to embrace what’s next. We want to wallow in and be enveloped by it, in

lines, making the CE world safe for whatever comes next.

Which brings us to the wide world of Apple. Of course, much actual and virtual ink has already been spilled discussing the relative merits and demerits of the latest iterations of the iPhone and the upstart iPad before we've really had our say. But we are not a news mechanism, and have never pretended to be. Our approach to products that begin with a lowercase i is simple: What's in it for us? Will there be enough CE apps worthy of an enthusiast's recurring swipe?

Answer: Oh yes. We unleashed Daniel Kumin on four universal-remote-control apps in "Mission: Control," page 24. Elsewhere in that story, Al Griffin delves into some great home theater apps and John Sciacca surveys the top iPad apps for multiroom music and whole-house control. So yes, fellow en-



We enthusiasts approach "the next big thing" concept a bit differently now. The pendulum has swung from "I gotta be first" to "It's gotta be worth my time and energy." But we have been duly rewarded for patience.

fact. But the bottom line has swung from "I gotta be first" to "It's gotta be worth my time and energy."

Result: Our tempered enthusiasm has been rewarded by the continuing maturity of the Blu-ray Disc format. And while it's still in ramp-up mode, it looks like 3D TV is following suit; check out technical editor Al Griffin's review of Panasonic's 3D plasma on page 48 as an example. Brief sidebar: I watched some of the World Cup in 3D on ESPN 3D and saw the inherent promise for live sporting events — even if the ESPN 3D logo was practically bumping up against my glasses. If NBC were to broadcast in 3D the 2011 Bridge-stone NHL Winter Classic game wherein the Pittsburgh Penguins host the Washington Capitals at Heinz Field on New Year's Day . . . I. Am. So. There.

But anyway.

Even with the caveats, it's hard to shake the "be first" gene. I mean, it's in our blood. And we should be out there on the front-

thusiasts, feel free to dive into the iPool for many of your CE needs.

And, as you may have gathered, an **S+V** iPad app will be coming your way soon, so stay tuned. i, er, I can't wait to share it with all of you. **SV**

GULF NOTES: As mentioned on this issue's cover, our parent company Bonnier will donate 10 cents towards the Gulf-cleanup efforts for each copy of selected issues of **S+V**, *American Photo*, *Popular Science*, *Science Illustrated*, *Popular Photography*, *Saveur*, *Parenting*, *Surf*, *Boating*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Wakeboarding* sold at the newsstand, up to a total contribution of \$10,000.

Still watching, still listening...

Mike

Mike Mettler
Editor-In-Chief

OUR APPROACH
TO iPRODUCTS
IS SIMPLE: WILL
THERE BE ENOUGH
MEATY CONSUM-
ER ELECTRONICS
APPS WORTHY OF
OUR **RECURRING
SWIPE?**



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The Multichannel-Music Brigade

Enjoyed your summer print issue (June/July/August) with its special emphasis on Tom Petty and the 5.1 mix of his new album with the Heartbreakers, *Mojo* — plus the review of *The Chicago Transit Authority* in quad! The suffering record companies need to realize that a market *does* exist that will return profits to them: multichannel music. Sure, DVD-Audio and SACD have had limited success in the States, but Blu-ray Disc offers an established and uniform standard.

Rhino Handmade should be congratulated for seeing \$\$\$ in reissuing quad titles on DVD. Now, let's really open the vault: Janis Joplin's *Pearl*, Simon & Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, Santana's *Abraxas*, and the holy grail of quad, Ten Years After's *A Space in Time*. Keep going, Rhino!

John R. Heffernan | Charlotte, NC

Entertainment Editor Ken Richardson
replies: Seems that Rhino has indeed de-

cided to keep going. Since our last issue, it announced that its next quad transfer will be *The Best of Aretha Franklin*. To keep tabs on the label's reissues, go to rhino.com/handmade. By the way, in the archives here at **Sound+Vision**, we have an original copy of *A Space in Time* on Columbia SQ quad LP, and it's a kick to read the inner sleeve after

all these years, touting the format's "unlimited new creative possibilities." Here's to all surround-format possibilities, *again*. ●

I'd just like to thank you guys for keeping the surround-music flag flying here in the 2010s. It seems that while most other media voices have abandoned it, you've kept your readers informed of current 5.1 releases by Steven Wilson, Porcupine Tree, King Crimson, Tom Petty, Chicago, and more, which otherwise might have totally slipped past those readers. It's hard to sell something when no one knows about it.

There are many fallacies concerning surround music. "I only have two ears." "You have to sit in one place to listen." But for those of us who appreciate hearing both familiar and new music opened up for a more detailed listening experience, it's something that leaves us wanting more.

Hopefully, we'll see more artists like Wilson and Petty — along with label efforts like Rhino Handmade's series of Quadrio [formerly Quadradisc] reissues on DVD — sparking a resurgence in multichannel music. And remember: Although DVD-A and SACD failed in the marketplace (for many reasons), both are still fine formats and remain viable in new universal players from Oppo and Denon.

The strange thing is that, in 2010, there are more surround systems in homes and cars than at any other point in the history of music — yet there's so little multichannel music available for sale to play on those systems. Maybe at some point, The Powers That Be will figure that out.

By the way, I'm the board operator at quadrasonicquad.com, a discussion group about surround sound. This is a free site with no ads, no donation requests, no Amazon links, etc. I'm only in it for the surround!

Jon Urban | Columbia, CT

Plasma, LCD, 3D — I could care less. I don't need to see the beard grow on the lead actor: I want to hear it. I am all for the *sound*.

Back in the 1970s, when quad appeared, only the audiophiles truly appreciated it. No one else wanted four speakers in their listening room, especially the big speakers

of the time. All that changed with movie surround and smaller speakers.

I have a collection of DVD-Audio discs that I listen to instead of the CDs. *Sinatra at the Sands* never sounded so good.

From Bach to Santana, surround is the way to go. If it will take Blu-ray to bring more of it into my home, so be it.

Richard J. Mann | Lockport, NY

Blu-ray Concert Reviews?

You guys review movies, TV shows, and albums on various formats, but there's never a mention of concerts on Blu-ray Disc. Jeff Beck's *Performing This Week . . . Live at Ronnie Scott's*, Chris Botti's *In Boston*, Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds's *Live at Radio City* — each would seem to be more of a reference disc in both audio and video than a lot of the movies on Blu-ray. Sound quality is outstanding; the Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio formats really make a system shine.

Home theaters aren't just for movies. Let's make Blu-ray concerts the new audio/video platform!

Mike Huber | Cocoa, FL

Mike Huber | Cocoa, FL

Ken Richardson replies: Actually, we started reviewing concerts on Blu-ray in January 2007 with some of the very first releases, including U2's *Rattle and Hum*, the Band's *The Last Waltz*, John Legend's *Live at the House of Blues*, and the Pat Metheny Group's *The Way Up: Live*. Since then, as space has allowed, we've covered the Rolling Stones' *Gimme Shelter* and *Shine a Light* as well as titles from Nine Inch Nails, AC/DC, Queen, and ZZ Top — and, yes, the Matthews/Reynolds release. We do intend to keep reviewing live Blu-rays; see page 80! ●

Don and All Here in the Material World

As an aging audiophile and movie geek, I'm struggling with my ever-growing collection of gear and software, as Mike Mettler has similarly noted in two of his "Track One" editorials ("We, the Acquisitionalists," January, and "Living in the Material World," April/May).

Shortly after graduating from college in 1967, about the same time I started reading your magazine in a previous incarnation,

I went all out and spent \$150 on my first "hi-fi" gear, which I bought from Radio Shack. For my equipment rack, I used some cheap lumber, wood stain, and concrete blocks. While I've never quite gotten into the upper echelons of the high end, I've had very good components over the years, and (along with multiple Blu-ray players) I still have speaker towers, heavy amps, turntables, cassette decks — even an 8-track tape player!

Accordingly, I have nearly every audio and video software format ever manufactured in this country since about 1959. Yes, that means 45s, quad LPs, VHS tapes, laserdiscs, HD DVDs — even CD-3s! But I also have a well-stocked MP3 player, and I'm eyeing Kindles, iPads, and mega-terabyte storage.

However, I can't see ever giving up my newspapers, magazines, or books — or the enjoyment of slapping an old vinyl disc onto my 30-year-old Bang & Olufsen turntable.

Michael Oleson | Fort Worth, TX

As Mike Mettler stated in his April/May editorial, "we like collecting, hoarding, maintaining, and purchasing. But we also like progress, efficiency, and space reduction." I'm caught in the middle of those ideals. My two semi-efficient Sony CD jukeboxes are being replaced by the storage space on my PS3. As for my 400-disc DVD jukebox . . . I'm still not sure. Can I sell it all off and turn to Net-

Some of reader Don W. Holland's 4,500 LPs and 5,000 CDs — housed in his "therapy room."

flix when I want to watch something? I don't know if my materialism will let me. Years from now, will we be known as Generation Clutter? And if so, will we be able to move over to Generation Hard Drive? I'm trying.

Art Miles | Casselberry, FL

Mike Mettler's April/May editorial was very timely for me, since I am one who *refuses* to be dragged into "the seemingly unstoppable trajectory of technical advancement."

Recently, I found myself needing a new stereo receiver and was shocked to learn that most now come without a phono input. I love my vinyl and find it hard to let it go, especially when it includes an LP of the Beatles' original *Yesterday . . . and Today*, valued at \$500, and a 45 by Linda & the Vistas, valued between \$200 and \$300.

I still have an open-reel tape deck, which doesn't work because I can't find a part. I also have a Sony Betamax VCR that *does* work and has never needed repair.

Milt Hazzard | Baltimore, MD

So, I'm not alone in my almost lifelong search for another tune.

Initially, my system was audio/video. Today, I'm back to straight audio; the video stuff went away. It's always been the music I love. And what I've found is a never-ending supply of fantastic talent the world over, from Hawaiian to zydeco. As you can see from my photos, I will never have enough!

Don W. Holland | Palmer, AK

3D? Not PDQ

I've been an audio/video buff since I was a kid building Heathkits. Whenever a new technology came out, I was first in line: quad LP, laserdisc, CD, SACD, DVD, HD DVD, Blu-ray Disc. Within the last 3 years, I upgraded my main home theater to 11.2 channels with a 72-inch HDTV and, in my second home, installed a 9.2 system with a 55-inch TV.

Now comes 3D Blu-ray. Well, I guess I'm going to sit this one out at least a few years until all the kinks are gone, if the format still exists by then. After spending thousands of dollars already, I'm not in a hurry to get on the 3D bus.

Joel Shapses | Naples, FL

Corrections

Contrary to Tom Petty's memory (which is otherwise sharp), the JBL speakers in the 1978 photo of him on page 24 of our June/July/August issue should've been identified as LE8T 8-inch full-range transducers with PR8 passive radiators.

In the same issue's SXSW coverage, owing to conflicting info on the band's Web site, the bassist for the Dandies (page 35, top right) was misidentified. He is Adi Schroter.

And in "Q&A," both reader Bob Happel and responder Al Griffin were incorrect in saying that the Wii has an LAN jack. Rather, the console's main method of connecting to the Internet is Wi-Fi; the only other option is a USB-to-LAN adapter. In addition, the Linksys by Cisco WET610N wireless bridge has a single LAN jack, not multiple ports. **SY**



DON W. HOLLAND

Jumbotron

MITSUBISHI WD-82838 82-INCH
3D DLP PROJECTION TV



TRANSFORMING YOUR 3D VISION AT AN OPTIMAL SIZE

THE BIGGER Let's face facts: Unless your TV's screen is really, really big, you're just not happening. This new Mitsubishi's screen measures more than 6 feet wide, but there's more to a TV than its size. The WD-82838 is part of a line that offers 16-speaker "immersive sound," Bluetooth A2DP audio streaming, and a dedicated subwoofer output. It also supports the "side-by-side" 3D signal format and is compatible with 3D BD players that output the "checkerboard" format. Other players will require Mitsubishi's optional 3D adapter. (An outboard emitter and active shutter glasses are also required to view 3D images on Mitsubishi 838 Series TVs.)

THE BETTER Perhaps more important than its size is the television's media-streaming options. It can access Vudu movies, Pandora music, and Flickr and Picasa photos, along with Facebook and AP News. Other cool perks include USB wireless N network adapter compatibility and ISFccc advanced video adjustments. Mainly, though, it's really, really big.

\$4,499

» mitsubishi-tv.com

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LIVING SPACE THEATER SYSTEM

LETTUCE, PICKLES Who would have guessed that Ann Arbor, Michigan would emerge as a center of hand-built craftsmanship? In a world of mass-produced sameness, Leon Speakers build its products to order, one at a time. Among other advantages, this lets it customize the speakers' dimensions and finish to help them blend into your room. For example, my listening room walls are lime green and orange plaid, and Leon will match that, no problem. Amid a lengthy product lineup, the Horizon 414-X-A system caught my attention.

HOLD THE MAYO This 5.1 system com-

prises an H2414-LCR-XA (an LCR soundbar speaker), a pair of AX-61 in-ceiling closed-back speakers, and an A10-UT subwoofer and L3-1K subwoofer amplifier. The front combo has six 4-inch Peerless woofers and three 1-inch Morel MDT-29 tweeters. The ceiling speakers contain a 6½-inch woofer and 1-inch pivoting tweeter. The subwoofer has a 10-inch aluminum cone driver, and its amplifier cranks out 1,000 watts. Oh, and I was kidding about the lime green and orange plaid walls. Maybe.

»\$6,375 / leonspeakers.com





TAKE TWO AND CALL US IN THE MORNING

Before the iPad, the tablet computer market was a snoozefest. After the iPad, market researchers have been falling over themselves predicting spectacular growth. IDC (International Data Corporation) says the tablet market will increase sixfold in 4 years. Led by the iPad, tablet sales will reach 7 million this year and hit 46 million in 2014. Also, IDC estimates — perhaps too optimistically — that 57% of consumers plan to buy a tablet or e-reader in the next 3 years. So, the majority of you had better wake up and start buying stuff; you've got some serious market forecasting to live up to. — K.C.P.

More **TECH BITES** at
soundandvisionmag.com

AVATAR? CHECK! ↓

DENON DBP-2011UDCI BLU-RAY DISC PLAYER

POPCORN? CHECK! It's way past time for your DVD player to finally join your VHS recorder and cassette deck in the closet. (At night when you're asleep they play Texas hold 'em in there and actually have a terrific time.) What you need is a Blu-ray player — one like Denon's DBP-2011UDCI. Aside from a 10-point deduction for an overly complex model number, it has lots of cool stuff.

SILLY GLASSES? CHECK! The Denon's feature list is impressive: 3D

ready (after a firmware upgrade this fall) with HDMI v1.4a outputs; Netflix and YouTube video streaming; DLNA 1.5-certification for network audio/video/photo streaming; DivX HD+, MP3, and WMA playback; and 1 GB of onboard memory. And it will play virtually all optical media, including DVD-Audio and SACD discs. A player this good just can't flop.

» \$799 / denon.com



AMAZING GRACE →

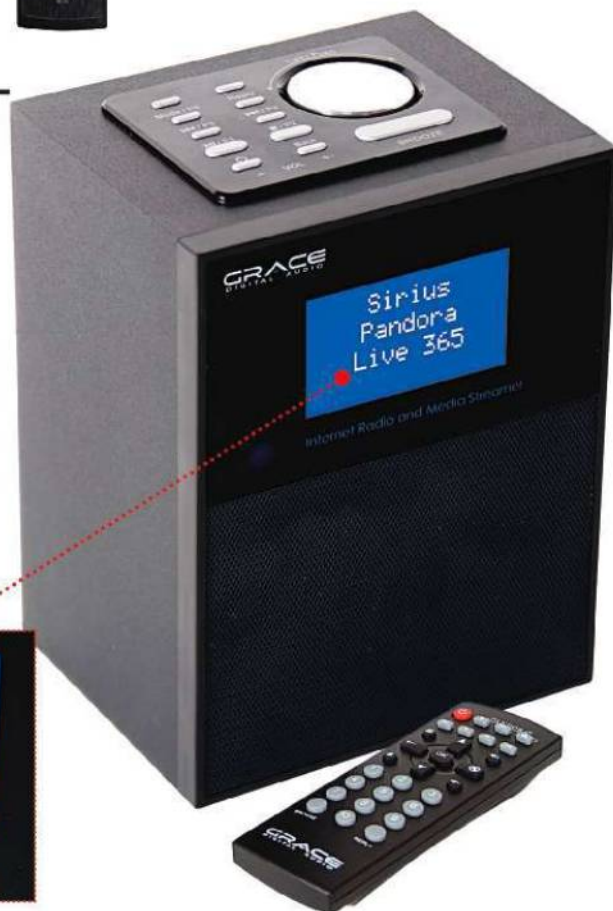
GRACE DIGITAL AUDIO ALLEGRO WI-FI RADIO AND STREAMER

HOW SWEET Your local AM/FM radio bands carry a few dozen stations. Satellite radio provides 200. Last time I counted, Internet radio has about a zillion stations worldwide. Unless you're the kind of person who freezes when confronted by too many choices, Internet radio could be something that you'd find interesting. Grace Digital Audio's new Allegro is ready to challenge your phobias.

THE SOUND The Allegro is a portable radio that provides alarm-clock functions as well as the all-important snooze button and runs on AC power or batteries. More important, it provides access to Pandora and other Internet music sites. You can also wirelessly stream stored audio files from your PC or Mac. A 4-line display and

presets help you navigate the vast expanse of the Web. For the record, Grace states that the Allegro can access more than 17,000 Internet radio stations, 20,000 on-demand programs, and 35,000 podcasts. That's practically a zillion!

» \$169 / gracedigitalaudio.com



DOCKING MANEUVERS

PIONEER AUDITION SERIES XW-NAS3-K IPOD/IPHONE DOCK



SITTIN' ON We're not sure what took Pioneer so long, but it's finally introduced a lineup of four iPod/iPhone docks. Of particular interest is the stalwart company's Audition Series XW-NAS3-K, a dock with a double-isolated frame that's said to decrease cabinet resonance and improve bass response. Also on-board are a digital amplifier, full-range speakers, a subwoofer, and composite- and component-video outputs.

for routing iPod/iPhone video to a TV.

THE DOCK OF THE BAY Along with its docking capability, the XW-NAS3-K is ready for wireless audio streaming. Just fire up a Bluetooth A2DP-equipped iPhone, iPod touch, Blackberry, or Android phone and you're good to go. (Well, right after you purchase Pioneer's optional AS-BT100 Bluetooth adapter for \$99). Long time coming, but worth the wait.

» \$449 / pioneerelectronics.com

CHOOSE LIFESTYLES

BOSE LIFESTYLE V35 HOME ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

OF THE RICH Where's Robin Leach when we really need him? He would certainly wax poetic over the new Bose Lifestyle V35, an upper-crust 5.1-channel kit designed to overcome the complexity of installing and using a home-theater system. Instead of an armada of buttons, the receiver has a sleek face and is armed with Bose's Unify intelligent integration system to help you set it up.

AND FAMOUS Despite its formidable name, the Unify system provides simple onscreen instructions

for connecting equipment and can sense when a connection is made. Likewise, it's easy to configure the Lifestyle's remote to control new sources. Bose's ADAPTiQ audio-calibration system automatically tunes the system for your room. The V35 system uses "jewel cube" satellite speakers (slightly larger – and cheaper – direct/reflecting models are also available) and a subwoofer module, and it has a dock for an iPod. As Mr. Leach used to say, "champagne wishes and caviar dreams."



» \$3,299 / bose.com

TWINKLE, TWINKLE LITTLE STAR

DREAMVISION STARLIGHT1 AND STARLIGHT2 HD PROJECTORS



HOW I WONDER Either you're a projector guy or you're not. While most folks just buy big TVs, projector guys, who tend to be

purists, aren't tempted by big glass. They know that to emulate the movie-theater experience at home you need to project the image. Projector guys also aren't tempted by familiar big-box names. They often seek out lesser-known companies for the latest in projector technology. Companies like DreamVision, and projectors like its Starlight1 and 2.

WHAT YOU ARE Each of these projectors sports a trio of 1,920 x 1,080-res LCoS panels. Contrast is rated at 32,000:1 (Starlight1) and 50,000:1 (Starlight2) – about double that of the company's previous models. Both Starlights are available with

an integrated Cinemascope mode that lets users switch between HDTV and ultrawide (2.35 - 2.40) projection when the projector is paired with the company's optional Cinemascope lens kits. In addition, the Starlight2 offers an advanced color management system for initial setup and calibration. Hang one of these on your ceiling, and it'll shine like a diamond in the sky.

» **Starlight1: \$6,995**

» **Starlight2: \$9,495**

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Demystifying 3D

Answers to some common 3D TV install questions.



My dad called me the other day. He had just rented *Avatar* and he wanted to know if I had seen it and if the version I watched was in 3D and why his wasn't. A client sent me an e-mail asking whether he could use a new 3D TV to watch regular, non-3D programming. Another client asked if his PlayStation3 would deliver full-resolution, 1080p 3D Blu-ray playback after the promised firmware update. Another client asked if the cabling we installed would support 3D. And another client asked...

You get the idea: 3D is confusing. Confusing enough to those of us in the business who do our best to keep up with it, but even more confusing to those on the sidelines trying to make smart buying decisions. While the 3D advertising blitz has done an amazing job of hyping this new technology and raising awareness, it seems to have done an even better job of making people unsure exactly how this extra dimension works. Clearly, people the world over are wondering just what 3D means and what they need

to make it work and enjoy it at home. Those of us in the custom-installation trade have found that 3D has raised other questions that we're being expected to answer.

One of the most important things that installers deal with is cabling, as in making sure that all of the cabling needed for now and — more important — the foreseeable future is in place. This is even more critical when running wiring through walls that won't be easily replaced. A large part of being able to watch 3D is choosing components — TV, Blu-ray Disc player, A/V receiver — that are compatible with the new HDMI 1.4 specification. However, you won't (or maybe more accurately you shouldn't) see the term "1.4" on any HDMI cable, which can actually confuse people looking to 3D-ify their systems. This is because the HDMI group discourages manufacturers from using any HDMI version number in their labeling or packaging going forward, starting with 1.4.

How do you know if your current cabling will work?

THE CUSTOM INSTALLER

JOHN SCIACCA

John began his career as a custom installer in 1998 at Custom Theater and Audio in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, where he still works. After he re-watched *Avatar* on Blu-ray in 2D (not as good) and saw *Toy Story 3* in 3D (love that Pixar!), his outlook on 3D's future has improved. He also blogs at johnsciaccia.webs.com, where he covers things decidedly off the beaten path.

Read more about John's adventures in CI at: soundandvisionmag.com/homeinstallation

The 3D Skinny

To take some of the confusion out of 3D, the short answers are: Yes, you need a new TV. Yes, you need to wear glasses. Yes, you need a 3D-capable Blu-ray player. Yes, you need a new A/V receiver (if you route video through it). Yes, your current HDMI cables will work if they reliably pass 1080p already. Cool? Cool.

As far as your cable is concerned, 3D is only a matter of bandwidth, and according to Michael Schaller, director of Kordz USA, if your existing cables reliably pass 1080p signals, you should be okay. This includes all of those homes that were wired with DVI cabling a few years ago, before HDMI exploded on the scene. So, yes, my friends, if you're using DVI — and get the appropriate DVI-to-HDMI adapters on each end — and you can view 1080p from your Blu-ray player, you can enjoy a 3D future.

When running new cabling, installing HDMI cables rated or labeled "High Speed," meaning they've been verified to perform at speeds up to 340 MHz or 10.2 Gbps, would be best. Future-looking installers should also consider running conduit and/or additional Cat-5/6 wire runs to accommodate any future, higher-bandwidth needs, especially to areas where a future retro would be a difficult or even impossible scenario. Another consideration is that as bandwidth diminishes over distance, choosing cabling with bandwidths exceeding 10.2 Gbps for runs ex-

ceeding 10 feet can offer added insurance.

Another issue has been the caliber of components available that support 3D, specifically surround-sound receivers. While the receiver isn't doing anything special for 3D, it needs to be HDMI 1.4-compliant in order to pass the video signal through it on to the TV. And if you want to enjoy the benefits of next-gen audio formats like Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio — and trust me,

To enjoy 3D now, choose components compatible with the HDMI 1.4 spec.

you do! — then running the audio through the receiver is required. Unfortunately, the first batch of HDMI 1.4-capable A/V receivers have been much lower-end than the models typically employed by custom installers, with most selling in the \$500 range. (Onkyo recently announced a slate of upper-end, higher-performing THX-certified models that will hopefully trigger more to come from other manufacturers.) This has meant that

clients wanting to enjoy step-up features like better amplification and signal processing have had to do it at the expense of no 3D. One terrific solution to this dilemma would be using a Blu-ray Disc player like Panasonic's DMP-BDT350. This player features two HDMI outputs — a 1.4-capable out for the 3D video to the TV and a 1.3 out to send high-resolution audio to any receiver or processor — making it a perfect problem solver.

Even more problematic is what faces anyone planning on using a housewide HDMI video-distribution system. These rely on a video-distribution device called a matrixer, which allows a given number of inputs to be routed to a given number of outputs. However, manufacturers have yet to develop a 1.4-compatible model, meaning that the 3D video won't pass through the signal chain.

One of the fun parts of being a custom installer is solving problems. And while 3D has certainly turned out some master-level Sudoku challenges along the way, its potential of cool things to come should make it worth all the effort. **SV**

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Feast on Sony's mesmerizing personal viewer.

Actually, the biggest issue for me was where to *put* the Dash. I already love my alarm clock, and since I get up so early and am so rushed once I'm on the move, I spend very little time in my bedroom. I considered a kitchen locale but eventually settled on my home office, where the unit sits right next to the computer on my desk. "But Gary," I can already hear you asking, "that seems like an odd place for it since you can find anything on the Dash on your computer, can't you?" True, but this arrangement works for me because the screen is constantly scrolling and giving me info and updates; I don't have to do it myself. News, sports scores, weather, headlines — it's like

Whether it's using the Dash for my vital needs (headlines, time, weather) or for more fun and frivolous uses (like the polar bear camera at the zoo or the 24-hour camera on Times Square), I'm digging my Dash. 

1,500 (or so) widgets at your fingertips, no waiting



1 How do you play the riff to "Smoke on the Water" again...? And what about "Sweet Child O' Mine"? Dial 'em both up on the Dash and let your fingers do the jamming. **2** Organize your mail, favorite video services, and top tunes, then scroll, scroll away... **3** Weather on the 8s – quite literally – plus putting the alarm-clock function to good use for a San Diego wake-up call. (What, I can't sleep in any later than that?)

GARY DELL'ABATE



Read more about Gary and his love for gadgets and gear at soundandvisionmag.com/gadgetgary

Bass

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Have a question about audio, video, or home theater for technical editor Al Griffin? Send e-mail to feedback@soundandvisionmag.com (and put "Q&A" in the subject line) or regular mail to Q&A, Sound+Vision, 2 Park Ave., 10th floor, New York, NY 10016. Please include your name, e-mail address, street address, and phone number for verification; only your name, city, and state/country will be printed in the magazine. Only questions chosen for publication can be answered. All letters are subject to editing.

The Outer Limits

Thoughts on 3D glasses, 7.1 Blu-ray, and more

Powered vs. Passive 3D

Q I'm sure this has been asked before, but for those of us who missed it, why do the new 3D TVs require powered glasses, whereas 3D movies in theaters look awesome with just the polarized ones?

Gary Spadoni | Orange, CT

Gary Spadoni | Orange, CT

A The reason for the different glasses is that 3D movie projection systems use different technologies from 3D LCD and plasma TVs. Most (but not all) 3D movie theaters are outfitted with a RealD system that displays 3D images using circular polarization technology. Filters placed over the projector's lens switch the polarity of light passing through it (in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction, hence the term "circular") in sync with the sequentially projected left/right images. Since the switching takes place at the projector end, theatergoers only require inexpensive passive polarized glasses to ensure that each eye takes in the corresponding left/right image bouncing off the screen.

With 3D LCD and plasma TVs, on the other hand, left/right images are simply displayed in sequence on the set's screen; no polarization is used. That's why you need the battery-powered eyewear, the lenses of which "shutter" in sync with the left/right pictures being displayed. One downside to the active-shutter approach is that one eye is always in the dark (the liquid-crystal material in each lens sequentially twists and untwists to block out light so that each eye sees only the image intended for it), so perceived image brightness is reduced. Then again, TV pictures are inherently brighter than those in movie theaters, so things pretty much equal out.

Stuck in Stereo

Q I'm in a quandary. I have a very good home theater setup and I really enjoy surround sound. However, I also have a huge classical music collection (LPs, CDs, DVDs, and Blu-rays). Right now, my system is hooked up so that if there's no surround sound on the recording, only my two front B&W 802 speakers play the music. In your opinion, do you prefer all six speakers delivering music or just the two fronts? All of my speakers are very good, and there's no weak link.

Jesse Joseph | via e-mail

Q&A

AI prefer to listen to music in surround whenever possible, and am quick to recommend the practice to others – especially someone with a high-end speaker rig like yours. A/V receivers and preamp/processors usually contain various processing modes that can derive surround information from a stereo source, letting you spread the sound to all speakers in your system. Some manufacturers also offer proprietary stereo-to-surround modes. (I'm partial to the Anthem Logic modes in Anthem's line of preamp/processors, which create a subtle yet satisfying sound-field expansion.) Of the "licensed" processing modes, the big three are Dolby Pro Logic IIx, DTS Neo:6, and SRS Circle Surround II. For listening to music with any of these, you'll want to first select the Music (as opposed to Movie or Game) option and configure any related settings for your particular setup.

7.1 Shortage

Q I've come across only two Blu-ray Discs that were mixed with more than 5.1 channels of audio: *The Orphanage* and *Pan's Labyrinth*. Both have DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 soundtracks. Why aren't more movies mixed in 7.1, which is the optimal format for home theater? Isn't that the whole point of Blu-ray?

Mike Caparula | Hoopeston, IL

A I fielded a similar question 2 years ago; at that time, approximately 20 Blu-ray titles with 7.1-channel soundtracks existed. Checking the Technical Stats page on the Blu-ray Stats Web site (blu-raystats.com), a useful resource for disc collectors, it looks like that number has since grown to 168. (About 85% of these have DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 soundtracks, with the remainder spread evenly between Dolby TrueHD and multichannel linear PCM.) From 20 to 168 titles in 2 years: That's an okay jump, especially when you consider that virtually all soundtracks you experience in theaters – well, good theaters, at least – are presented in 5.1. (They need to be remixed in 7.1 from the original 5.1 soundtrack elements for a movie's Blu-ray release). However, the recent theatrical release of *Toy Story 3* – the first flick to take advantage of Dolby's new Dolby Surround 7.1 theater-sound format – could potentially mean more Blu-ray titles with Dolby TrueHD 7.1 soundtracks. It's about time! **SV**

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Mission: Control

Reviewed by DANIEL KUMIN



↑ Fab Four

1 The simplest of the four solutions, iGot-It works on a “components” model: you identify components from onscreen lists and make selections via the iPhone’s selector wheel.

2 Among the most potent and flexible of the apps tested here, RedEye uses metaphors of Rooms, Devices, and Activities to take on A/V system control.

3 RedEye takes a different approach than the other iMotes by placing its IR transmitter in a tabletop base that also doubles as a charging stand.

4 FLPR is organized purely along device lines, with a generous selection of component types and brands, including less quotidian names, to choose from during setup.



1 i-Got-Control
Reviewed on
page 26



2 Rē
Reviewed on
page 27



3 FLPR
Reviewed on
page 28



4 RedEye
Reviewed on
page 29

↓ iPad Apps for Multiroom Music and Whole-House Control



Check out our roundup of advanced media-server and home-control apps designed specifically for the iPad.

Page 32

Our search of the iTunes Store reveals four sophisticated apps designed to turn your iPhone or other Apple device into a universal remote control.

Like some 40 million other people, I love my iPhone. It's always with me, serving as everything from trail-finder to stock ticker to guitar tuner to, occasionally, mobile phone. While fumbling in the dark with the minimum three or four remote controls that my ever-shifting A/V system requires just to watch a movie, I've often wondered if there was "an app for that."

The answer is at least a half-dozen apps designed to turn an iPhone (or iPod Touch or iPad) into a powerful universal remote handset, or iMote, have been launched upon a sea bobbing with some 100,000-plus other apps. But first, some of you ask, "What's an app?" (Perhaps you've just returned from an extended vacation in Bishkek.)

Apps are small, specialized software applications — the 100,000-plus number grows by some hundreds every day — designed to run on Apple's iPhone/iPod touch/iPad hardware. Since the iPhone/iPod touch/iPad is in fact a remarkably powerful and versatile touchscreen computer, apps perform tasks as varied as gaming, GPS navigation, social networking, scientific measurement, music making, and anything else you've imagined doing on a computer — and a great deal you probably haven't imagined. Apps get downloaded from Apple's iTunes Store, pretty much just as the latest opus by Lady Gaga does. Lots of apps are free, some cost just a dollar or two, and a few cost more than that.

Now, when it comes to the iPhone/iPod touch/iPad (I'm going to use simply "iPhone" from here on to represent all three), it doesn't take a genius to see that this device would make an irresistible touchscreen controller for just about any A/V system. Trouble is, the iPhone doesn't

transmit infrared (IR) signals, the sort that virtually all TVs, receivers, Blu-ray Disc players, and other audio/video components use for remote control. What the iPhone does talk is Bluetooth (a short-range radio protocol, mostly used to link wireless headsets/controllers to cellphones) and wireless IP via Wi-Fi, the same standard your home network router, not to mention Starbucks and McDonalds, uses to connect wireless-ready laptop computers and other devices.

If all A/V components were IP-networked, the problem would be solved: The iPhone could talk to them directly over an existing wireless home network, an increasingly universal feature of middle-American life. Alas, most are not — though more and more A/V receivers are, and brands such as Pioneer are already offering their own free iPhone apps to control them directly. (See the Pio receiver review on page 64.) But that doesn't help the un-networked 99 percent.

Consequently, every maker of an A/V control app so far, including the four we've rounded up for review here, has opted for a hardware/software solution: The software is the app, and the hardware is a module that translates your thumb's wishes into IR codes your components can recognize. Functionally, none is very different from a conventional, hardware universal remote, whether aftermarket or packed with an A/V receiver. You set up each by loading the IR codes to match your particular gear, either from onboard or online databases, and the blanks left by any missing commands must then be "learned" from the original hardware remotes.

That's the common thread, but as we'll see, the patterns into which these makers have woven it are as varied as the carpets in the open-air markets back in Bishkek.

↓ i-Got-Control

i-Got-Control ("IGC" henceforward) is probably the simplest of our four solutions. It consists mainly of the IRB1, a Chiclets-size IR-emitter dongle available from the online Apple Store and directly from maker iGi Corp.'s Web site for \$69.95. When combined with the IGC software app, a free download from the iTunes Store, it turns the iPhone into a touchscreen remote.

Like most A/V receiver (or aftermarket) hardware remotes, IGC works on a "components" model. You first identify the components in your system, choosing from onscreen lists covering the usual categories of TV, Cable, Amplifier, and Receiver, plus Audio Accessory, Home Automation, and Video Accessory extras. Next, you select brand and code sets from sub-lists. These can be as long as several hundred or as short

worked well enough, letting you "overwrite" the existing code of a button recalled from IGC's database (in the case of a command that fails to work, or to work correctly) or learn commands missing from a remote's set. It can also serve to create an entirely new "component" when your brand/model is absent from IGC's comprehensive database. Unfortunately, you can't add a button to a component's pages, though you can repurpose an existing onscreen key, as I did for my Motorola/Comcast DVR's 30-second forward-skip feature (an undocumented Easter egg from TV-commercial-loving Big Cable) by linking it to the yellow "A" key on the transport page.

Macro command sequences must be learned from the original remote — even if all or most of the desired com-

IGC incorporates a Master Volume option on its setup page that can "punch through" volume control to a particular component no matter what device page you're on.

as a single code set, as I saw for numerous less-than-ubiquitous TV brands. (Selections are performed via the iPhone's native selector wheel, a slot-machine-like arrangement of dials.)

Once you "add" a component, you get three laterally adjacent swipeable pages of onscreen control buttons. Two of these pages contain fixed key groupings arranged in familiar remote control patterns. The third page holds a dozen plain, blocky, rectangular macro keys, each of which can initiate a series of multiple commands.

IGC's IR-command learning process proceeds in the familiar nose-to-nose, remote control mating-dance fashion. This

mands are already present in IGC's onboard code database and loaded into individual component-remote pages. Multi-command, multi-component macros that I created such as "system launch" and "all off" worked well enough, but the inability to add one or more keys to the existing screen, or to include any of the thousands of existing codes already stored in IGC's command sets, seems like an omission to me.

Another drawback to IGC's layout is its use of a home page as the springboard to all devices. This means that if you're on the A/V receiver control page and need to issue a Blu-ray Disc player command, you



Version tested: 1.2.1
Price: \$69.95
i-got-it.com

← The App

Although i-Got-Control's component/command database runs deep, you can also "learn" commands from other hardware remotes if a particular code turns up missing. If you can't locate a certain component within IGC, it will allow you to create an entirely new one, repurposing buttons as you see fit from the app's templates.

← The Gear

Like most of the other iMotes appearing in our test, i-Got-Control's uses a Chiclets-size IR-emitter dongle that you plug into your iPhone/iPod Touch's docking port to control A/V components.

have to return home and select the disc player page before you can so much as hit Pause.

On the other hand, IGC does incorporate a Master Volume option on its setup page that "punches through" volume control to a component you select (usually an A/V receiver) no matter what device page you're using. IGC also came up with a nifty feature it calls Volume Swipe, which makes a vertical swipe gesture up the iPhone's screen work as a volume-up control, and a downward swipe as a volume-down. This is a pretty cool idea, but you need to be careful not to

start your swipe on a button (doing so will issue that button's command rather than a volume command), which diminishes the feature's no-look appeal somewhat. (And, a bit counterintuitively, the slower you swipe, the larger a volume change you get.) There are also options for click sound and vibrate feedbacks in response to button presses.

All in all, what IGC has most going for it is simplicity. Any user should be able to plug in the IRB1 IR emitter and set up, navigate, and use the IGC app with little difficulty, in the best spirit of the iPhone itself.

→ The App

Rē features a good deal of customization options. You can select among 10 screen backgrounds and an infinity of color shades; rearrange buttons on any page; and choose a raft of key shapes and icons.

→ The Gear

Rē's hardware dongle is similar to i-Got-Control's and identically priced at \$69.95. Its IR power and wide-angle coverage proved to be best-in-class.



Version tested: 1.1
Price: \$69.95
newkinetix.com



Rē, from NewKinetix, employs a hardware dongle (officially the NK100) that's very much similar to i-Got-Control's and identically priced at \$69.95. But this app is a considerably different concept.

Like Logitech's Harmony family of hardware system remotes, Rē uses metaphors of Rooms, Devices, and Activities. You begin by identifying a Room you're setting out to control — the Home Theater, for example — and then ID the brands and models of the Devices residing therein. (You may subsequently create additional Rooms to control other gear in your home, in

a hotel room, or even at your local watering hole.) This all takes place on Rē's setup page (using the iPhone's native slot-machine-style spinning-dial selector wheels), thereby loading in the required code sets from NewKinetix's embedded database. There are many code sets to choose from, and no good way beyond trial and error to predict just which one will best control a specific component, but Rē includes a well-conceived auto-search routine that can ease the drudgery somewhat.

With Rooms and Devices established, you then create Ac-

tivities (independently for each room) that group key commands from multiple components, such as TV, receiver, and DVD player, and name them what you like — though something along the lines of "Watch DVD" and "Watch Cable" would seem sensible.

Rē arranges all of a particular Device's buttons on a single, continuously vertically scrolling page, and places a Room's full Device set on laterally swipeable pages. This works well

Audio Bar, which appears just above the Tab Bar whenever you select an Activities page. This keeps Volume up/down and Mute controls ever present no matter how far down you scroll on your however-big Activity.

Rē permits copy/paste operations during setup to duplicate devices and activities to multiple rooms, and even incorporates iPhone "bumping." (Bumping uses the iPhone's internal accelerometer to trigger an ac-

For my own house, I'd create two "Watch TV" Activities with Rē: a complex Watch TV: DK, and a stripped-down Watch TV: Everybody Else.

enough, but I can see where a system comprising more than four or five components might get a bit cumbersome.

Which is where the Activities concept comes in. You can assemble Activities from among any of your Devices, and then freely add or delete buttons so that your finished assembly is just as simple (or complex) as you desire. For my own household use, I'd be inclined to make not one but two "Watch TV" Activities: a complex Watch TV: DK, and a stripped-down Watch TV: Everybody Else.

Another excellent Rē feature, Favorites, is always just a touch away via the screen-bottom Tab Bar, as are Rooms, Devices, and Activities. Favorites automates multi-key macros for channel changes, and you can organize multiple lists however you choose: "Sports Channels," "Pay Cable," and "Network Channels," for instance. Rē even provides a long list of familiar broadcast and cable TV icons (the CBS eye, NBC peacock, ESPN logo, and so on), including dozens that aren't so familiar. Handy!

Another handy feature is the

tion — in this case, settings-file transfer via Bluetooth — when you fist-bump another person holding an iPhone.)

NewKinetix endowed Rē with a good deal of customization options. You can select among 10 screen backgrounds (but not import your own wallpaper, alas) and an infinity of color shades; rearrange buttons on any page via simple, snap-to-grid dragging; and choose a raft of key shapes and icons. You can also freely assemble a macro string on any key, harvesting any of the stored commands of all your Devices, a very powerful feature.

Rē is clearly the most potent and flexible of the three apps reviewed here that use a plug-in hardware dongle, and it's also the most completely customizable. (I also appreciated its IR power and wide-angle coverage, which were best-in-class.) An unavoidable companion to flexibility is complexity, but the time you invest learning the ins and outs of the Rē app's structure and organization will surely pay big dividends in a highly capable, yet intuitive, personalized remote control.

FLPR

With a dongle less than half the size of Rē's or IGC's, FLPR maker New Potato wins the miniaturization sweepstakes. (It also wins the charmingly odd corporate name contest.) Like the IGC app, FLPR is organized purely along device lines, but with a particularly generous selection of component types, including media servers, game consoles, and iPod/iMP3 player docks. The brand lists

transport, numeric keys, and others below.

Each device's button layout includes a broad arrow key that shifts to a More Controls page listing less-needed commands ID'd by text labels on plain, rectangular keys. This makes for a more or less long, vertically scrollable list (very long, in some cases). However, you can set FLPR to hide "inactive" keys — that is, on-

Happily, FLPR incorporates IR learning like the others, so you can acquire any (or all) missing commands from your original remotes.

are similarly generous; for example, the receivers/amps selection numbers some 55, ranging from ADA to Yamaha and including such less quotidian names as Halcro, Rotel, and Theta.

On the other hand, FLPR's code lists are limited. In most cases you can select from a subcategory, such as a model range, but in many cases there are no options beyond that — FLPR loads a single code set for the brand and model selected and you get what you get. With recent-model gear this is likely to work out pretty well, but you may encounter incomplete control with older components. Happily, FLPR incorporates IR learning like the others, so you can acquire any (or all) missing commands from your original remotes. And when a component is altogether absent from FLPR's database, you can create a "custom device" from scratch, learning all commands from the original remote. You still must employ FLPR's basic key layout, however, which is similar for all devices: a vertically scrollable page of several dozen square and rectangular keys, with Power on/off at the top and groupings for cursor, Volume and Channel up/down,

screen keys with no associated IR codes, whether the code set was learned or one that originated from FLPR's database.

FLPR does not permit grouping of commands from multiple remotes, or even rearranging key locations or modifying appearances within a single device. For this reason, creating a hybrid "activity" page is not really practicable. You can, however, create self-contained macros incorporating multiple commands harvested from individual buttons across multiple pages. This lets you make macros relatively quickly, without recourse to your original hardware remotes. For example, I assembled a macro string of TV power, receiver power, and cable-box power commands, followed by a 2-second delay (to let the components "wake up"), along with a command to select my receiver's Cable/Sat input. This worked fine, but I still had to manually swipe my way back to the cable



The App

FLPR's setup options include 22 visual "skins," which are colorful backgrounds that can be individually assigned to different device pages. There are also 16 different icon options — also associated freely with devices — plus the ability to call up the iPhone keyboard to rename a device or macro.

The Gear

FLPR totally wins the miniaturization sweepstakes by supplying an IR-emitter dongle that's half the size of the other models featured in our test.

Version tested: 1.0.0

Price: \$79.95
newpotatotech.com



Device page to change channels, browse the program guide, and so on. On the plus side, enabling the Master Volume option on the main Setup page causes Volume up/down and Mute keys to appear on the Macros page, a very valuable detail.

Any macros that you create with FLPR all reside on a single page in another vertically scrolled list of plain rectangular buttons. So if you end up creating lots of macros, quickly finding the one you want will inevitably become tougher as you go. Also, there's no provision for editing or combining existing macros; you

can only delete one entirely and start from scratch.

A small icon corresponding to each device in FLPR's top-of-screen function bar makes moving between various components fairly quick. Setup options include 22 visual "skins," which are colorful backgrounds that can be individually assigned to different device pages. There are also 16 different icon options, plus the ability to call up the iPhone keyboard to rename a device or macro.

All in all, I have to say that I found FLPR to be quite usable. In particular, its layout proved simple and mostly intuitive, and its swiping and scrolling were consistently snappy.

→ The App

RedEye downloads codes "from the cloud" as you identify your brands and models during setup. This makes for a longer setup, but also permits ThinkFlood to keep its app's code sets current.

→ The Gear

The RedEye base communicates with an iPhone via your home's Wi-Fi network (or, failing that, a dedicated "RedEye network" that the base station creates).



Version tested: 1.1.2

Price: \$188
thinkflood.com

↓ RedEye

RedEye, which hails from developer ThinkFlood (what, is everybody's spacebar broken?), takes a very different approach from our other three iMote solutions. Instead of locating the requisite IR transmitter at the iPhone's dock connector in the form of a plug-in dongle, RedEye places it in a stationary tabletop base station that also doubles as an iPhone charging stand. This integrates an IR "blaster" array of infrared LEDs that are intended to flood your equipment rack with the signals needed to place them under your sway. (It's also

the reason why the RedEye costs more than twice as much as the others.)

This clever solution has a number of huge advantages, which I'll get to in a moment, as well as two potential disadvantages. First, the RedEye base station must be within clear line-of-sight of all components it needs to operate. Thus, if your equipment is in one corner some 90° from the TV and shadowed by a potted rubber tree, you'll have to find a location for the RedEye base that splits the angle effectively. Given the base's essentially 360° cov-

erage, this turned out to be fairly easy in my case (even though my TV is indeed 90° from my gear rack); I simply placed the base on a shelf over my desk where it sat at a 45° angle from both the TV and the rack. In cases where coverage is problematic or your gear lives behind opaque doors, RedEye recommends running secondary, wired IR flashers from the IR repeater jacks on an A/V receiver or preamp/processor. (I should note: the RedEye hardware does not incorporate any

additional base stations and use your iPhone(s) to serve as remote-room controllers (assuming Wi-Fi coverage).

Setting up RedEye begins with plugging in the base and establishing a network. Next comes software setup of the RedEye app on the iPhone. Like *RM*, RedEye employs metaphors of Rooms and Activities to organize commands. Unlike *RM* and the other iMotes, it does not incorporate its full IR command database within the app, but instead

Activities is where the system shows its stuff, offering up tasks like Watch TV and leaving you to simply identify which components would be involved.

IR repeater facilities.)

The second potential drawback is that RedEye works only on the system where the base lives. Unlike with the other iMotes, you can't carry a dongle in your pocket and use it to control your upstairs system at bedtime, or down at the pub to secretly change the channel from ESPN to Bravo. (Wear running shoes if you decide to try this at my local joint.) But note that ThinkFlood is promising to debut a RedEye Mini (at less than \$50), which will use a dongle — though this one plugs into the iPhone's headphone jack, not the dock connector.

Now to the base-station pluses. The lack of a dongle means there's nothing to plug, unplug, or lose. The iPhone communicates with the RedEye base via your home's Wi-Fi network (or, in the absence of one, a dedicated "RedEye network" that the base station creates), which also means you don't have to aim the iPhone toward the component under control, or in any particular direction at all. And for a multi-room system, you can purchase

downloads code sets "from the cloud" as you identify your brands and models during setup. This can take a minute or two for complex components such as an A/V receiver, but it presumably makes the app smaller and more responsive. (It also should permit ThinkFlood to keep its code sets current without having to release frequent updates to the downloadable app.)

And indeed, RedEye's code sets proved to be comprehensive and well targeted. (In many cases, RedEye uses a specific device model number to select the correct set.) Of course, it's the Activities pages where ThinkFlood's system really shows its stuff. RedEye automatically offers up common sets like "Watch TV." Once you identify which components would be involved (in my case, TV, A/V receiver, and cable box), the app proposes a basic command set, complete with buttons, layout, and self-actuating Launch and Shutdown routines.

These "templates" proved fallible. "Watch TV," for instance, lacked commands to select the proper inputs on receiver and TV (RedEye has no way of know-

ing what you have plugged into what, or via which input), but adding these and ordering them into the Launch macros was quick and easy, and involved just navigating a few levels of setup menus to choose from the device commands that had already been loaded.

Since RedEye is a "state-aware" system, it's smart enough that when you change activities—say, from "Watch TV" to "Listen to Radio"—it won't turn components off just to turn them immediately back on, to cite one example. And creating an entirely new activity of your own devising, combining whatever set of components and commands you desire, is only a little more arduous. Similarly, learning IR commands (from original remotes) to fill blanks in a command set, or to create an entire new one for a component ab-

sent from ThinkFlood's listings, was easy and well prompted by the app—though you must aim the original remote not at the iPhone but at the RedEye base station while teaching.

Finally, ThinkFlood has also made a creative attempt to improve upon the main weakness of all touchscreen controllers: the near impossibility of no-look operation. RedEye lets you link up to 24 buttons to the 24 iPhone physical "gestures." These include gaming-style accelerometer moves such as shake and flick-left, plus various trackpad-like finger moves like swipe, double taps with two and three fingers, and so on. With practice these worked as advertised, though I had a certain amount of trouble. (The fault may well lie with the operator and not the system.)

It's a hackneyed dodge of comparison tests since *Buggy-Whip Quarterly* but no less apt here: These four systems offer something for everyone. RedEye is clearly the most powerful and adaptable (it would likely be my pick), but its one-room basic design and more complex setup will not suit all. Rē probably comes closest to achieving all-things-to-all-humans status, but the simple-to-use FLPR and the even simpler i-Got-Control will doubtless appeal to some even more strongly.

Finally, it would be irresponsible not to point out that every one of these systems incorporates features and foibles that I lacked the space to detail, so the serious shopper is enjoined to go the extra mile and do some careful homework on each maker's Web site, and perhaps even search out a hands-on demo, before buying. (I must similarly add that all four makers regularly update their apps, doubtless including new features and fixes that postdate this piece, as did the debut of Apple's multitasking OS4 iPhone/iPod Touch update, though I was just able to confirm that all four appear to run normally under iOS4.)

But whichever way you go, if you love your iPhone as much as your carefully tuned A/V systems, you'll simply have to own one (or more) of these. Whether it turns out to become an indispensable A/V companion, a valued occasional helper, or just a whiz-bang toy with which to further goad your unfortunate BlackBerry/Android/Palm-afflicted friends matters relatively little. They're cool! They're iPhone! And, unlike so many other apps, they actually perform a useful task in an innovative, fun fashion. **SV**

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Must-Have Home Theater Apps



Killer App

Apps that let you operate media receivers such as those from Sonos, Logitech (Squeezebox), and Apple (Apple TV) using an iPhone/iPod touch or iPad, are the – pardon us here – killer app for home theater. Most of these previously required that you either used a proprietary controller, connected to a TV, or pawed the unit's front panel to browse libraries of content. Now all that's required is a free app running on your Apple device.



Go Sonos

Sonos system owners can download the Sonos Controller for iPhone (shown above), a free app that lets you browse both your stored music collection and Internet radio stations with an iPhone/iPod Touch. The app can also be used to control music distribution and volume level for each zone in a multizone Sonos setup — a very handy feature.

Free Range

Meet the Sonos Controller for iPhone app's volume control screen (above). As you walk room-to-room in a house populated by Sonos devices, you can whip out your iPhone/iPod touch, select the room where you want to control music queue and volume level, and make tweaks as needed. Previously, you had to buy a pricey touchscreen controller to do all that.

As a tech-obsessed reader of **Sound+Vision**, there's a good chance that you own an iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad. Sure, these gizmos do lots of cool stuff, but did you know they can also be used to enhance the home theater viewing/listening experience? Whether you're looking to fine-tune surround sound speaker levels or simply update your Netflix queue without having to leave your seat, there are a growing number of apps designed with A/V aficionados in mind. Here's a sampling to get you started. . .

SoundMeter is an app that basically fills the same role as the trusty Radio Shack sound-pressure level meter long used by surround sound-ophiles to tweak speaker levels in their systems. But whereas a meter from the Shack will set you back 50 bucks, **SoundMeter** costs just 20 bucks and does lots more: Along with reading and displaying sound levels, it can generate white noise, pink noise, and single-frequency tones. The app was designed to work with both the iPhone's (first-gen model excepted) built-in and accessory headset mikes, but it can also be used with external high-quality microphones for more precise readings.

Looking to schedule an evening's worth of TV viewing while in transit from work or wherever? If you're a DirecTV, AT&T U-verse, or Comcast cable subscriber, you can tap DirecTV, AT&T U-verse TV Mobile Remote Access, or Comcast Mobile apps during your nightly slog home to browse program guides, select shows to record, and manage recorded content sitting on your DVR. Netflix subscribers will also find plenty of selections in the iTunes App Store for managing their viewing queue either on the go or from the comfort of the couch. The selections range from totally free (**PhoneFlicks**) to \$2.99 (**iRentMovie**).

Type Netflix into the iTunes search window to see a complete list.

Apps made for music listening are also a big part of the iPhone/iPod touch universe. We've talked up iPhone/iPad/iPod touch-friendly streaming services like Pandora, Slacker, and Rhapsody plenty in these pages. But apps that can be used to control the media receivers that connect to your A/V rig and stream music, either over the Internet or from your computer, also populate the iTunes store. If you're a Sonos system owner, **Sonos Controller for iPhone** (free) will let you browse both your stored music collection and Internet radio stations with an iPhone/iPod touch. And it can also be used to control music distribution and volume level for each zone in a multizone Sonos setup. Owners of the various media receivers populating Logitech's Squeezebox line, meanwhile, can download **iPeng**, a third-party app that offers many of the same features and functionality as the Sonos controller, though at a \$9.99 cost.

If, like me, you have an Apple TV box sitting in your rack, chances are you've heard about Apple's free **Remote** app, which can be used to control iTunes libraries residing on both an Apple TV and a computer over Wi-Fi. And if you think **Remote** sounds cool, check out **Rowmote**, an iTunes controller that handles a host of other A/V apps, including Apple DVD Player, Boxee, EyeTV, VLC, and Last.fm.

Apple may rule its iTunes App Store with an iron fist, but that doesn't mean that owners of Windows-based home theater PCs have been completely left out in the cold. Along with giving you full control over Windows Media Center, apps such as **Remotely Possible** let users operate Pandora, Hulu Desktop, and SlingPlayer (Slingbox receiver for Windows) on an HTPC.

— Al Griffin

iPad Apps for Multiroom Music and Whole-House Control

If you've been limiting your iPad usage to updating Facebook and/or tilting your way through yet another round of *Labyrinth*, then you're really missing the iBoat! Electronics manufacturers have embraced the iPad as a powerful touchpanel interface, especially those companies that were already riding the wave of automation and whole-house control. With added processing power, a higher-resolution screen, and extra screen real estate to play with, the iPad has become the hottest control solution to hit the custom market in years. Here are a few apps that will turn your Pad into the ultimate touchscreen.

1 Crestron

How does a company that basically established, and has since led the industry in, touchscreen-based control deal with this new interloper? By welcoming it and going on to create the industry's most popular app! According to Crestron, its *Mobile Pro G* iPad app is ranked the 31st overall top-grossing iPad app in the U.S. and is the only consumer electronics app to crack the top 100 (at presstime). Once it's installed, *Mobile Pro G* essentially makes the iPad a Crestron touchpanel. As with the company's own touchpanels, Creston's iPad app offers infinite customization possibilities, letting installers personalize each iPad for each project.

Price: \$99
crestron.com

2 Savant

No company is as well positioned to take advantage of the iPad as Savant. That's because its entire product line is OSX-based, so Savant engineers get to leverage their experience developing with Apple software. As Savant CEO Robert Madonna put it, "With Savant's iPad App, you have an Apple machine talking to an Apple machine." Instead of just reworking its existing iPhone version, the company engineered its new *Rosie 4i*

app specifically for the iPad. In addition to maximizing the potential of the large screen, it also utilizes the iPad's elegant finger "swipe" capability. The Savant *Rosie 4i* app features cool user adjustments like a changeable background that can display any stored photo. To further demonstrate its iPad commitment, Savant has created desktop and in-wall docks that allow users to position (and charge) their iPads.

Price: \$10
savantav.com

3 Control4

Control4 has become a force to be reckoned within the automation world, and the new *My Home for iPad* app makes its system both more powerful and less expensive. By utilizing the full 9.7 inches of high-rez screen real estate, Control4's app offers a superior control option to the company's own 7-inch touchscreen, which costs about twice as much as the iPad itself! The app offers direct access to all of your home's sub-systems like lighting, HVAC, multi-room audio, home theater, and security. And when *My Home for iPad* is updated to work with Control4's 4Sight remote-monitoring service later on this year, users will be able to control their home via the Internet from anywhere in



Maximum Apps

Crestron's Mobile Pro G (top left) and Savant's Rosie 4i (top right) home-control iPad apps make the most of the device's screen real estate by providing access to a large range of control options on a single screen. A scrolling bar running along the screen's bottom with Mobile Pro G, for example, enables you to quickly jump to other sources or functions. With Rosie 4i, a range of functions are at your fingertips — everything from source selection and control to multiroom volume adjustment.

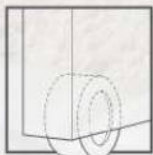
↑ Bigger = Better

The Sonos Controller for iPhone was one slick A/V app, but it looks like the company's upcoming iPad version (shown above) will be even better. The main change is the way the Sonos app makes use of the larger screen: Instead of jumping between several panels to access different functions, it now lays things out in one place. This lets you, for example, alter the music queue in the room you're sitting in while simultaneously checking on what's being played in other zones.

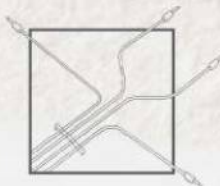


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the world! The app is free but requires the purchase of a separate mobile navigator license (\$99) for each iPad.

control4.com

4 Meridian SooLoos

The *Meridian Sooloos iPad App* allows users full control over their Sooloos music server to browse, manage, and play audio in multiple zones around their home. Meridian owners also get the ability to control their surround sound processors and DSP loudspeakers directly. The app takes full advantage of the iPad's larger size and resolution by displaying more information on the screen at once than the company's iPhone version, and it offers higher-quality artwork. Users can browse 35,000 Internet radio stations and all 8 million Rhapsody tracks, and they can create, edit, and load playlists of their favorite music from the comfort

of, well, anywhere that they can get online.

Price: Free
meridian-audio.com/soloos

5 Sonos

To say that Sonos is excited about its upcoming iPad app would be an understatement. According to a company spokesman, its new app "will be the coolest home controller on the iPad, period!" Scheduled for August release, *Sonos Controller for iPad* will take advantage of the device's big glass footprint by presenting tons of information at once, and do so in portrait or landscape orientation. Without leaving the app's main screen, a Sonos system owner can simultaneously display all available sources, browse the Music Library, check the Now Playing queue, and view the currently playing track plus volume level for each zone!

Price: Free
sonos.com

... AND MORE TO COME

With the iPad's overwhelming popularity, attractive price, and undeniable cool factor, look for many other A/V electronics manufacturers to jump on the app train. Planned app releases that we're following include Elan (elanhomesystems.com), which is currently formalizing the details for its g! iPad app and expects "a graphics rework to handle the higher resolution as well as optimization for the larger screen area." Remotescape (remotescape.com), which makes an impressive iPhone app for Kaleidescape systems, has promised to up the ante for iPad by providing users with full-screen cover art views and the ability to fully browse and control their music libraries without ever turning on a TV. The \$119 app is expected this fall. Lastly, music-server maker Olive (olive.us) plans to follow up its iMaestro iPhone app with an iMaestro Pro version for iPad that will offer enhanced features like metadata editing and access to music previewing/purchasing.

— John Sciacca

– John Sciacca



Furnish Your iPad

So you've got an iPad and loaded it up with apps – now what? Next up should be decking it out with accouterments to make sure your iPad looks like it belongs in your pad.

➡ As you might imagine, Apple's own online store (apple.com) is a good place to start shopping. For \$29 you can pick up the company's basic tabletop iPad Dock, which not only gives easy access to the touchscreen but also has an audio output and can keep your iPad charged. If you plan on doing heavy Web surfing, metadata editing, or Tweeting, Apple's iPad Keyboard Dock might be for you. For \$69 you get all the benefits of the iPad Dock along with a full-size keyboard and some additional connector ports.

➔ Afraid that an overzealous finger swipe might topple your iPad from its dock? Fear no more with Griffin Technology's heavy-duty aluminum A-Frame stand, shown above (\$49; griffintechology.com). This stand securely cradles the iPad in soft silicone and can hold it in either portrait or landscape mode.

➔ While docks are handy, they usually don't hold the iPad at an angle that's conducive to typing. If you can't bear the thought of adding an external keyboard, the Macally ViewStand (macally.com) might be the perfect solution. This \$59 dock is ergonomically designed to enhance typing and viewing in both vertical and horizontal positions.

➔ Worried that all that swiping and stroking will leave your iPad's screen covered in smudges, smears, and scrapes? Zagg's invisibleSHIELD (\$39; zagg.com) was originally designed to protect military helicopter blades from harsh desert sands, meaning that it should be able to withstand an amazing amount of abuse — screws, a Dremel, a Weed Whacker, etc. — and keep your iPad scratch-free for years to come.

➔ Looking for a more customized mounting solution for your iPad? Premier Mounts (premiermounts.com) recently unveiled its IPM-100 and IPM-200 mounting brackets, which snug the Pad into a VESA 100-compatible frame that works with any wall mount (pricing and availability TBD). Those looking for an in-wall dock, meanwhile, can check out the iPort CM2000 (\$499; iportmusic.com), which uses a wall-mounted chassis with a rectangular fascia held in place by magnets to encase the iPad.

— J.S. 

— J.S. SV

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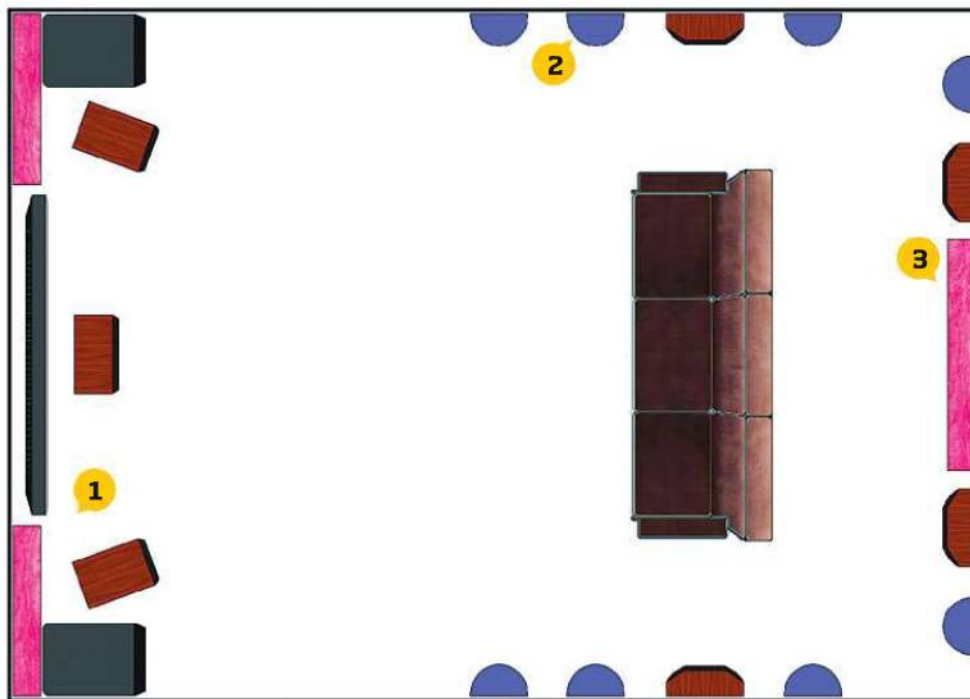


DIY Room Tune-Up

Recent advances in acoustics can help you set up a great-sounding room for the cost of a decent Blu-ray Disc player. Here's how to do it.

Story, Illustrations, and Photos by BRENT BUTTERWORTH

↓ The Room



Fine-Tuned

Dr. Toole's prescription for an optimized room includes **1.** absorptive panels situated behind the front left and right speakers instead of the side walls, where they may deaden your room's sound; **2.** diffusers placed at either side of the surround speakers; and **3.** an additional absorptive panel centered on the back wall (especially if the wall is only a few feet behind your couch).

Did you know we've just entered a golden age of room acoustics? Unless you're prone to perusing the papers of the Audio Engineering Society, I'm sure you had no idea. But as the philosophies of this new era spread, thousands of audio enthusiasts will experience far better sound — and they'll accomplish this on their own at a cost they can easily afford.

This room-acoustics revolution was spurred by the publication 2 years ago of *Sound Reproduction* by Dr. Floyd Toole. It compiles much of what Toole learned in his 25 years at Canada's National Research Council (NRC) and his subsequent work as director of research and development at Harman International — parent company of JBL, Infinity, Revel, and a zillion other audio brands. The concepts introduced in *Sound Reproduction* form a big chunk of *Home Theater Recommended Practice: Audio Design*, a set of

guidelines approved last year by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) and the Custom Electronics Design and Installation Association (CEDIA).

Home theater acoustics has been a mish-mash of science, anecdotal experience, misinformation, and quasi-mystical practices. In *Sound Reproduction*, Toole applies his scientific skills to the problem — and comes to the conclusion that it's not as complicated as most people thought. His work is based primarily on research he and his colleagues at the NRC and Harman have done, and also on his encyclopedic knowledge of others' work in this area.

By combining the scientific concepts Toole presents with a little bit of inventiveness and a stop at your local home improvement center, you can now greatly improve the sound in your home theater for a couple hundred bucks.

↓ Absorption



You can build your own low-cost absorptive panels in three simple steps. **1** Construct a 4-inch-deep wood frame using 1 x 2s. Both of the frame's sides should ideally measure 4 feet. **2** Stuff the interior with medium- to low-density fiberglass (attic insulation is good) or foam. **3** Wrap the panel in very thin, acoustically transparent fabric. You can use any color fabric that you like, just as long as it's not thick or tightly weaved.

Step 1: The Room Itself

We have to start by discussing the room itself, which has been the focus of much of the work of home theater acousticians. The dimensions of a room have tremendous effects on bass reproduction. At frequencies below about 200 Hz, the room acts like a resonator, much as an empty 2-liter Coke bottle does when you blow across the top. The room's dimensions determine the frequencies of the resonances. For decades, acousticians have sought the ideal room dimensions that will result in even distribution of these resonances — and, therefore, even bass response.

According to Toole, science doesn't support the idea of

perfect room dimensions. He almost gleefully points out that in order to get the benefits of "ideal" dimensions, you'd have to position the speaker in one corner of the room and your head in the opposite corner. He does caution against having a room in which two dimensions are the same, or multiples of each other — such as a square room or a 12 x 24-foot room — because those rooms will greatly accentuate certain bass frequencies.

Beyond that basic admonition, Toole's advice is, in essence: Don't worry about the dimensions. Just run all the bass (below 80 Hz or so) through your subwoofers and adjust the positioning and equalization of the

subs to fix the bass problems. He also strongly recommends using at least two, and preferably four, subwoofers in order to deliver more consistent bass to all the seats in your home theater. (Contributing technical editor John Sciaccia has covered subwoofer optimization in his "The Custom Installer" columns, which you can find on soundandvisionmag.com.)

Step 2: Absorption

As you know if you've ever been in a concert hall, sound reflections give a room character. But as you also know if you've ever been in a gymnasium, excessive reflection of sound reduces clar-

ity and makes speech hard to understand. In a typical living room, speech intelligibility is no problem because the carpet, drapes, and upholstery absorb sound reflections. However, in sparsely furnished rooms, absorbing sound reflections can be beneficial.

Many acousticians tame reflections through the use of absorptive materials such as foam and fiberglass. It has become common practice to use absorptive material on the side walls where the sound from the front speakers reflects toward the listener. Toole, however, points out that these reflections are the strongest source of sound in a home theater — stronger even than the direct sound from the speakers — and that killing these reflections (and, therefore, any subsequent reflections those sound waves might make) makes a home theater sound dead. His conclusions indicate that eliminating side-wall reflections may be undesirable for stereo listening and at most optional for home theater.

For most systems, though, he recommends using absorptive treatment on the front wall behind the speakers. (Two exceptions here would be systems with dipolar- or bipolar-type speakers, both of which use backfiring drivers by design to reflect sound off your room's walls.) To do this, you'll need two absorptive panels measuring at least 4 feet on each side. If your room can't accommodate panels that big, Toole advises making them as large as you can. He also recommends using an absorptive panel on the back wall, especially if the wall is only a couple of feet behind your couch.

Surprisingly, almost all of the acoustical treatment products on the market are way too thin to fit Toole's prescriptions. Ideally,

you want to absorb sound all the way down to the lower regions of the midrange around 200 Hz, not just in the upper midrange and treble. The measurements Toole presents in *Sound Reproduction* show that the typical 2-inch-thick acoustical panels can't do this; you need at least a 4-inch panel of solid foam or fiberglass. Unfortunately, most foam sold for acoustic treatment is covered with wedges or pyramids, which make it less effective in the lower midrange.

My experience over the years bears out Toole's statements: I've always found that 2-inch-thick wedge foam panels make voices sound "shouty" because they kill the high frequencies but leave the midrange largely intact. In fact, the case Toole presents in *Sound Reproduction* is so persuasive that I decided to junk the 4-inch wedge foam panels I'd been using and build 4-inch fiberglass-filled panels.

So the bad news is that you'll have a tough time finding pre-built absorptive panels that get the job done. The good news is that it's easy and cheap to make them yourself. Any medium- to low-density fiberglass or foam will work. I constructed two 4 x 4-foot, 4-inch-thick panels using attic insulation stuffed into a frame built from 1 x 2s. With some very thin, acoustically transparent black fabric wrapped around them, they look like part of my walls. (Thicker, more tightly weaved fabric won't work because it reflects high frequencies.) Total cost: \$90.

Step 3: Diffusion

There's also another way to deal with reflections: scatter them around. You perform this task with a device called a diffuser. You should put diffusers on the side walls (especially in the area around the surround speakers) and on the rear wall behind you.

Some diffusers are simple geometric shapes, such as rounded or triangular columns. Some are “engineered diffusers”: complicated plastic or wood forms,

To get the benefits of "ideal" room dimensions, you'd have to position the speaker in one corner of the room and your head in the opposite corner.

some of which resemble the Manhattan skyline. There's no magic prescription for diffuser shapes, but Toole recommends that engineered diffusers be at least 8 inches thick and geometric shape diffusers be at least 12 inches thick. That's because we perceive spaciousness at frequencies between 100 Hz and 1 kHz, and thinner diffusers won't work in the lower end of that range.

Few commercially available diffusers are more than 6 inches thick. But here again, it's easy to

make them. To give you an example, I made a 4-foot-high triangular one from some 1 x 2s and a sheet of $\frac{5}{32}$ -inch plywood. An additional step I took was to glue some ran-

dom chunks of wood to the backs of the panels to keep them from vibrating. You could build eight of these for under \$100 — or even less if you can come up with a better design. Another technique is to cut 2-foot-diameter Sonotube concrete forms in half to make hemi-cylindrical columns.

Diffusers also minimize flutter echo, the annoying “z-z-z-z-ing” sound that sometimes occurs when sound bounces between parallel surfaces. Flutter echoes can be really annoying, especially

with high-frequency sounds coming from your surround speakers. However, Toole says you don't have to rid your room entirely of flutter echoes, just the ones that affect your speakers. Once your diffusers are in place, sit in your listening position and have someone clap their hands in front of each speaker in your system. If you hear flutter echo, you can usually tell where the flutter is occurring — and because flutter echo is most noticeable at high frequencies, all it takes to fix the problem is a few of the little 1- or 2-inch-thick diffusers available on pro audio Web sites.

If the rear wall is at least a couple of feet behind your head, it's a good idea to put diffusers on that wall. If your couch is only a foot or two from the rear wall, you'll get better sonic imaging if you put the diffusers on the side walls and

Diffusion



Recipe for a DIY diffusor: **1** Construct a triangular wood frame as shown using 1 x 2s. The frame should ideally be 4 feet high and 1 foot deep. (The triangle's apex should have a 1-foot height.) **2** Cover the frame with thin plywood panels. You can optionally glue random wood chunks to the backs of the panels to help prevent vibration. **3** Spray-paint black or similar dark tone to match the decor of your THX/ISF-approved home theater/mancave.

DIY ROOM TUNE-UP CONCLUDES ON **PAGE 40**

Il a un _____ dans le bus.

Il a un ordinateur.

un ordinateur

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mount absorptive panels on the rear wall.

Of course, many people aren't inclined to spend a sunny Saturday slapping together absorption panels and diffusers. Those who crave convenience and aren't so bothered about budget can hire a home theater acoustical consulting company such as Performance Media Industries, Rives Audio, or SH Acoustics to

do the whole thing soup-to-nuts. (Those guys even know ways to make it all *look good*.)

No matter what your budget is, though, you now have the power and knowledge to get your room sounding great. And that couple hundred bucks you invest will keep paying off long after today's audio and video technologies have faded into history. Even though I had

what would have been considered a well-designed room by past standards, I'm now getting better sonic focus in the front of my room and a better sense of envelopment in the rear. A lot of people (including me and many fellow **S+V** editors) have spent a lot more money for upgrades that yielded a much smaller improvement. **SV**

Web Exclusive Speaker Special

Check out contributing writer James K. Willcox's gallery of 10 striking cost-no-object speakers at SOUNDVISIONMAG.COM

1 Vivid Audio G2 Giya (\$50,000)

If Willy Wonka made speakers instead of candy, he might have produced these. The one-piece, curved enclosure is made of a vacuum-infused fiber composite reinforced with carbon fiber, much like a racecar or speedboat.

2 MartinLogan CLX (\$22,000 and up)

Sporting MartinLogan's famed curvilinear panels, which provide a wider dispersion than flat panels, CLX models are full-range line-source electrostatics that stand nearly 6 feet high and more than 2 feet across.

3 Wilson Audio's Alexandra X-2 Series 2 (\$148,000)

Available in pretty much any color (and buffed to a high-gloss exotic-car shine), these speakers are sure to impress friends; weighing in at 1,500 pounds for the pair, not so much your UPS man.



4 Bang & Olufsen BeoLab 5 (\$23,000)

Beneath its Robby-the-Robot exterior, this speaker packs 2,500 watts of power; a separate digital amp powers each driver. Three elliptical, silvery saucers – *Okay, acoustic lenses* – act as reflectors, directing sound from the upward-firing midrange and treble drivers toward the listener. Also onboard is a bass-calibration system that automatically adapts the speaker to your room. **SV**



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Jakob Dylan's Eagle Ears

THE GIFTED SINGER AND SONGWRITER
ON THE JOYS OF LISTENING TO VINYL AND
HOW SEQUENCING SONGS CAN BE
A CREATIVE CATALYST.

Story by
Mike Mettler

“Turntables are incredible!” Noted songcrafter Jakob Dylan, 40, the proud owner of a sweet Rega ’table that he spent months researching, is waxing about the merits of, well, listening to wax on platters — and appreciating their inherent beauty.

“I sit online and look at the ones they make in Europe,” he admits. “You can buy a house for the cost of some of those turntables. They’re works of art. Some of them really belong in a museum.”

No arguments here. And in this era of 0s and 1s filling in the digital blanks (or not), it’s worth noting that certain albums lend themselves better to being spun on and enjoyed from a turntable. Case in point: *Women + Country* (Columbia), the second solo album from the Wallflowers leader. (The band is currently on hiatus.) It’s one of those things we like to refer to as a great headphones album,

thanks in no small part to the intimate, atmospheric production by über-producer T Bone Burnett. “My last record [2008’s *Seeing Things*] had certain restrictions to it; it was very primal,” explains Dylan. “So I didn’t want anything like that at all for *Women* from the get-go; I wanted full, beautiful sound. And I got really excited about the instrumentation T Bone had in mind, because he knows his sonics as well as anybody. Plus I already knew all of the folks who would play on the record, which was very inspiring when I wrote it.” And nothing but the whole wide world to gain by listening to it. . . .

WHEN I
COMPARED THE
WHO'S MY
GENERATION
CD WITH THE
VINYL, IT
ACTUALLY
MADE MY HEAD
HURT. ONE
FORMAT
IS ENJOYABLE,
AND ONE IS
MASSIVELY
PAINFUL.



IF YOU MAKE A HIGHLY DIGITAL RECORD THAT'S JUST CHOPPED UP, IT MAKES NO SENSE TO PUT IT ON VINYL. BUT THIS RECORD WAS PLANNED FOR VINYL RELEASE. WHEN YOU GET A TASTE OF IT, IT OPENS UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD.



"APPOINTMENT LISTENING"



SV As you were writing and crafting *Women + Country*, did you have a specific sonic goal in mind?

For sure. Our recording technique lent itself to a very good vinyl record. If you make a highly digital record that's just chopped up, it makes no sense to put it on vinyl.

If you make a hyper-electronic-sounding record, there's no purpose doing vinyl for it. But based on how we recorded, this is *exactly* the kind of record that should be put on vinyl today. [Currently, the 180-gram *Women + Country* LP is available at jakobdylan.com and at his live shows.]

SV So a high-quality vinyl release was always on your mind?

Oh yeah, I planned on it. There was one Wallflowers record, *Red Letter Days* [2002], that was put on the cheap vinyl. The grooves were like an inch deep! I can't say I was aware that you could even make shitty vinyl; I thought those kind of machines would have been gone by that point. Lesson learned there.

SV I feel a bit like a broken record saying that there's a warmth and depth to the sound in *Women's* vinyl groove that you can't get otherwise.

No, you don't get that the way we usually hear music today. Oddly enough, it seems like we're getting rid of the CD, too, thanks to the double-click. But I do the same thing as well; I download music. I'm okay with that. I have to admit sometimes I'm just glad to be hearing the music at all.

SV Is there a great-sounding record you'd recommend people check out on vinyl?

Any of them! [laughs] At one point, I was way into it — that it mattered what year the vinyl was released as to whether I'd buy it or not. I'd listen to a jazz record or a Simon and Garfunkel record from the "correct" year, which was like going from a 2D movie to 3D. But the one I'd recommend the most is a Decca version of the Who's *My Generation*. When I A/B'd it with the CD, the CD actually made my head hurt. It's not that I didn't appreciate the sound; it's just that I realized there was something completely different going on with the vinyl. One format is massively enjoyable, and one is just actually painful. Vinyl is becoming more important and is more successful. And when you get a taste of it, it opens up a whole new world.

Sometimes it's like viewing an old photograph: You have a particular taste and you respond to it. You put that old vinyl on, the right kind of vinyl from the right year, and the way it sounds is a revelation. I remember in the '80s when they got us to re-buy all of our music on CD — we didn't really realize back then how shitty that sound quality was going to be.

SV Part of the appeal was that we were the portable generation. We were able to take music wherever we went. We'd play it in the car, and not have to worry about skips and pops.

And they told us the CD was indestructible. [chuckles] It seemed like a neat invention, but the world had the wool pulled over its eyes. Everything dissipated then. The quality of the music did, and the artwork became uninteresting and not valuable anymore.

SV Speaking of quality music, I find *Women + Country* to be a cohesive work that I like listening to from beginning to end. In this day and age, a lot of people just don't do that, but I'm all for the integrity of the album. As the album's creator, do you feel that listening to it in its running order is important?

Yeah, for sure. I hear music that way, and one piece complements another. The concept of how you put your first song followed by your second song got lost. I'm not hung up on it, but I think it was more enjoyable and made more sense to listen to albums that way. I am frustrated with people who won't do it anymore because the album has "gone away," yet they don't want to write "just" songs that are downloaded one at a time. They can't wrap their head around that.

I don't make a big noise about it either way. I have my preference, but I think, on a basic level, one song affects the next song. And if you only listen to them one at a time in a bubble, all sorts of opportunities are missed out.

SV That's a great point. "Everybody's Hurting" goes right into "Yonder Comes the Blues," and it's such a nice, logical transition. The record unfolds like you're reading chapters in a book.

That's the only way I know how to do it. I mean, I'm game for trying different ways, but writing songs in a small block of time — the ideas are going to run into one another, and the songs belong together. It's my preference. You have to be inspired by something, and that's the way I know how to do it — the way I *prefer* to do it.

SV My view is that the artist is presenting material to me in an order that I should respect and listen to, at least once at the outset. I may change my mind later on, but you put songs 1 through 11 in that sequence for a specific reason.

I'm actually glad that you do that. I mean, I'm a consumer as well, and it's harder and harder to find the time to do it myself. It's the only way that we *used to* do it. We used to have time to just listen to music. But we have it everywhere now in small sound bites. I mean, this record is, what, 45 minutes? If you have anything else going on in your life, it gets harder and harder to put the time aside for it. I certainly appreciate that you can find that time, and I have to work harder at finding that time myself. But it used to be so easy.

SV You essentially have to set aside "appointment listening time."

That's what it is. And attention spans were longer. You



THE SEQUENTIAL FORMAT WORKS FOR ME. SONG 1 IS SOMEHOW GOING TO MAKE SONG 4 STAND OUT, AND SONG 6 MAYBE A FOIL TO GET YOU TO SONG 8.

didn't feel like you needed immediate results, everything wasn't just a double-click away — you were okay with that. You didn't know any other way anyhow.

SV Sequencing is a lost art.

I can't tell you how many times I make these running orders and *somebody* is bound to suggest that I "topload" it: Just put the "best one" first and the "worst one" last. You get a sense that people are going to leave the room midway through the first song. And forget about Song 3, no one is even going to get there! Or they've got it on random shuffle, and they never get to your "second song" anyway.

SV Did you feel an extra impetus to reinforce the idea to the listener that "I want these songs to be heard in this way"?

As I said before, I have my preference, but I'm not hung up about it. I'm happy that people just listen to the music however they get it; that's the bottom line I'm most interested in. But when I'm making a record, I have to be inspired and work within certain conceptual boundaries that make sense, and the sequential format does work for me. Song 1 is somehow going to make Song 4 stand out, and Song 6 might be a foil to get you to Song 8. That's just how I make records. I don't want to say it's exactly like a play, but sometimes there's an interlude that makes the next song somehow stronger.

SV In the "old days," the listener would need a couple of "absorptions" to get a sense where a certain record was going, and this is that kind of record. I feel I get something more each time I listen to it. I'm finding the layers.

That's the appreciation you have for the LP. I have it as well. That's what I mean by "the benefit." "They've Trapped Us Boys" [Track 9] wouldn't make any sense as the first song on the record. You need more information before you get there than had it been Track 1. And if that isn't me overintellectualizing a record [chuckles]. . . . At some point I have to say, "It's just music."

SV Right. We're not saying this is the only way to listen to a record. Songs can and will come up randomly for people.

For guys like me, putting it together this way is how I get the inspiration for it, and that's what counts for me. I've always seen it that records are records, and that people listen



to them a certain way. And certain songs sound great on certain days at that particular time or hour. That's not a "contract," by any stretch — I mean, I didn't do "The Sound of Silence," where people want to hear it that way for the rest of your life. I can interpret my songs any way I want from here on out. That's more energizing for artists and bands. When I go to shows, I've always appreciated that. The studio environment has nothing to do with the stage environment. You can't reproduce it *exactly*.

SV Songs should also be allowed to grow. Twenty years from now, "Lend a Hand" may have a different meaning behind it, or you may play it differently, or have a line that comes to you after living with it for 2 decades or so that fits better at that point. And you should be "allowed" to do that, because it's your piece, your creation.

And hopefully you've written the songs in a way that allows you to do that. I'm happy to have any connection to any song that I wrote at any time. Now and then, certain songs pop up that I'll think, "I don't know if I can get it together to sing that one" — not because it's too hard to relive it; I haven't gotten that dramatic about any of that stuff. It's just 3-and-a-half minutes of music; I can get with anything any time. But some songs you just lose interest in. You might have written one in an afternoon 15 years ago, and there shouldn't be a responsibility to *have to* play it ever again. But if it means something to somebody, sure, I can do it; I've always been accepting of that, too. I have favorite songs of mine, but if people are going to get in their cars and get a babysitter to come see me, I can't just go up there and say, "I'm only going to do what I want to do." Otherwise, I might as well just stay home and do it for myself.

SV My closing thought about Women + Country is that people should spend time with it in a nondistracted way. Maybe that's too much to ask for most people, but not for the S+V audience.

Well, I appreciate that. The people involved with making the record feel the same way. It's a good collective of people, and you can feel it on the record. We could feel it in the room. I could tell while we were recording it that we had something special. **SV**

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Panasonic

TC-P50VT25 3D PLASMA HDTV

Reviewed by AL GRIFFIN Photos by TONY CORDOZA

2010 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED



↑ Extra Dimensional

3D is just one high point of Panasonic's VT25 Series plasma TVs. There's also a THX picture mode, plenty of media-streaming options, and Wi-Fi connectivity (the latter requires the company's optional wireless LAN adapter).

CORALINE, FOCUS FEATURES/
COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

→ Crystal Eyes

VT25 TVs come with one pair of active-shutter eyewear. You'll need to shell out another \$150 for each additional pair. (Who said new technology was cheap?)



KEY FEATURES

- +50-inch, 1080p-resolution screen
- +3D-capable/comes with one pair of 3D glasses (additional glasses, \$150 each)
- +Wi-Fi-ready (requires optional \$99 wireless LAN adapter)
- +THX picture preset
- +48-Hz/96-Hz display modes for 24p Blu-ray input
- +Blur-reduction mode
- +Pro picture-settings menu with white balance, color management, and gamma adjustments
- +Viera Cast options include Netflix, Amazon Video on Demand, YouTube, Pandora, Picasa photo, and Twitter
- +Viera Link HDMI-CEC control
- +(2) USB ports; SD card slot
- +Connections: (4) HDMI, (2) component-, and (2) composite-video; (4) stereo analog audio; RF Ant/Cable; RGB PC; RS-232 and LAN; optical digital audio output

Dimensions + Weight
48¼ x 32 x 13¼ in; 67¼ lb
(with stand)

Price
\$2,600 (list)

panasonic.com

↓ Remote Notes

A big plus of Panasonic's remote control is its mostly backlit keypad.

A button labeled Viera Tools calls up an onscreen window that takes you straight to the 3D and THX modes.



Along with Samsung, Panasonic has been pushing hard to bring 3D TV to both early adopters and regular folks who happened to catch *Avatar*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Toy Story 3*, or one of the other recent 3D blockbusters at their local multiplex. But whereas Samsung is neutral when it comes to displays, offering 3D TVs in LCD and plasma flavors, 3D for Panasonic is all about plasma. The company's initial VT20 Series sets were made available exclusively through Best Buy. The 3D TVs in its newest VT25 line are coming at ya through a wider range of retailers — where they will be sold alongside the company's DMP-BDT350 Blu-ray Disc player, a model with dual HDMI outputs for better backward compatibility with the installed base of A/V receivers and surround sound preamps.

Panasonic sent me its 50-inch TC-P50VT25 set along with a DMP-BDT350 Blu-ray player to test. (Look for a more in-depth examination of the player in a future issue.) The TV comes with a single pair of active-shutter 3D eyewear; additional units will run you \$150 each. (Ouch!) Unlike some of the bulimic-thin sets that have come out in the past year, VT25-series TVs are a more substantive 3[½] inches deep, with the screen bordered by a relatively thick 2-inch-plus gloss-black bevel. The set's 3 x 10-watt speaker system is positioned out of sight within the panel's bottom edge. A swiveling gloss-black base completes the look, which tends toward the soft-edged and organic.

With four HDMI v1.4 jacks, plus component-/composite-video, RGB PC, LAN, and RS-232 connections, VT25 Series TVs sport enough inputs to handle the majority of A/V system requirements. One installation note: Most of the set's jacks are positioned on the back panel, which means that connected cables jut out directly as opposed to draping downward (as they do on ultra-slim TVs with A/V connections located on a bottom-facing input panel). This doesn't mean you can't wall-mount a Panasonic VT25 Series TV, but you may need to make space allowances for its input section layout.

Recent Panasonic TVs have been multimedia-friendly, and the VT25 Series is no exception. There are two USB ports and an SD card slot on the set's side panel alongside the Channel and Volume up/down, and Power on/off buttons. With an SD card or USB storage device/digital camera plugged in, you can watch AVCHD videos, view slideshows of digital photos, or even listen to MP3 music. Yet an-

other use for the USB slots is to plug in Panasonic's optional DY-WL10 wireless LAN adapter (\$99) and link the TV to the Internet via Wi-Fi.

Now that I've dropped the I-word, here are a few key media-streaming options for Panasonic's 2010 Viera Cast TVs: Netflix (not available during testing, but scheduled to go live by the time you're reading this), Amazon Video on Demand, YouTube, and Pandora. Other offerings include Twitter, Skype (which requires an accessory video camera/microphone), Picasa Web photo albums, Bloomberg stocks, and weather forecasts.

The VT25 Series remote control isn't all that different from previous versions accompanying Panasonic TVs. One recent change is that the clicker now has a mostly backlit keypad — a big plus. Pressing the Input button calls up an onscreen menu with a list of inputs that can be relabeled Blu-ray, Receiver, etc. Along with the Menu key, there are two big buttons orbiting the navigation cursor labeled Viera Cast and Viera Tools. The first one takes you to the set's media-streaming options portal. And the second calls up a row of windows at the bottom of the screen that provide quick shortcuts to stuff like the set's 3D and THX display modes.

» SETUP

Panasonic's picture presets include a THX setting that applies globally to all inputs — just set it once and forget it. There's also a Custom mode with settings that can be independently tweaked for each component you connect to the TV. While THX provided dead-on accurate color points, the TV's grayscale reproduction in that mode displayed a too-warm, somewhat greenish bias (see Test Bench on page 51 for details). For this reason, I preferred to make my adjustments in Custom, which gave me access to a Pro menu with white balance and red/green/blue hue and saturation adjustments — something that's not available in the partially locked-down THX preset.

The Panasonic VT25 Series TV provides four picture-size Format options, including a 16:9-picture-friendly Full mode, that are selectable via remote control. During setup, however, it's important to first visit the Aspect Adjustments submenu and select the Size 2 HD Size option, especially if you want to see every pixel in the image during Blu-ray playback. (The Size 1 option — the default for most picture modes — crops off around 4% of the picture to avoid edge noise from showing up



with broadcast and cable TV sources.)

Other picture setup options that I selected for the P50VT25 included Warm 2 color temperature, Medium video noise reduction, Light black level, 3:2 pulldown On, and the 96 Hz 24p Direct In. Previous Panasonic plasmas mostly provided only two screen-refresh options — 48 Hz and 60 Hz — for handling a 1080p/24 input signal from a Blu-ray Disc player. But the trouble with those modes was that 48 Hz created visible flickering in bright areas of images, while 60 Hz introduced the potential for film-pulldown-related artifacts like picture “stutter.” But with the VT25’s 96 Hz 24p Direct In mode selected, Blu-ray images look both solid and smooth.

Getting 3D going on the Panasonic isn't a problem. You simply hit the Viera Tools button on the remote and select the 3D window, and a 3D settings menu pops up. Unlike the Samsung LED model I tested in our June/July/August issue, the options here are simple and straightforward. The Auto 3D setup option should work for most 3D signals, whether arriving from Blu-ray, satellite, or cable. (Other choices include Side-by-Side, Top and Bottom, and Native.) Two other items, Left/Right Swap and Diagonal Line Filter, don't get much explanation in Panasonic's manual, but they are apparently there to normalize things if 3D images start to look funny. Finally,

you need to press and hold the Power button on Panasonic's eyewear for about a second.

» PERFORMANCE

Since 3D is the cool thing that everybody wants to know about, I'll start there first. When watching my small library of extra-dimensional material — Blu-rays of *Coraline* and *Monsters vs. Aliens*, along with Panasonic's own demo disc — the P50VT25 delivered consistently solid, sharp-looking 3D pictures that were free of crosstalk (on-screen overlap of left- and right-eye pictures that result in "ghost" images). Depth effects were strong, and occasionally dramatic: In a close-up shot from the title sequence of *Coraline*, where a needle juts forward through a buttonhole into the area just in front of the screen, the impression of continuous 3D space created by the Panasonic was entirely believable. The 3D illusion held up well when I sat at off-center seats, and also when I slumped down on the couch with my head slightly tilted (which is my customary, get-comfy viewing posture). The only 3D-related complaint I had was with Panasonic's glasses, which pressed down a bit uncomfortably on the bridge of my nose.

Now, on to the wider world of 2D viewing. Martin Scorsese's mind-bending *Shutter Island* is one of the best-

Side Bar

Inputs and other controls

1 Port Ability

Along with HDMI and composite-video/stereo audio inputs, the P50VT25's side panel jack set includes an SD card slot and dual USB ports. These let you easily plug in media to watch AVCHD videos shot with digital cameras, view slideshows of digital photos, or even listen to MP3 music. The USB slots are also used for connecting Panasonic's Wi-Fi adapter.



2 Back Story

Back-panel connections include three additional HDMI jacks, two component-video sets, an RGB PC input, and an RS-232C port for hooking up to an advanced home-theater control system.



looking movies I've seen on Blu-ray Disc in some time. (Robert Richardson, the film's director of photography, was also responsible for *Inglourious Basterds*, another stunning-looking Blu-ray.) Viewing a shot where the boat carrying federal agents Teddy Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Chuck Aule (Mark Ruffalo) coasts slowly toward the island, I could see a wide range of subtle green tones in trees covering the rocky hills, and the red-brown of derelict brick structures displayed an authentic, weathered hue. In a subsequent shot outside the gates of the hospital grounds, Daniels's gaudy green tie and Aule's red one looked notably vivid. At the same time, the sallow skin tones of both agents came across as natural and stood in contrast to the ruddier faces of the hospital's security officers.

The Panasonic's black level and shadow detail were also impressive. For instance, in a scene where Daniels gains access to the hospital's violent prisoner ward, deep shadows displayed a solid black tone as he walked down a dim hallway, and details like the texture of the brick walls and the uniforms of prisoners in their cells also cut through the gloom. I must say, though, given my experience at the 2010 Consumer Electronics Show looking at demos of Panasonic's Infinite Black Pro — a suite of black-level enhancing technologies that this TV features — I expected to see even deeper blacks and punchier contrast. That's not to say that the Panasonic TC-P50VT25 3D set's blacks were unsatisfying, but they do fall short of the Pioneer KURO plasma-like levels that I recall

appreciating in Panasonic's demo.

The P50VT25's handling of standard-def programs left a bit to be desired, especially when using a component-video connection to feed signals to the set. DVDs that I watched with the TV handling video upconversion were for the most part soft and somewhat noisy-looking. I also took note of a few false contouring artifacts, which showed up as an active, patchy quality to the mist in scenes from the *Master and Commander* DVD where ships sail through fog. I wish I could say that the effect was limited to standard-def programs, but I occasionally saw it with Blu-rays as well. For instance, in a scene from *Shutter Island* where the agents examine an escaped prisoner's empty cell, light-to-dark gradations in the harsh shadow cast on the wall by an overhead lamp showed a similar effect.



Not So Flat

The 3½-inch cabinet depth of the VT25 Series TVs is more substantive than many other recent sets, including some 3D models. A swiveling base lets you easily change the TV's position when stand-mounted.

BOTTOM LINE

The best thing that I can say about Panasonic's TC-P50VT25 is that it's capable of delivering a home 3D-viewing experience that's strikingly close to what you'd get in good theaters (minus the huge screen, of course). Beyond that, VT25-series TVs are the complete package: They provide a range of engaging media-streaming options, videophile-oriented setup features, and picture quality that, taken as a whole, ranks up there with the best flat-panel TVs. If you're in the market for a new set and are looking to go 3D, this Panasonic is easy to recommend. **SV**

TEST BENCH



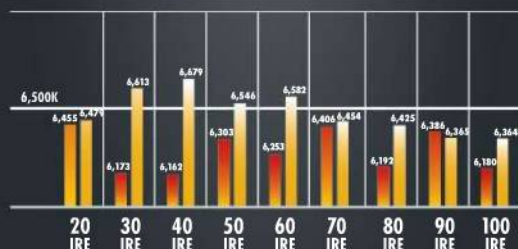
FULL LAB RESULTS AT
SOUNDANDVISIONMAG.COM/PANASONIC-VT253D

Brightness (100-IRE):

Before Calibration 31.2 fL After Calibration 35.3 fL

Color Temperature

Before Calibration / After Calibration



Precalibration measurements were made with the Panasonic TC-P50VT25's THX picture preset selected. Grayscale tracking in that mode measured ± 338 K of the 6,500-K standard from 20 to 100 IRE, which is below-average performance, although its color points perfectly mirrored the SMPTE HD spec. The set's color points were noticeably more saturated in Custom mode. However, the color-management and white-balance adjustments in that mode's Pro setup menu (not available in THX) let me make significant improvements in both grayscale tracking and color-point accuracy.

Light output dipped to a degree when I watched 3D programs, and there were also slight color shifts, but the set's picture presets in that mode provided adequate enough controls to compensate. (There is no THX preset for watching 3D content, although the

Cinema preset that substitutes for it displays similar characteristics.) The TV's color decoding was reasonably accurate in Custom mode; in THX, it displayed a -10% dip for red and -2.5% for green and blue. Gamma at the default 2.2 setting measured as 2.1.

Overcan — the amount of picture area hidden behind the edges of the screen — was 0% for high-definition signals with Full/HD Size 2 selected and 4% in Full/HD Size 1. The TV displayed 1080i- and 720p-format high-def as well as standard-def test patterns at full resolution via both its HDMI and component-video inputs, although 480i-format standard-def signals looked soft via a component-video connection. With its blur-reduction setting active, a full 1,200 lines was visible on motion-resolution tests, as opposed to around 750 lines with blur reduction switched off. — A.G.

SV RATINGS



Runco

Q-750i LED DLP PROJECTOR

Reviewed by BRENT BUTTERWORTH

2010 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED



↑ **Go Wide**

A range of lens options are available for Runco's Q Series projectors, including a CineWide with AutoScope feature that adds a motorized accessory lens to project 2.35:1 images free of black letterbox bars on an ultrawide screen.

➔ THX: Yes

The Q-750i's THX mode delivers a great-looking picture right out of the box. A quick fine-tune of the brightness and contrast controls is all it'll take to coax optimal performance from the projector.



KEY FEATURES

- +LED illumination rated to last the lifetime of the projector
- +1080p resolution
- +1.3x zoom lens (others available)
- +Vertical and horizontal lens shift
- +Accepts 1080p/24 input signals
- +Inputs: (2) HDMI, VGA, (2) component-video (one RCA, one BNC), composite-video, S-video; RS-232C, 3.5-mm IR input, (2) 3.5-mm 12V trigger outputs

Dimensions + Weight
9 1/4 x 22 1/2 x 22 1/4 in;
20 lb (without lens)

Price
\$14,995

runco.com



↑ Nice Touch

Although remote controls do tend to be an afterthought with front projectors, Runco's offers a backlit keypad and full set of direct input and aspect-ratio buttons.

Since 1986, I've owned at least eight TVs, every one but the last replaced because of failure, obsolescence, or my insatiable yearning for a larger screen. Yet I still wake to the melody of the Sony clock radio I bought that same year. Wouldn't it be great if a video display could last as long as my clock radio?

Maybe it can. Projector manufacturers are now making a transition from UHP lamps that last nearly 3,000 hours to LEDs that, as rated, can last tens of thousands of hours. Among these companies, Runco makes the most audacious assertion for the lifespan of its LEDs: According to the company's Web site, the LEDs in its new Q-750i DLP projector "never burn out."

Credit this claim not to Runco's engineering but to the chutzpah of its marketing department. The guts of the Q-750i are essentially the same as those used in the Digital Projection M-Vision Cine LED projector (reviewed April/May 2010; also on our Web site) and in Vivitek's H9080FD. Yet Vivitek claims only 20,000-plus hours of life for the LEDs, while DP claims 60,000-plus. Truth be told, no one really knows how long they'll last, but it's a pretty sure bet that the Q-750i will be obsolete long before its LEDs die — if they ever do.

DLP projectors that use red, green, and blue LEDs can produce much more intense, saturated colors than ones with a white lamp and a color filter wheel. Runco used this expanded color reproduction to create Runco Smart Color (RSC), a mode said to improve skin-tone reproduction without affecting other colors. The Runco Q-750i also includes the Personal Color Equalizer (PCE), a set of controls that allow adjustment of hue, saturation, and level of the primary and secondary colors. (The Digital Projection and Vivitek models include this feature under different names.)

While the light engines, jack panels, and basic menu structures of the three LED projectors are the same, Runco added a few other exclusive features in addition to RSC. Most obvious is the Q-750i's handsome, sturdy case, which features a flip-down panel to hide the video and power connections. The projector is THX-certified, which in this case means it has a THX mode intended to deliver an accurate picture with only basic calibration of brightness and contrast. ISF Day and Night modes let the installer create separate memories for dark and moderately lit surroundings.

Because this is only our second review of an LED home-theater projector, I'll briefly recap LED's other advantages. UHP lamps begin to dim and shift color after about 1,000 hours, but manufacturers say LEDs perform fairly consistently for most of their lifespan. Single-chip DLP projectors with UHP lamps produce color fringing, but LED-based DLP projectors don't because they use separate red, green, and blue LEDs instead of a color filter wheel. LEDs can also produce deeper blacks because they can be almost instantly dimmed to any level — something that's impossible with a UHP lamp. Runco also claims an energy savings of 70% compared with a similar lamp-based projector.

As with most Runco projectors, the Q Series comes with all sorts of options. A wide variety of primary lenses are available to suit different installations. Runco's CineWide with AutoScope feature adds a motorized accessory lens to project 2.35:1 images free of black letterbox bars on an ultra-wide screen. The Q-750d model adds a separate video processor and costs \$3,000 more.

» SETUP

Prepping the Q-750i is like driving to a 7-Eleven in a Hyundai Accent — a quick, no-frills ride. Everything is manual, including focus, zoom, and lens shift. As with the DP and the Vivitek, lens-shift adjustment requires use of a long metric Allen wrench. Also, the zoom has less range than most, so your installer won't have a lot of leeway in mounting the Q-750i.

The THX mode does, indeed, give you a great picture right out of the box. All it took was fine-tuning of the brightness and contrast controls to get a picture that's pretty much the best the Q-750i can deliver. I measured an average color temperature of 6,464 kelvins (K), almost right on the industry standard of 6,500 K. Calibration of the red, green, and blue gain and offset controls produced only a slight improvement (see Test Bench on page 54).

It was an accurate picture, but it wasn't overly bright. I measured only 18.2 footlamberts with a full white (100-IRE) image on my 80-inch-wide screen. That's bright enough for a home theater with controlled lighting, but not for a more typical media room where you're likely to have a light or two on.

Start-up time was 40 seconds, which is maybe a third of the warm-up time for a lamp-based projector. When you kill the power, the light extinguishes

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Definitive Technology

2010 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED

MYTHOS XTR-50 ON-WALL SPEAKERS

Reviewed by BRENT BUTTERWORTH Photos by ZACH STOVALL

Lean Machines

- 1** Designed specifically for use with the latest ultra-thin TVs, the XTR-50's cabinet depth maxes out at only 1½ inches. (Shown here on their stands.)
- 2** An XTR-50 can be flipped on its side and used as a center speaker. You can use it as a surround speaker, too.
- 3** DefTech insists that you use a subwoofer with the XTR-50 system – its own SuperCube III, for example.
- 4** Mythos Gems are tried-and-true surround speakers that work well with any Def Tech speakers, the XTR-50 included.





◀ Think Thin

Space-saving strokes of genius abound in the XTR-50, including woofer magnets that poke through the back of its cabinet and a thermally conductive gasket that lets the enclosure act as a heat sink.

KEY FEATURES

+XTR-50 LCR speaker (\$699 each): (2) 3½-in woofers; (4) 3½-in passive radiators; 1-in tweeter; 27 in high; 5 lb

+Mythos Gem surround speaker (\$279 each): (2) 3½-in woofers; 1-in tweeter; 10¼ in high; 4¼ lb

+SuperCube III subwoofer (\$699 each): 7½-in woofer; (2) 7½-in passive radiators; 10¼ in high; 25 lb

Price (as tested)
\$3,354

definitivetech.com

I don't know who said, "You can never be too rich or too thin," but it wasn't a speaker engineer. Thinness is the enemy of good sound because in order to produce sound, a diaphragm of some sort has to move back and forth. The lower the frequency of sound, the farther back and forth that diaphragm has to move. And the thinner the enclosure that holds the diaphragm, the shorter the distance the diaphragm can move — and the less bass and more distortion it will produce.

When the slimmest flat-panel TVs were about 4 inches deep, it wasn't hard to build an equally thin on-wall speaker. Now that many new TVs are less than 1½ inches deep, older on-wall designs are starting to look like Lane Bryant models. Enter the Definitive Technology Mythos XTR-50, the first speaker designed specifically for use with the latest ultra-thin TVs. The XTR-50's curved grille stands out only 1½ inches in the middle and 1 inch at the edges. That curve provides extra depth for the speaker drivers in the middle but matches the depth of a 1-inch-thick TV at the edges.

Minor strokes of genius abound in the XTR-50. The woofers' neodymium magnets poke through the back of the extruded aluminum cabinet, an idea that bought Definitive's engineers a precious few millimeters of space. A thermally conductive gasket seals the hole around the woofers and also allows the aluminum enclosure to act as a heat sink. Drivers mount from the back, thus tying the front and back together mechanically to minimize vibration.

Each XTR-50 has the same 1-inch aluminum-dome tweeter used in other Mythos speakers, flanked by two 3½-inch aluminum-dome woofers — the first dome woofers I've seen. Four 3½-inch aluminum-dome passive radiators surround the woofers. But even six 3½-inch domes can't produce enough bass to convey the bombast of a typical Jason Statham flick. Thus, Def Tech insists that you use a subwoofer with the XTR-50. My test system included the SuperCube III, a cute minisub that complements the XTR-50's aesthetic.

You can flip an XTR-50 on its side to use it as a center speaker, and you can use it as a surround speaker, too. It's available only in black, which looks great next to most TVs but could be visually intrusive when used as a surround. Realizing this, Definitive catered to my sophisticated design sense by including a pair of its Mythos Gems. The Gem, re-

viewed in our January 2009 issue (also available on our Web site) as part of a Mythos system, is a 10¼-inch-high surround speaker with dual 3½-inch woofers set at different angles to broaden the sound field.

» SETUP

Although the XTR-50 was obviously designed for on-wall use, Definitive Technology includes hardware that lets you place the speakers on a table or a TV stand. A smoked-plastic base attaches to the speaker for vertical (i.e., left or right channel) use, and two feet attach to the back of the speaker for horizontal (i.e., center channel) use.

I, being of sound mind and body, chose to attach the XTR-50s directly to my wall, surrounding a 72-inch projection screen. While the back of the speaker has two slots that allow it to be hung from screws, Definitive also supplies a slim metal mount that makes the process easier. I had the front three speakers mounted in 10 minutes, using nothing but a powered screwdriver and drywall screws. If you want to conceal the speakers by running the wires through the walls (which you should), you'll need to set aside more time.

Just as a sleek designer dress has no room for a wallet, the XTR-50 has no room for speaker-cable binding posts. Def Tech instead provides a connector with tiny screw terminals. I like these better than spring clips, because they provide a more secure connection and are easier for large fingers to handle.

Because the 3½-inch dome woofers have scant output at low frequencies, you'll need to take care in selecting the subwoofer crossover point during setup. As you can see in the extended lab notes online, even the Gem's two 3½-inch cones can out-thump the XTR-50's six domes. A crossover setting of 120 Hz filters out enough bass to prevent the woofers from disintegrating when you play the XTR-50 loud. It's possible that the relatively high crossover point will let you localize the bass — i.e., pick out by ear where it's coming from, which isn't supposed to happen — but you can fix that by placing the sub near the center speaker or, better yet, using two or more subwoofers.

» PERFORMANCE

You must assume that speakers designed to match a TV are made primarily for movies. That's why I



↑ The Set Up

Since the XTR-50's woofers have scant output at low frequencies, you'll need to carefully select your subwoofer crossover point. A 120-Hz setting will filter out enough bass to keep things under control when you crank it up.



← Deep Listening

The XTR-50 produces a greater sense of depth than most on-walls, with instrumental sounds on many recordings seeming to come from well behind the speakers.

started my listening tests with 9, a sci-fi movie nobody saw (not to be confused with *Nine*, a musical nobody saw, or *District 9*, a sci-fi movie everybody saw). I thought 9 would be perfect for getting the feel of the XTR-50s without risk of damaging them; after all, an animated movie about rag dolls couldn't be too tough on the woofers, could it?

Wrong. Turns out *9* is a post-apocalyptic piece pitting a truly ragtag group of those rag dolls against robotic killing machines. It's one of the darkest movies I've seen, in large part because of the machine-on-doll violence and the frequent discharge of military ordnance. As I inched my receiver's volume knob higher and higher, the XTR-50s never complained, never distorted, and never sounded less than superb. They even survived a full-blast viewing of *Terminator Salvation*, last year's most bombastic Blu-ray Disc.

Usually, a design-oriented speaker like the XTR-50 hits its output limits at a much lower level than the subwoofer it's paired with. However, even the good-for-its-size SuperCube III couldn't keep up with its skinny sibling. I often heard distortion from the sub when I cranked the system, but rarely heard it from the XTR-50.

The tonal balance of the Def Tech XTR-50 suits movies well. Dialogue was easy to understand, with no bloating

or smearing. The strings in film scores sounded unusually engaging. Experimentation with my tried-and-true demo discs revealed what I consider to be the XTR-50's only noteworthy flaw: a mild sibilance that occasionally intrudes on dialogue.

Although the XTR-50 wasn't designed primarily as a music speaker, it's gonna be hooked up to your receiver so it's likely to get some music played through it. When it does, you'll probably like what you hear. The XTR-50 produced a greater sense of depth than most of the on-wall speakers I've tested; the instrumental sounds on many recordings seemed to come from well behind the speakers. Many of the midrange instruments — saxophone, electric guitar, etc. — really jumped out at me, much as the strings in movie soundtracks did. When playing music CDs, I only once noticed that slight sibilance I heard in movie dialogue. That's probably because music vocals are usually better recorded and have less sibilance in the first place.

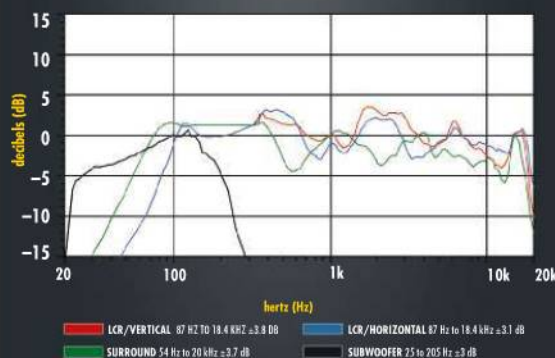
Music that contains extreme high frequencies, such as brushed cymbals and acoustic guitars, seemed a bit subdued through the XTR-50; I noticed that the title track to Steely Dan's *Aja* sounded a little less vivid than usual. So overall, it's a competent presentation for music, although less compelling than most audiophiles would like.

» BOTTOM LINE

Listening to the Definitive Technology Mythos XTR-50 do its stuff with movie soundtracks was like watching a 98-pound fashion model sling an 80-pound bag of cement over her shoulder: It's hard to believe it's possible even after you've witnessed it. As long as you stick to that 120-Hz cross-over point, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the XTR-50 even for a large, serious media room. And given that Definitive Technology has priced it no higher than most other on-walls even though there's nothing else like it on the market, it's a fantastic bargain. **SV**

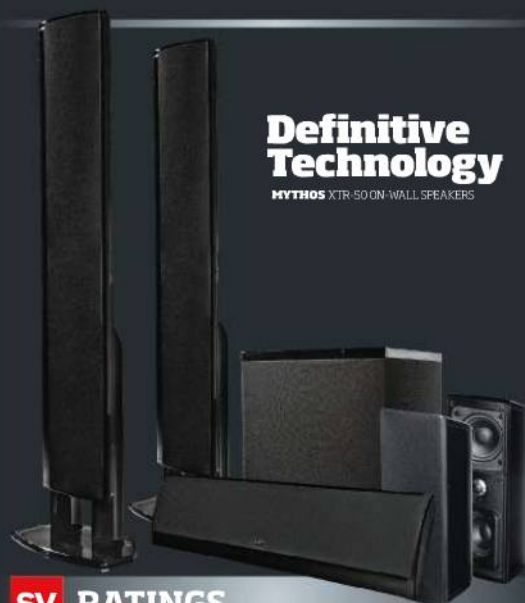
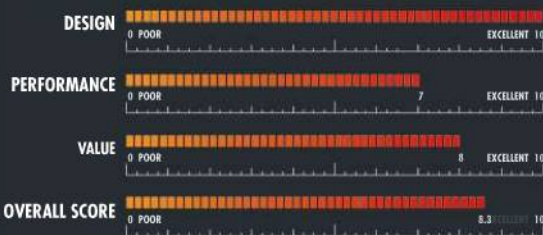
↓ TEST BENCH

 FULL LAB RESULTS AT
SOUNDANDVISIONMAG.COM/DEF-TECH-XTR-50



The Def Tech XTR-50 measures quite well when mounted on a wall either vertically or horizontally, with no major anomalies except a sharp rolloff of about -9 dB at 20 kHz. Off-axis response is very good when mounted vertically and fair when mounted horizontally. Measured on a stand verti-

cally, the response is a bit smoother at ± 3.8 dB. The Gem measures surprisingly flat for a multidirectional surround speaker. The SuperCube III subwoofer puts out good bass oomph for its size, averaging 98 dB at 10% distortion or lower, with maximum output of 101 dB at 63 Hz. —B.B.

**SV RATINGS**



Flawless Finish

Revolutionary FollowThru™ conceals and protects cables, even through the elbow

Easy Installation

QuickConnect™ system allows TV to snap securely onto mount with one movement and unlock with the push of a button

Perfectly Positions TV

Easily adjust height and level after mounting with ProSet™ technology, without re-drilling or removing TV



Model XF228

Easy To Center On Wall

Mount design allows TV to shift left and right for perfect placement, even with off-center studs

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Monitor Audio

2010 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED

SILVER RX SERIES SPEAKER SYSTEM

Reviewed by BRENT BUTTERWORTH



↓ GRILLE OFF

Concealed magnets hidden below the wooden veneer of Monitor's Silver RX tower and center-channel speakers hold the grille in place. An advantage to this design is that the speakers can be set up "naked" with no grille and you won't have to gaze at unsightly rubber grommets.

➔ WONDER STUFF

All speaker drivers in the Silver RX Series benefit from Monitor Audio's proprietary Ceramic-Coated Aluminum/Magnesium (C-CAM) material, which is used to stiffen the diaphragms of the woofers, midranges, and tweeters. Shown at right, the system's compact RX Centre speaker.



KEY FEATURES

+Silver RX6 tower speaker (\$1,250/pair): 6-in woofer; 6-in midrange/woofer; 1-in tweeter; 35% in high; 36% lb

+Silver RX Centre speaker (\$675): 6-in woofer, 6-in midrange/woofer; 1-in tweeter; 19% in wide; 21% lb

+Silver RXFX surround speaker (\$750/pair): 6-in midrange/woofer; (2) 1-in tweeters; 11% in wide; 10% lb

+Silver RXW-12 subwoofer (\$1,300): 12-in woofer; 500-watt amplifier; 15 in high; 49% lb

Price (as tested)
\$3,975

monitoraudiousa.com

In Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley, where I live, "naked" is all the rage. That's not just because the Valley is the world capital of adult-video production. It's also because the SFV is home to several of America's leading speaker reviewers. Don't worry: As far as I know, the reviewers are keeping their clothes on. But many of the speakers they review are not.

Today's trend in speaker design is to let it all hang out — to cast off the grilles and put the woofers, midranges, and tweeters on bold display. We're even seeing this trend among in-wall speakers and soundbars.

The latest "naked" speakers to enter my home are Monitor Audio's Silver RX Series, which were clearly designed to be used without grilles. Many past Monitor designs sported dolled-up drivers that look good exposed, but most of the speakers' faces were marred with unsightly rubber grommets needed to hold the grilles in place. In the new Silver RX Series speakers, Monitor has replaced those grommets with magnets hidden under the wood veneer. Just touch the grille to the front and the concealed magnets almost magically grab hold. But like the robes that the Valley's more risqué onscreen performers wear between takes, the grilles are there only as a courtesy; the idea is that you'll use the speakers with no adornment at all.

There's a side benefit to the naked design

who live in 500-square-foot row houses built in the 18th century.

The system that Monitor's North American distributor supplied me for review consists of two RX6 tower speakers, an RX Centre, two RXFX surround speakers, and an RXW-12 subwoofer. All except the subwoofer employ the same 1-inch tweeter and 6-inch midrange/woofer in various combinations. The RX6 adds a 6-inch woofer that lacks the polished phase plug at the center of the midwoofer's cone. A switch lets you run the RXFX's dual tweeters in bipolar (in-phase) mode for a more directional sound or in dipolar (reverse-phase) mode for a more diffused sound. The sub has a 12-inch C-CAM woofer and an internal amp rated at 500 watts continuous.

All models are available in four wood finishes, or in black or white lacquer for an additional cost. Sadly, the subwoofer and the surround speaker don't conform to the "naked" theme; their front baffles bear the usual rubber grille grommets.

» SETUP

The Silver FX Series' conservative design could be considered either well grounded in tradition or same-old, same-old. But there's no denying that the straightforward design makes setup easy. Except for the necessity of attaching a

The speaker cabinets are compact — something you might expect, given that they were designed in Britain by people who live in 500-square-foot row houses built in the 18th century.

concept: Speakers usually sound better with their grilles off. That's why some manufacturers of exotic high-end models don't even offer grilles as an option.

Beyond the cosmetics, the Silver RX Series follows the usual Monitor Audio script. To cut distortion, the company's proprietary Ceramic-Coated Aluminum/Magnesium (C-CAM) material stiffens the diaphragms in its woofers, midranges, and tweeters. The speaker cabinets are compact, which you might expect given that they were designed in Britain by people

plinth to the bottom of each RX6, you basically pull the speakers out of the boxes and plopp them in place. Large thumbwheels make it convenient to adjust the leveling spikes on the bottom of the RX6 and the RXW-12.

Each RX6 is supplied with what the manual awkwardly refers to as a "port bung," a foam cylinder that stuffs into the front bass port to reduce low-frequency response. The manual recommends using it in small rooms. In my large home theater, it wasn't necessary.

The RXFX has a rear-mounted bipole/dipole



↑ TURBO BOOST

The RXW-12 subwoofer contains two EQ-curve pushbuttons: one that delivers a flat frequency response, and a second that adds a 4-dB boost to give action movies more kick.

switch, which is difficult to access when the speaker is hung on the wall, although most people set this switch once and never touch it again. After a bit of experimentation, I set it to bipolar, but that's just a personal preference.

The RXW-12 has a convenient top-mounted volume control, as well as pushbuttons that let you select two equalization curves. EQ 1 selects a flat frequency response, while EQ 2 adds a 4-dB boost at 21 Hz — a feature intended to give action movies a little more kick.

» PERFORMANCE

I started my listening sessions with the grilles off, as I do with most of the speakers I review. But while I enjoyed the speakers' crisp, present treble, it sounded just a bit too bright for me. Placing the grilles on the speakers tamed the treble perfectly. Suddenly, though, I was in a weird situation. Usually, people might remove their speaker grilles for listening and then replace them to protect the speakers from accidental damage. I was doing just the opposite — leaving the gorgeous speakers to stand naked but covering them with the grilles for listening.

Speaker grilles tend to dull the upper treble, but not in this case. High-frequency percussion instruments came through particularly clearly. When I listened to the jazz/funk classic "What I Say" on Miles Davis's *Live-Evil* CD, the pandeiro (a type of tambourine) and the agogô bells played by Brazilian percussionist Airto Moreira seemed to float right between and about a foot above the speakers. The percussion stood out from the group's sonic fracas as if I were hearing the music performed live in a small club.

At the other end of the sonic spectrum, the RX6 staggered me with its deep, dynamic bass. The towers perfectly replicated the fast, fat groove of

» BOTTOM LINE

I'm surprised at the raw power of Monitor Audio's Silver RX Series speakers. I'm delighted at their vivid sonic imaging. And I'm charmed by their gorgeous looks – with or without the grilles attached. If you're seeking a compact, do-it-all system, I doubt you can do much better than this one. **SV**

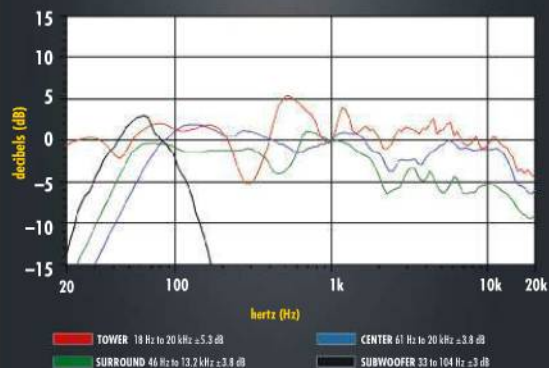
Michael Henderson's electric bass on "What I Say" and even took a stab at the couch-shaking, ultra-deep pipe-organ notes on Michael Murray's recording of Joseph Jongen's *Symphonie Concertante* with the San Francisco Symphony. For a small speaker with two 6-inch woofers, the RX6's performance is astounding. With so much great stuff going on in the highs and lows, I almost forgot to evaluate the speaker's mids. But that's partly because they sounded so natural that they didn't call attention to themselves.

The RX6's dynamics left me pining for a dumb, loud action movie. Luckily, I had on hand the Blu-ray Disc of *Fast & Furious*, which has a classic "ram all the faders to the top" soundtrack mix. The RX Series system perfectly reproduced the four different sounds in *Fast & Furious* (roaring engines, squealing tires, throbbing music, and the pummeling of lowlifes by Vin Diesel). Had I been blindfolded for this test, I'd have thought I was listening to a high-end system designed for a 25-seat home theater. The RX6 and Monitor's surprisingly potent little RXW-12 subwoofer's dynamics let them accurately deliver this over-the-top movie's soundtrack with a complete lack of audible distortion even when I played them really, really loud.

The RXFX surround speakers' timbre matching was superb. As objects flew past me during the movie's driving scenes, the sound effects were remarkably consistent as they shifted from the front speakers to the surrounds. This characteristic helped the system produce an enveloping effect that drew me into whatever I was watching.

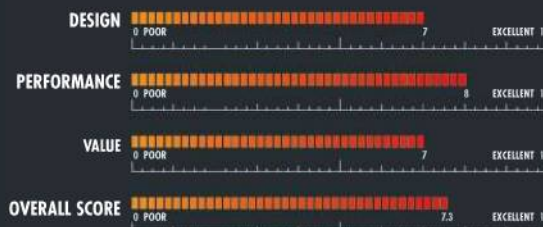
The RX Centre seemed subtly brighter-sounding than the RX6, even with its grille on, but I noticed that only when I was listening critically. Once I got into the movie or TV show I was watching, I immediately forgot about the difference.

↓ TEST BENCH

 FULL LAB RESULTS AT
SOUNDANDVISIONMAG.COM

The Silver RX Series speakers all have a fairly smooth midrange and a mild treble rolloff. The RX6 tower has the floor bounce effect typical of tower speakers, with a dip at 300 Hz and a peak at 500 Hz, but through most of its range its response is within ± 2.5 dB.

The RX Centre has smooth on-axis response but gets a little rough off-axis. The RXFX measures pretty flat for a multipolar surround. The RXW-12 subwoofer averages 92 dB at 10% distortion or lower, with maximum output of 102 dB at 50 Hz. — B.B.

**SV RATINGS**

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Pioneer

VSX-1020-K A/V RECEIVER

Reviewed by DANIEL KUMIN Photos by ZACH STOVALL

2010 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED



1 Get Surrounded

The surround modes include Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD MA, and Dolby PLIIz. Also onboard is Pioneer's own MCACC autotsetup and calibration plus room-correction system.



2 Plug It In

The VSX-1020-K receiver's back panel sports no fewer than five 3D-ready, v1.4a HDMI inputs, but no S-video connections or a multichannel analog audio input.

↓ Control It



Pioneer's remote proved quite usable despite its small, closely spaced buttons. The company's iControl AVR app also lets you operate things via iPhone.

Liquid Sound

The Pioneer VSX-1020-K ably conveyed the gargantuan scale of effects like the approaching tsunamis in the high-production-values *2012*, delivering all-channels DTS-HD Master Audio sound with no shortage of usable power. And with PLIIz riding on top, the towering waves towered audibly higher, wetter, and more menacing.

KEY FEATURES

- +7 x 80 watts (2 channels driven, 20 Hz to 20 kHz, 0.08% THD)
- +5 HDMI (v1.4a) inputs, 1 output
- +Transcodes component-, composite-, and S-video for output over HDMI
- +Upconverts lower-res analog and HDMI video to 1080p (HDMI out)
- +Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio, DSD (SACD), and Dolby PLIIz decoding
- +Pioneer MCACC auto-setup/calibration and room/speaker correction with supplied mike
- +7-channel/9-band user-adjustable graphic EQ
- +Graphical onscreen setup menus
- +FM/AM tuner with 63 presets; Sirius satellite-radio-ready
- +Internet radio streaming via wired Ethernet
- +iPod playback via front-panel USB port with onscreen control; generic-USB-memory playback
- +Bluetooth A2DP wireless stereo-audio link via optional Pioneer AS-BT100 adapter
- +Assignable powered-Zone 2 or front-biamp channels
- +8-component pre-programmed/learning remote
- +IR in/out, Pioneer Control I/O

Dimensions + Weight

16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 15 in;
22 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb

Price
\$549

pioneerelectronics.com

Pioneer Electronics knows a thing or two about receivers. As it should, since the company has been making them longer, without interruption, than almost anyone else. What Nixon-era dorm room was complete without a Pioneer SX-424 and a pair of small Ohms or JBLs? (Party!)

Times have changed since then, of course, and so have receivers. Witness Pioneer's new VSX-1020-K, a model offering a full 7.1 channels instead of 2, a total of 560 watts of power instead of an optimistic 30, and God knows how many listening modes instead of just stereo and mono. As for special features, while the SX-424 boasted a lighted tuning dial plus a Loudness button, the VSX-1020-K has... well, let's just say more.

» SETUP

That "more" begins with Pioneer's proprietary MCACC (Multi-Channel Acoustic Calibration) auto-setup and calibration plus room-correction DSP system. You also get graphical onscreen menus and displays, iPod/iPhone connectivity and control, and even Bluetooth link-ability using an add-on module. Front-panel USB port iPod integration (as well as playback of music files from a generic USB drive) is on board, of course, as is streaming Internet radio via the rear-panel Ethernet port (but not streaming from a networked Mac/PC or other hardware such as a DLNA-capable networked hard drive). You can even download a free app from Apple's iTunes store to control the VSX-1020-K from your iPhone/iPod touch.

But as to the actual setting up, Pioneer's MCACC takes care of all the heavy lifting automatically. MCACC is by now a familiar accomplice (though it has never before appeared in so affordable a receiver), and it worked as usual; the automated series of clicks and noise bursts circulated among my six-speaker-plus-sub layout, assigning crossover frequencies that were perfectly sensible, even if not precisely the ones that I use from day to day. Channel levels likewise deviated less than a decibel either way when checked using my handheld sound-level meter.

The balance of MCACC's "acoustic calibration," which is speaker/room-corrective equalization by individual channel, also matched previous impressions. The algorithm automatically calculates EQ results for three different references: one that essentially matches left/right pairs, one that normalizes all speaker responses to the front pair, and one that corrects all speakers individually. There's a lot more to MCACC, including the ability to offload results to a

USB memory stick for detailed viewing on a PC. But generally, I found that Pioneer's room correction delivered audible gains in bass smoothness and clarity, though at the slight cost of added treble brightness. However, you can easily go in after the fact and tweak the EQ settings onscreen in detail.

It's also worth noting that the VSX-1020-K offers no fewer than five 3D-ready, v1.4a HDMI inputs, a new high for this price category. At the same time, it has no S-video inputs or a multichannel analog audio input for hooking up a first- or second-generation Blu-ray Disc player or an SACD/DVD-Audio player.

» PERFORMANCE

My first concern as always was to evaluate the Pioneer's amplifying prowess in the simplest context: plain 2-channel stereo. Listening to high-res music downloads (via an outboard digital-to-analog converter) revealed nothing untoward: The VSX-1020-K sounded clean, dynamic, and surprisingly powerful, with enough 2-channel oomph to deliver convincingly lifelike levels on acoustic music without strain. I cued up "You Can't Beat the House" from Mark Knopfler's *Get Lucky* and heard precisely the dynamic subtlety, treble clarity, and vocal richness I expected, reminding me again just how capable modern, high-value audio electronics really are. (Trust me, the SX-424 never sounded so good.)

Baseball season was underway as I reviewed this new Pioneer, and I enjoyed kicking in Dolby PLIIz, with its "front height" channels, while watching my Red Sox. The height dimension is great for sporting events with lots of applause and crowd noise, as it really does draw you into big-stadium action just that much more. (It seems like a subtle distinction at first, but the more I listen to it, the more I miss the added dimensionality when I take the front height channels away.)

I didn't wait long before testing the Pioneer's abilities with a high-production-values movie. The Blu-ray Disc of *2012* fit the bill admirably, and while I won't disguise the fact that I lacked the fortitude to sit straight through this risible 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -hour mish-mash of action nonsense, I did sample enough to appreciate the considerable wow factor of its soundtrack.

The VSX-1020-K was clearly up to the task of all-channels, end-of-days wow-ing. It ably conveyed the gargantuan scale of effects in the high-production values *2012* like the approaching tsunamis, delivering truly sweeping, all-channels DTS-HD

Master Audio sound with no shortage of usable power. And with PLLz riding "on top," the towering waves towered audibly higher, wetter, and more menacing.

The VSX-1020-K's Internet radio feature sounded quite good on higher-bit-rate channels. Its operation was also smooth and a good deal more responsive than on some other networked A/V receivers I've encountered. The VSX-1020-K's Anchor Bay video processing deinterlaces and up-scales both digital and analog sources for HDMI output. As expected given my previous experience with Anchor Bay silicon, performance was solid and artifact-free. You can also adjust video parameters like contrast, brightness, and sharpness (though only for standard-def signals), and the settings are individually retained by source/input. The Pioneer upconverts component- and composite-video signals to HDMI, and also downconverts component for output over its composite jacks (in case you want to record *I Love Lucy* reruns to that old Beta VCR). Not a complete video features palette, but pretty impressive nonetheless for an under-\$600 receiver.

My iPhone worked perfectly when plugged into its front-panel USB port, delivering sprightly onscreen navigation via Pioneer's remote control, including, though more slowly, cover-art display. But my steam-powered 60-GB iPod/Photo would not work; when I plugged it in, the Pioneer's onscreen menu displayed "Generation Error." (Same could be said for this author.) Pioneer was nice enough to also send along its optional AS-BT100 Bluetooth adapter (\$100), a Chiclets-size dongle that jacks into a rear-panel port. This, too, paired up with my iPhone without drama, and delivered similar navi-

» BOTTOM LINE

This is a pretty cool little receiver. Its video and audio performance is solid, and it's surely as loaded with features – many of them legitimately useful – as anything in its price range. I'm usually all for simplicity, especially in the more affordable price ranges, but in this case I didn't see a serious downside to the Pioneer's feature richness. I'm guessing that more than a few VSX-1020-Ks will see the inside of a dorm room – and that those rooms will become the most popular hangouts on their floors. **SV**

gation and control, with typical A2DP Bluetooth sound: usable but a bit short of true hi-fi.

» **ERGONOMICS**

Pioneer supplies the VSX-1020-K with a non-illuminated version of the dense but capable pre-programmed/learning remote that came with its flagship models a year or two back, and it's still quite usable despite the small buttons and close spacing. However, the lack of a backlit keypad means you'll be reaching for glasses, a flashlight, or both more often than you'd like.

The VSX-1020-K's onscreen graphics are pretty slick, but the display is a full-screen, rather than overlay, type that hijacks the screen altogether and engenders a several-second pause while it arrives and departs (still faster than some other receivers I've used). The set also lacks any pop-up menus or alerts for volume level, surround modes, signal formats, and the like. Some consider these annoyances (they're defeatable on most receivers), but I've come to rely on pop-up displays as useful references and miss them when they're absent.

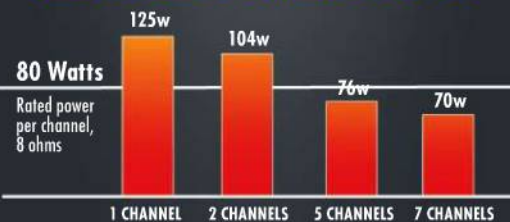
After downloading Pioneer's iPhone app, I was delighted to find it an eminently usable, added-value tool. The iControl AVR app delivers just volume/mute controls on its initial screen but provides a huge bonus on two adjacent pages: complete lists of all surround modes and all inputs. You can select among these with a finger-touch for instant results and no waiting for the VSX-1020-K's menu to rise and fall. There's also a groovy tilt-ball for 4-way sound balance and, even better, the potential for full Zone 2 control. With a VSX-1020-K set up for two-zone operation and an iPhone/touch in your pocket, iControl AVR turns it into a powerful wireless Zone 2 controller.

↓ TEST BENCH

 FULL LAB RESULTS AT
SOUNDANDVISIONMAG.COM/PIONEER-VSX-1020-K



MEASURED POWER OUTPUT



*Current-limiting protection triggered when 4 or more channels were simultaneously driven for longer than 1 second or so, limiting output to around 70 to 75 watts.

Pioneer's affordable VSX-1020-K was a pleasure to measure. It performed superbly on all of our standard PCM and Dolby Digital digital-input tests (save one, which I'll discuss below). Frequency response, noise, distortion, and linearity tests were also all aces. Power output was generously above Pioneer's rather vague 80-watt spec, though current-limiting protection engaged within a second or so when 4 or more channels were driven, limiting steady-state power to below 70 watts. (As I've mentioned many times before, I consider this to be unimportant for real-world listening.) Stereo analog-input noise was only average at -80.4 dBW.

The exception mentioned above

was our subwoofer-output distortion test, which revealed obvious clipping (7.2% THD) whenever 4 or more channels of full-scale bass (30 Hz) were presented at the input. However, changing either front or surround channels to "large," and thus removing their low-frequency contributions, dropped this to something on the order of 1%, suggesting that the overload is in the digital input or routing stage, not in the filter algorithm or output stages themselves. Since encountering full-scale bass precisely in phase and simultaneously in all channels is virtually unprecedented in real-world use, I consider this pretty much a non-issue; I certainly never heard any manifestation in my listening. —D.K.

SV RATINGS

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Peachtree Audio

2010 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED

iDecco INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Reviewed by AL GRIFFIN Photos by ZACH STOVALL



1 Tubular

With the iDecco, you get the option to inject vacuum-tube magic into the preamp's signal path or choose all-solid-state operation.



2 The Source

In addition to its iPod dock and USB input, the iDecco provides jacks to hook up one analog and two digital source components.



3 Digital Divide

The iDecco's top-mounted iPod dock pulls a digital signal from your iPod. This sets it apart from other docks, which extract analog signals.

KEY FEATURES

- +40-watt stereo amplifier
- +Hybrid tube preamplifier
- +Headphone amplifier
- +96-kHz/24-bit upsampling DAC
- +Digital iPod dock with video output
- +Remote control
- +Wide/narrow jitter adjustment
- +Fast/slow digital filter slope adjustment
- +Inputs: Coaxial and optical digital and stereo analog audio; USB; IR remote
- +Outputs: analog stereo line (fixed-level) and preamp audio; ¼-in headphone; component-video; IR remote

Dimensions + Weight
5 x 14¼ x 14 in; 25 lb

Price
\$999

signalpathhint.com



Turn It On

The remote control is required to turn on the Tube function. It can be used to skip tracks forward and back when listening with an iPod.

Audio components designed for stereo-only listening continue to occupy a niche in our multichannel world. But when lined up next to the “statement” A/V receivers that have rolled out in the recent past — hulking overachievers offering everything from Audyssey room equalization and 11-speaker surround sound to built-in wireless networking — they do seem pretty boring. Overpriced, too: If you think an \$800 stereo receiver that lacks digital inputs and delivers only modest power sounds like a middling deal, then check out the high-end audio realm, where \$7K integrated amps barely raise eyebrows. It's enough to make you wonder why no companies have stepped in to build less yawn-inducing stereo components that also provide good value.

Hold on a sec: Peachtree Audio appears to be filling that role. The company's iDecco is an innovative and decidedly un-boring 40-watt-per-channel integrated amplifier with a hybrid tube preamp/headphone amplifier section and a built-in digital iPod dock. It also features a high-quality 96-kHz/24-bit upsampling DAC (digital-to-analog converter) that a docked iPod, a component plugged into its coaxial or optical inputs, and a computer connected to its USB port can all benefit from. Most fascinating of all, the iDecco sells for \$999, an amount that's not much more than what you'd pay for a basic, middling stereo receiver.

Fit and finish on the iDecco are impressive for a product at this price. The unit is encased in a curved sheet of black acrylic. Its textured aluminum front panel contains a ¼-inch headphone output jack, a power on/off button, a large volume knob, and the necessary buttons to switch inputs between the five possible sources you can connect. Signs of quality become obvious as you paw the iDecco's front-panel controls: The volume knob has a heavy-duty feel and allows for adjustment in fine increments, while the input buttons lock in with an audible, satisfying click. Last but not least, there's a small window to showcase the 6N1P vacuum tube used by the iDecco's preamp, complete with a blue LED for added drama when the Tube option is selected.

The iDecco's connection options are what really set it apart from other, sorta-similar hi-fi components. First up, there's that iPod dock located on the unit's top. Having a built-in iPod dock is in itself pretty cool, but unlike other docks on the market that merely extract an analog signal from the iPod's pedestrian-quality DAC, this one pulls a digital signal from your iPod/iPhone. If you've got one of those iPod Classics with 160 GB of storage to hold loads of uncompressed files, this basically means that you'll have a high-end hard-disk music server when the 'Pod is docked in the iDecco.

Beyond the dock, the iDecco's back panel provides coaxial and optical digital and analog stereo inputs for connecting components like a CD/DVD/SACD player,

digital radio tuner, or turntable. And the USB port to plug in a computer will come in handy if you're using the iDecco as the centerpiece of a desktop audio system. Outputs include gold-plated multiway speaker connections and both fixed line-level and preamp outputs. (The second option is meant for connecting an external power amp or for feeding signals to a powered subwoofer.) There's also a component-video connection to route videos stored on your iPod, or YouTube clips streamed via an iPhone/iPod touch, through to a TV.

Peachtree includes a nice-looking remote with buttons that duplicate the front-panel controls, along with some that aren't present on the iDecco's minimalist facade. For instance, you'll need the remote to trigger the optional Tube function that injects vacuum-tube magic into the preamp's signal path (and turns on that cool blue LED). With an iPod in the dock, the chapter skip-forward/reverse buttons can be used to jump one track at a time ahead and back. This is about all the remote-control functionality you get for your iPod, though, as a few other buttons that could conceivably be pressed into duty currently serve no function.

» SETUP

The iDecco's form factor allows for a range of installation options beyond the traditional A/V component rack. At around 15 inches wide and 14 inches deep, it's small enough to sit on a desktop alongside compact monitor speakers. I could also see the iDecco easily fitting on a shelf in a bedroom or a vacation cottage. For my testing, I set it up in two places: the desk where I regularly plug away at my writing and my living room stereo system's rack.

Peachtree's manual for the iDecco reveals a refreshingly modern outlook, one that reflects the reality that people now get music from many other sources beyond CD playback. For example, the installation tips section mentions products like Sonos, Squeezebox, and Apple TV, and offers setup advice for iTunes playback with a PC or Mac connected via USB.

In my living room rig, I connected my Apple TV box, CD player, and turntable to the iDecco's optical-digital, coaxial-digital, and stereo-analog inputs, respectively. Bypassing my difficult-to-drive MartinLogan towers, I instead used better-than-average bookshelf models for the speaker end of things. For desktop listening, I switched between an iPod touch and my USB-connected Mac PowerBook as sources, relying mostly on a pair of Phiaton MS 400 cans for critical listening.

» PERFORMANCE

I don't know about you, but in my world a product like the iDecco makes the most sense situated on a desk, so that's where I started my evaluation. After plugging in the Phiatons, I pulled out my PowerBook and cued up

an HDtracks 96/24 FLAC download of "Oklahoma U.S.A." from the Kinks album *Muswell Hillbillies*. With the Tube option switched on, this song's gentle piano/accordion interplay sounded both warm and crisp (also amazingly fresh, given its 40-year-old vintage), and I could easily distinguish between Ray Davies's full vocals and brother Dave's reedier voice.

Overall, I'd have to conclude that the Tube setting did make an audible difference, although less so than I had anticipated. Ray LaMontagne's vocals on "Barfly" from his *Till the Sun Turns Black* CD sounded slightly less raspy and dry with it turned on, and I thought I could hear added shimmer and depth in the ride cymbal pattern that kicks in at the song's ending stretch. (That may also have been the intoxicating influence of the orange glow/blue LED light mix coming from the iDecco's tube window viewed at close range.) But tapping the Tube option didn't necessarily make compressed tracks sound any better: The keyboard in an MP3 download of the Raveonettes' "Dead Sound" (from *Lust Lust Lust*) still retained its strident tone.

Tube or no, what was most apparent during my time spent with the iDecco on the desktop was the dramatic leap in audio quality it offered over simply plugging into my Mac's headphone jack. There were many times when I got so wrapped up in the seductive sound that I had to stop working and just listen. (So much for writer productivity!) About the only thing that gave me pause was the iDecco's somewhat high noise floor: When I cranked the volume, a faint hiss became audible much earlier on the iDecco via headphones than on a pre-amp and A/V receiver I compared it with. Still, I didn't exactly find this to be a problem during normal listening (rock & roll as opposed to solo cello sonatas, folks).

» BOTTOM LINE

The Peachtree Audio iDecco is a unique, affordable product with a distinctive look and an ability to juggle a wide range of sources – everything from a computer and iPod to a reel-to-reel tape deck. In my home, the iDecco's limited power output made it a better fit for the computer desk than for the living room. But wherever I listened, I was knocked out by the great sound quality, which is just one way that the iDecco distinguishes itself from the stereo component herd. **SV**

After carting the iDecco to my living room, I cued up the Apple TV and played a few Apple Lossless-encoded tracks by British band the XX. On the song "Islands," the bass-synth-and-electronic-handclap rhythm sounded punchy and had a satisfying sense of drive. And the breathy female vocals and reverb-touched guitar that floated over this stark, black background came across as simultaneously taut and icy-cool. In an echo of my headphones test, invoking Tube didn't make too much difference, at least not on "Islands." When I played Mogwai's "Glasgow Mega-Snake" from the album *Mr. Beast*, the furious, high-decibel guitar/drums onslaught sounded notably more congested and cluttered with the Tube in line. It was perhaps the one time during my listening test when I felt a strong preference for the iDecco's pure solid-state operation.

While 40 watts per channel should be plenty for small rooms, the limitations of the iDecco amp were clearly heard in my largish 2,500-cubic-foot living room. When I cranked "When the Music's Over" from Rhino's vinyl reissue of the Doors' *Strange Days* during comparisons between the iDecco and a Marantz SR-6004 A/V receiver (reviewed in the June/July/August issue), Jim Morrison's overheated (and very un-XX-like) vocals and Robby Krieger's sinewy guitar solo flowed forth from my speakers with a much greater sense of ease with the Marantz plugged in. (Granted, the SR-6004 is a 7-channel surround sound receiver rated to deliver 110 watts per channel, as opposed to a 40-wpc stereo integrated amp, making this an apples-to-oranges comparison. But then again, the Marantz's \$1,250 cost isn't that far off from that of the \$999 iDecco, and both can be used for stereo music listening, making the comparison somewhat apt.)

↓ TEST BENCH

 FULL LAB RESULTS AT
SOUNDANDVISIONMAG.COM/PEACHTREE-IDECCO



MEASURED POWER OUTPUT



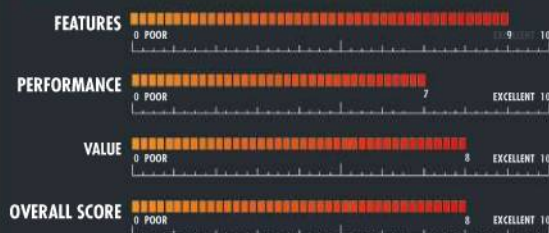
Peachtree Audio's little iDecco measured fairly predictably. All signs pointed to a superbly accurate digital-to-analog converter system: Linearity was virtually perfect, as was noise modulation. Signal-to-noise measurements appeared limited by the noise performance of the unit's analog circuits, as indicated by the fact that noise only improved by about 3 dB when 96/24 dithered silence was applied, rather than the much greater improvement that a theoretically perfect system would deliver. (We have yet to see one, of course). Similar levels of noise were seen when shorted analog inputs were selected, which corroborates the theory.

Frequency response was universally quite flat with the tube buffer bypassed (although engaging the "slow" filter option induced a rolloff above 10 kHz, to -2 dB at 20 kHz).

However, with the tube stage added to the signal path, bottom-end response rolled off below 80 Hz, regardless of signal type or input, by just a bit less than 3 dB per octave, reaching -5 dB (re: 1 kHz) at 19 Hz. This is not a matter of much concern, though it might be just audible in direct comparisons with another, flatter system, particularly via good headphones. Engaging the tube stage also had a very minimal impact upon distortion measurements, raising them by entirely inconsequential amounts, such as from 0.04 to 0.05%.

Amplifier power output was much as specified, delivering 41 watts into 8 ohms with both channels driven. Changing to 4-ohm loads only increased power by less than 1 dB, suggesting power-supply current capacity as the limiting factor.

— Daniel Kumin

SV RATINGS

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Russound

COLLAGE POWERLINE MEDIA-AND-INTERCOM SYSTEM

Reviewed by JOHN SCIACCA



Nice Touch

Russound's Collage system takes a no-new-wires approach to housewide audio distribution, sending data and control signals over existing power lines. At right, the CAK1, a keypad controller with a built-in 32-watt stereo amp, FM tuner with Radio Data System, and two-way intercom capability.



➔ Media Feed

The CMM1 Media Manager hooks up to your home network via a LAN connection and feeds tunes from both the Rhapsody Internet music service and your computer to the CAK1 keypads.



KEY FEATURES

- +Transmits audio, control signals, and metadata throughout a home using existing power lines
- +CMM1 Media Manager supports up to 10 keypads and 3 simultaneous network audio streams
- +CMM1 compatible with MP3, WMA, AAC, M4A, and Real file formats
- +CAK1 keypad has 1½ x 2-inch, 240 x 320-pixel color display with 32-watt stereo amplifier and built-in FM RDS tuner; available in gloss white or black
- +Keypads include full two-way intercom and room-monitoring features
- +CMM1 includes a code for 6 months of free Rhapsody service

Price
Collage CMM1 Media Manager, \$549; Collage CAK1 Amplified Keypads, \$849 each

russound.com



↑ Mo, Control

Each CAK1 keypad also comes with an infrared remote with buttons to adjust and mute volume, skip tracks, and power the unit on/off.

Distributed audio systems usually mean one thing: wires. Lots of wires, including speaker and control cabling that spider-webs out from stacked black boxes in a central location to controllers and speakers in each listening area. When you build a new home, running all that wire is a relatively minor and inexpensive issue. But as you may have noticed, there's a bit of an economic situation going on, with the result that people aren't building new homes like they used to. For those who find themselves living in an existing, distributed-audio-system-less home, Russound has created an ingenious solution that might be the thing to end their silence.

Russound's Collage is an audio distribution system tailor-made for existing homes. It uses a "no new wires" approach, decentralizing distribution and sending data and control signals over existing power lines. Since every home has AC power running through it, that means virtually every home is a candidate for Collage.

The system's components, which consist of the CMM1 Media Manager and up to 10 CAK1 Amplified Keypads, link up via HomePlug1.0+ Extended Powerline technology and communicate using Russound's proprietary Gridcast communication protocol. The CMM1 can support three separate network audio streams, either from the Rhapsody subscription music service or from files stored on a networked computer or hard drive. The CAK1 also includes an FM tuner with Radio Data System, a full two-way intercom system, and a 2 x 16-watt amplifier, all of which adds up to quite a bit of functionality for your dollar.

» SETUP

My 12-year-old home is about 2,000 square feet, putting it squarely in Collage's install wheelhouse. Straight away, I thought the CAK1 looked cool... and also a lot like an iPod. It features a 1½ x 2-inch, 240 x 320-pixel color display with four capacitive buttons flanking each side of the screen and a click/scroll wheel along the bottom. The gloss-white CMM1 is roughly the size of a paperback book. Besides power, the CMM1's only required connection is a hard-wire Ethernet hookup to your home network.

Russound's simple pre-install procedure involves naming each CAK1 via the keypad's LCD interface and then "binding" them to the CMM1. You do this by pressing the "Bind" button on the CMM1 and then a "Bind to Media Manager" selection on each keypad within 30 seconds. Once this process is complete, you

relocate the keypads to where you plan on installing them. Because the signals are transmitted over power lines, the obvious locations are above light switches or electrical outlets, where they'll be significantly easier to install.

But before you — or your installer — start running around and gleefully cutting giant holes in your walls, Russound recommends that you first perform a site survey. This involves plugging in the media manager and keypads at the desired locations, and then commanding the system to initiate a "Gridcast Status" check that reports the signal strength of every device and ensures that no electrical anomalies are impeding performance. (As we say in the custom install biz, measure several times, cut once.)

The CAK1's slick backbox, power supply, and power pocket design keep all high-voltage connections safely in a separate pocket and provide simple RJ-45 and mini-plug power connections to the keypad. But keypad installation requires working with potentially hazardous high-voltage wiring, so a licensed and qualified electrician should install it. Once those electrical connections have been made, installing the keypad itself is incredibly simple.

I placed the media manager in a back bedroom next to my router and installed keypads in my master bed and bathroom, living room, and dining room. Upon running a Gridcast Status check, everything reported a perfect 10. (Russound recommends a score of at least a 6.) The keypads also offer some handy feedback that would be very useful for troubleshooting, such as identifying which controller or location is causing a problem.

Speakers connect directly to the CAK1 using up to 14-gauge traditional wiring. Nearly any speaker can be connected to the system, though in-wall/ceiling models are an obvious choice. (Russound offers a single, stereo-summing in-wall speaker, the Acclaim 7W51SFT, that could install directly above the CAK1 to provide a very easy retrofit solution.) The CMM1 also includes a code for 6 months of free Rhapsody service. Last but not least, an IR remote is included to control the CAK1.

» PERFORMANCE

Because of the CAK1's iPod resemblance, I found controlling it to be very intuitive and mastered operation within minutes. The keypad starts playing the last source you'd been listening to when you power it on. You also have the option of selecting the FM tuner

or browsing your network. I don't subscribe to Rhapsody, that million-song jukebox in the sky, so the 6-month free trial was a real plus.

The keypad's click wheel makes whipping rapidly through selections easy, but browsing a sizable music library (I have nearly 9,000 songs on my hard drive) can involve a lot of clicking. I would've preferred a search or scroll by letter option instead of just browsing by artist, album, playlist, or genre — the options offered by the Twonky Media server running on my computer. Fortunately, Rhapsody lets you search, browse channels, and create lists of favorite albums, artists, or songs, making browsing significantly easier.

The keypads display artist, album, and track info metadata, although album art is currently only supported for Rhapsody. (Rusound says a future firmware release will enable the system to display art with music streamed from a computer or other networked drive.) Also, there are no pause or mute controls on the keypad — both of which I find necessary to trigger quick, temporary moments of silence during listening.

The CMMI's ability to support three simultaneous network streams proved more than adequate for my use, but it might not be enough for large households with many users. Fortunately, any keypad can either "join" another stream or access its own FM tuner.

Don't let the CAK1's relatively modest 16-watt-per-channel amplifier rating fool you; it definitely had the power to drive my speakers, including some in-ceiling models, a pair of outdoor speakers, and a pair of old bookshelves, as well as Russound's Acclaim 7W51SFT, to *LOUD* listening levels without distorting. I generally had the keypad set at the 25–55 range (out of 100), though I experienced no problems when cranking Rhapsody's "80s Hits" to a plenty-loud 75 for a pool party. I also liked tweaking the sound for each room or speaker type with the keypad's 5-band EQ.

Collage's intercom offers point-to-point, whole-house, and room-monitoring options that work as well as if not better than standalone intercom-only systems. I don't have much use for an intercom — though it was fun to randomly surprise my 3-year-old daughter by shouting, "What are you doing?"

My previous experience with powerline systems found them prone to electrical interference, so I broke out a vacuum and my

wife's hairdryer in an attempt to foil Col-
lage. The keypads didn't even flinch when
the appliances were plugged into the same
outlet, so I stepped the torture up a notch
by running the vacuum and the hairdryer si-
multaneously on two different outlets. This
test dropped my Gridcast score to a 6, but
it didn't stop the music from playing. To say
that the Gridcast network signal is strong
would be an understatement!

While the system performed admirably for the most part, I did encounter some performance glitches. Early in my review cycle, there were several times when I couldn't get any music to play, or got "stuck" listening to a queue of music that I had selected and was unable to delete. (These issues were always resolved by either rebooting the CMM1 or power-cycling a CAK1.) And once, after a particularly intense lightning storm, the dining room pad spontaneously turned on at about 3 a.m. and started playing Diana Krall. (Admittedly, there are worse things to wake up to.)

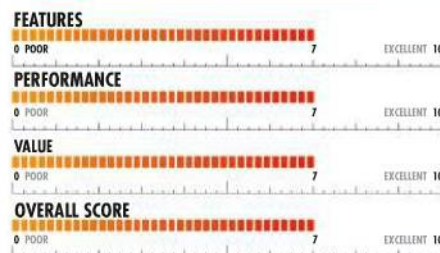
Many of the queries I put in to Russound concerning specific features were answered with "Yes... after a future firmware update." That list includes the aforementioned network album art, a sleep button and wake-up timer, a housewide audio (Party) mode, Radio-Time Internet radio capability, and the ability to program the F1-F4 (favorites) buttons to select specific Rhapsody or Internet radio channels.

According to Russound, "Collage will see fairly frequent firmware updates as new features and services are added. Every update will include additional features and

benefits." Also in the pipeline for release later this year are an iPod dock and a Source Bridge that will allow you to add legacy components (CD player, cable box, etc.), along with a CCTV camera to turn the system into a video intercom. But while I applaud the company's forward-looking upgrade plans, it would've been nice if a few more features had been included right out of the gate.

» BOTTOM LINE

Adding multiroom audio distribution to an existing home can be a tricky and expensive proposition. But a powerline-based system like Russound's Collage could likely be installed in a single day, saving hundreds (if not thousands) of dollars on labor. And while wireless systems like Sonos are another popular alternative, many people still prefer a wired, in-wall solution. For those folks, Collage will be an incredibly appealing option. **SV**

SV RATINGS

➔ Stream In

Collage supports up to three simultaneous network streams. Users can also "join" an existing stream or tap the CAK1's built-in FM tuner.





Sleek, Stylish, Sophisticated Solution

The Cabaret Screen's contemporary design allows seamless blending into any environment

The Cabaret Screen is an exciting new addition to Stewart's line of electric retractable screens. With a beautiful new designer housing, the Cabaret offers an innovative approach to motorized roll down screens.

The Cabaret is perfect for creating media rooms within family rooms, game rooms or any living space in the home. The stylish removable aluminum valance comes in various finishes, and can be customized with the color of your choosing. Mood lighting is also available in cobalt blue or white, which slightly illuminates the room making the Cabaret an attractive light fixture as well. Its sleek and contemporary design and unique mounting system makes front projection possible in new and retrofit applications. The Cabaret screen is available with a variety of Stewart's front and rear projection materials including the Generation 3 1080p-ready FireHawk, StudioTek 130 and GrayHawk RS screens.

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#1 Twelve Consecutive Years
inside track

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RESIDENTIAL

You Know You're Going to Fall

... for the disc, if not the flick.



Alice in Wonderland

(Disney)

Movie ★★☆☆

Picture ★★★★★

Sound ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆

As reimagined by Tim

SOUNDVISION
REFERENCE BLU-RAY DISC
2010

Burton, *Alice in Wonderland* is Lewis Carroll by way of the *Lord of the Rings* movies — complete with a quest, a chosen innocent taking up the sword, an epic battle between good and evil in a mythical landscape, and action sequences enhanced by special effects. It all made for a box-office hit in 3D, and now it's a home-theater demo in 2D on this reference-quality Blu-ray Disc.

The film starts off in the gaslit glow of Victorian rooms and the pale tones of English exteriors. Although there's great detail in costumes here, revealing all the intricacies in ornate dress patterns, the visuals seem a little lacking at first. Everything changes, of course, when Alice (Mia Wasikowska) opens

up the door to Munchkinland — er, falls down the rabbit hole into Wonderland, which explodes with sharp, saturated colors. The 1.78:1 picture may be “only” 2D, but figures are very dimensional indeed, particularly the animated creatures. You can almost reach around the shiny-skinned frogs and touch every hair on the horses and hounds.

In the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack, all channels erupt after Alice plummets, and they remain constantly active. Danny Elfman's music bounces out from everywhere, combining with but never overwhelming the immersive environmental noises while demonstrating a wide dynamic range across the well-separated instruments. There are 6.1 channels, by the way (not 5.1, as the packaging erroneously states), and great use is made of that extra channel in the rear, allowing for the Jabberwocky's tail to go swooshing overhead and the March Hare's thrown cups to sail right past you.

Thirty minutes of run-of-the-mill production featurettes include interviews with Burton and stars Johnny Depp, Anne Hathaway,

way, Helena Bonham Carter, and Wasikowska. More interesting are another 20 minutes on the music and the CGI. This Combo Pack also houses a DVD of the film and, on a third disc, a digital copy. — JOSEF KREBS

Shutter Island

(Paramount)

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Sound ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Returning to his full-on, in-your-face *Cape*

SOUNDVISION
REFERENCE BLU-RAY DISC
2010

Fear mode, Martin Scorsese takes Dennis Lehane's novel and delivers an old-school Hollywood thriller featuring a storm-torn Dark House. And from the get-go, the DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix on this Blu-ray Disc heightens the tension, with ominous sounds and the brilliant modern/classical score (supervised by Robbie Robertson) emanating from all channels.

On first sight of the island, a frightening



cello theme pounds out, building to a dense crescendo as we approach the psychiatric hospital. This is just the first example of the music's power, yet the score never drowns out the movie's atmospheric effects. From accurately panned drive-bys to the well-placed (and often startlingly loud) slamming of doors, everything is clear and bassy, adding to the menace. The surround channels help to engulf you in the ever-growing sonic tornado with cracking thunder, snapping branches, and lashing rain.

The highly detailed, well-contrasted 2.35:1 picture allows you to see what's really going on in the gloomy backgrounds. Although blacks are deep, other tones are purposely dull and dimly lit, with just Leonardo DiCaprio's garish tie — a constant reminder of his dead wife — adding bright color to some scenes. A slight grain lends a historical look, and the occasional flatness of images makes the richly colored and fully dimensional dream sequences appear all the more striking.

Extras consist of just two above-average 20-minute featurettes. One has the director, his smart cast, and Leane revealing elements of the production, and the other is an interesting look at psychiatric therapies of the 1950s that informed the story.

— JOSEF KREBS



The Road

(Sony)

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Sound ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Faithfully adapting Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer

Prize-winning novel, director John Hillcoat and screenwriter Joe Penhall conjure a post-apocalyptic world that probably won't sit well with the casual viewer. But for those willing to be drawn in, *The Road* is likely to resonate long after it has ended.

Most of the movie follows a father (Viggo Mortensen) and his son (Kodi Smit-McPhee) through the dark gray landscape of a dying Earth. It's a difficult environment for any home theater to replicate, but in general, this Blu-ray Disc is up to the challenge. There's a reasonably broad grayscale in the 2.35:1 picture, with enough delineation of dark and light tones to keep you involved in the narrative. However, I would've preferred a bit more shadow detail in the darkest scenes.

Surround-channel effects in the DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix are used sparingly but successfully. There are no ambient sounds of nature — nature has *died* — so instead we hear lifeless trees falling to the ground and the groan of engines as occasional vehi-

cles approach, adding to the sense of danger.

Like the film, the extras are on the minimalist side, although you do get an intelligent and informative commentary by Hillcoat in addition to the usual making-of featurette and handful of deleted scenes. You also get

The Other Coraline? Button it up. This is the real 3D.

Limited software is a common problem with format launches. When Blu-ray first hit, the undersize selection of titles had me (reluctantly) reaching for *Hitch*, *Click*, or *xXx* to get my high-def fix. With the arrival of 3D Blu-ray, the situation is even worse. As of now, you can count the number of 3D titles on one hand. Of these, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* is the sole title that can actually be bought separately; the others are only available as part of exclusive offers when you buy a 3D HDTV or 3D glasses. *Coraline*, for example, can be had for free, but only after you spend a few grand on a Panasonic 3D plasma TV.

"But I bought *Coraline* in 3D on Blu-ray last year," you may be replying at this point, "and it was reviewed in the October 2009 issue of *Sound+Vision*." That, however, was a regular Blu-ray Disc; inserted into a regular Blu-ray player and viewed on a 2D TV, it allowed you to see 3D in the anaglyph format via magenta/green-tinted cardboard glasses. And those 3D images looked drained of color, even in the eye-popping scenes that take place in the world of *The Other Mother*. White

highlights, meanwhile, were tinged with a sickly red-green tint, and doubled-up "ghost" images were frequently visible.

In comparison, the new version of *Coraline* is a genuine 3D Blu-ray Disc meant for a 3D Blu-ray player, active-shutter 3D glasses, and a 3D TV like Panasonic's TC-P50VT25 (reviewed on page 48). Panasonic made a good move in choosing *Coraline* to showcase the 3D capability of its new sets because it's a beautifully made film — the first stop-motion-animated feature to be shot in 3D. Of course, *Coraline* is still a lot of fun to watch in 2D. But if you're going to see it at home in 3D, it deserves to be seen in proper 3D.

As the new Blu-ray Disc confirms, the 3D effect in *Coraline* is actually, for the most part, subtle, drawing you in by enhancing the separation of spatial layers in deep-focus shots. More dramatically, though, the new version replaces the drained picture of the old disc with what I saw in the theater during the film's initial run: solid, crisp-looking images full of strong contrast and rich color.

— AL GRIFFIN



For the 1.37:1 picture, Criterion has done the best it could with available film sources (the original negative was lost long ago), and the result is rich and detailed if not as pristine as many other great black-and-white films.

— KEN KORMAN



(Sony)

Movie ★★☆☆☆

Picture ★★☆☆

Sound ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

In roles that each drew an Oscar nomination, Christopher Plummer and Helen Mirren vividly display the battle of wills between Leo Tolstoy and his wife, Sofya, during the last year of his life. Tolstoy disci-

The 2.35:1 transfer is just as up and down as the script. Skin tones are exemplary in close-ups, but the picture overall lacks the crispness and depth we expect from Blu-ray. It is, to try to encapsulate its odd nature,

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 83 »]

Baseball
THE TENTH INNING
A FILM BY ROBERT ALTMAN & JOHN DAHL

league play, the Wild Card, and home-run chases by Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa, and Barry Bonds (with the specter of steroids chasing them all) — not to mention one World Series canceled by a strike, two taken by the Boston Red Sox, and five owned by the New York Yankees.

It took 86 years for the Red Sox (below) to win the first of those two World Series. It's taking the Chicago Cubs 101 years and counting — and as I write this, they're playing .438 ball, prompting some of us fans to feel like counting to 102 already. But all of us can sympathize with the title of John Scheinfeld's terrific documentary on the North Siders, *We Believe: A Relationship That Lasts a Lifetime*, now on DVD only (Virgil Films).



anyone who loves their city and their team."

Real life? . . . You won't care if you *never* get back. — KEN RICHARDSON

— KEN RICHARDSON



Electric, Live, on Blu

U2 and Bruce Springsteen stake new high-def claims.



With the Edge (far left) and Bono out front, U2 knows how to Bowl over an audience. Below: Springsteen power-drives the E Street Band.

material from the band's lukewarmly received *No Line on the Horizon*. (The sinew of those songs becomes much more apparent in a live setting.) Details in the 1.78:1 picture are quite sharp when the camera stays on the band members long enough, rendering clearly the sparkles on Adam Clayton's bass strap and the hairs on the back of the Edge's guitar-fretting hand.

The DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 sound reveals its definition when Bono breathes deep into his mike and all channels get caressed with his exhalation before he begins "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." It's not long before the audience takes over several loud, chill-inducing, full-surround verses. Having seen U2's show at the old Giants Stadium a month before this October 2009 Rose Bowl gig, I can attest to the power of such a massive sing-along. When I replayed the sequence in PCM stereo, the impact was instantly deadened, taking me out of the moment and right out of the 360° experience. I can't live . . . without surround.

Extras are bountiful, including a documentary on the creation of the spider and tour clips from both sides of the Pond. Overall, *U2360°* is a fully loaded chronicle of a band demonstrating its crowd-winning prowess.



Holding court in Hyde Park, Springsteen employs no spectacle and no elaborate staging other than a massive black curtain and matching sidestage screens. In fact, black is the color of much of this sunny day in June 2009, as all nine E Streeters wear variations on the theme. Still, in *London Calling's* 1.78:1 picture, you should be able to discern the pattern details on drummer Max Weinberg's vest and the swirls on guitarist Steven Van Zandt's



Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band



How do you get intimate with tens of thousands of people? It all boils down to the music. If the material isn't strong enough, heartfelt enough, or deep enough, no amount of razzle-dazzle will bridge the gap.

U2 and Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band have highly personal visions, yet they've

been able to connect with the masses on an international scale for more than 3 and 4 decades apiece. Consider, though, the audience tallies for the concerts documented on *U2360° at the Rose Bowl* and *London Calling: Live in Hyde Park* — 97,000 and 50,000. That's a lotta pairs of ears, and eyes, to win over. And with the shows' appearance on Blu-ray Disc, can these two big-stage personas win you over in that most intimate of arenas, your home theater?

U2 attacks its world-domination goals head-on with a massive, spider-like stage structure that's intended to keep the band in full view of the audience at all times. (Suspended above the stage itself is a giant screen, composed of interlocking and movable LEDs.) Director Tom Krueger, who was a skillful cinematographer on *U23D*, follows the expected quick-cuts route for the show's first 20 minutes, mirroring the brisk tempo of the set-opening



ever-present bandanna. You can also clock how long it takes Springsteen to sweat through his charcoal-gray shirt and transform it into a dark-textured blot (about 54 minutes, by my calculation), as well as watch the sweat bullets continually fly all around from his aggressive guitar strums and pointed hand gestures.

Without much prompting, the crowd does key takes on *whoa* in "Badlands," "Out in the Street," and "Born to Run," among oth-

ers. (The hometown audience that saw the show with me at Giants Stadium 4 months later turned the *whoas* up another notch, of course.) The "legendary E Street Band," as Bruce indelibly stamps his Garden State gang at the climax, storms through 27 classics and newbies alike, including a riveting, epic run through "Jungleland." And as the bright blue sky turns ever duskier, an extended sax solo from Clarence Clemons fills all corners of the 5.1 mix — which, for some reason, is in

mere Dolby Digital, not Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio.

Extras are minimal, though it's truly something to see the steam rising from Springsteen's shoulders — as if he's very much a man on fire — during his performance of "The River" at Glastonbury 2009. "Is there anybody alive out there?" he pleads more than once in *London Calling*. We're here, Boss, and you've got us feeling your rhythm. You made the connection.

— MIKE METTLER



Listening Room redux:
Mindi (left) and Tresa.

You Sexy Things

No, not the girls (though they do look swell). I'm talking about the *gear*. In these snaps from the photo shoots for their current CDs of mostly original material, both artists keenly understand that (at least in some musical circles) everything old is new again. Even if one gal's hi-fi is another gal's lo.

Alto saxophonist **Mindi Abair** comes to us *In Hi-Fi Stereo* (Heads Up/Concord), adorning her album artwork with images of historical vinyl LPs and an old-fashioned 45-rpm record player. She stocks the CD itself with a new variation on her customary con-

temporary jazz — filtered through the R&B and soul of the '60s and early '70s. As Abair says in her press release: "It's a vintage-sounding record, a modern take on a very classic sound." And as co-produced by Abair and Rex Rideout, it's high fidelity indeed, from honking sax to deep bass.

The warm glow of the radio that bathes **Tresa Levasseur** may connote *Low Fidelity* (BDC Distribution), but the title track has the Canadian singer testifying about another kind of faithfulness: "Well, the same old song's kinda hard to hear / It's comin' in loud, but it's far from clear / Your frequen-

cy's been gettin' weak on me / And I say no ... to low ... fidelity." She says yes, however, to some smokin' blues — such that this album, first released up north in late 2008 but available in the U.S. just now, earned a Juno Award nomination for Blues Album of the Year. "I made a record with a sound that pleased my own ear," Levasseur notes, "and it turns out that a lot of other people like the same sound I do." She co-produced it with David Gavan Baxter, managing to fit widescreen sonics into what seems like the intimacy of a club. And the super intimacy of your listening room. — KEN RICHARDSON

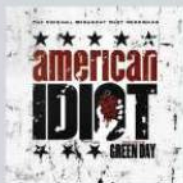


Broadway Bits

Who knew that Bon Jovi's David Bryan could whup Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong? That's what happened, figuratively, at the Tony Awards, where *Memphis* beat *American Idiot* for Best Musical. Bryan took home a pair of Tonys for Best Original Score Written for the Theatre (with Joe DiPietro) and Best Orchestrations (with Daryl Waters).

Is Bryan truly the Best? Compare for yourself on the Original Broadway Cast Recordings of *Memphis* (Delray/Rhino), *American Idiot* (Reprise), and *Fela!* (Knitting Factory). Rounding out the Best

Musical nominees was *Million Dollar Quartet*, but its cast recording is currently unavailable. Alternatively, you can try the



not-Best-nominated *The Addams Family* or Andrew Lloyd Webber's not-yet-imported *Phantom of the Opera* sequel, *Love Never*

Dies (both from Decca Broadway).

Meanwhile, the American Theatre Wing wants you to know that it's "So much more than just the Tony Awards," which you can discover on its Web site — host of, it claims, "the country's largest online archive of theatrical conversation and programming," all free. Check out americantheatrewing.org.

Happy to do a spending spree? Visit masterworksbroadway.com, the recently launched site of Sony's theatrical division, where you can find not only the cast recording of the current revival of *Promises, Promises* but also classics dating back to 1947's *Finian's Rainbow*. There, too, is *Heart & Soul: Celebrating the Unforgettable Songs of Frank Loesser*, a centennial salute whose 19 tracks include songs from *Guys & Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

Business, by the way, is Broadway-bound in 2011 with Daniel Radcliffe. Not enough of an update for you? Think you can dance? Switch on your Wii for *Dance on Broadway: Songs from Your Favorite Musicals* (Ubisoft), with a program from "Luck Be a Lady" to "Dreamgirls." Or load *Green Day: Rock Band* (MTV/EA) into your Wii, PS3, or Xbox 360 and make your own Tony case for *American Idiot*. Which is where we came in. — KEN RICHARDSON

Tony score: Bryan 2 (above), Green Day 0.



» MOVIES & TV

[» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 79]

elegantly bland. The DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 sound is better, particularly in presenting Sergei Yevtushenko's luscious score and the often intricate dialogue.

A commentary by Plummer and Mirren is fun, but they talk only when they are on-screen. Director Michael Hoffman chats throughout his own track, offering good insight into both history and the filmmaking process. Also here: a handful of deleted scenes (miserably presented in the window-boxed format), one of the longest blooper reels around, and movieQ+sync interactivity, which offers trivia information while you watch the movie.

— RAD BENNETT

» DVD



Creation

(Lionsgate)

Movie ★★☆☆☆

Picture ★★☆☆☆

Sound ★★☆☆☆

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Charles Darwin (Paul Bettany) shook the world with his theory

of evolution — but you'll find none of that spirit in this somewhat dreary film, which focuses on events in the Darwin household while he's writing *On the Origin of Species*. His wife, Emma (Jennifer Connelly), is a devout Christian, and Charles realizes that his book might — as Thomas Huxley (Toby Jones) emphatically proclaims — "kill God." Bettany looks distressed most of the time, and the device of using his visions of his deceased daughter, Annie (Martha West), only manages to make him seem deranged.

In the 2.35:1 picture of this DVD-only American release, the grayish photography seems to suit the pain-burdened script. The Dolby Digital 5.1 sound centers on dialogue much of the time, although it opens up nicely to reveal Christopher Young's lovely score, which is the best thing about the film.

Meanwhile, extras are perplexing. In his commentary, director Jon Amiel fills us in on biographical details that should have been put into the movie, and the featurettes grouped together as *Debating Darwin* present authorities one at a time rather than in actual discourse. Still, some interesting questions get asked about Darwin's book, best summed up by Nick Pollard in a *Pollard on Film* segment.

— RAD BENNETT

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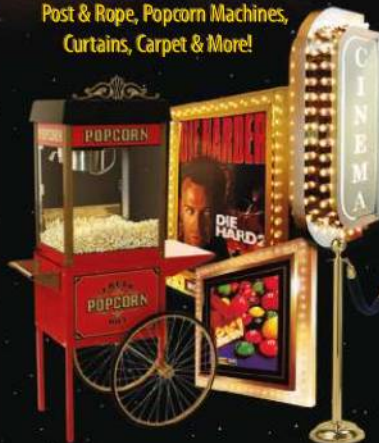
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The iPad is just one slice of a fresh-baked paradigm shift.

The launch of the iPad, and the frenzied adoration it has inspired, is proof of the seismic quakes rattling the consumer electronics industry. Actually, it's more like the complete terraforming of a new planet. Like it or not, if you're a hi-fi nut or video geek, you can forget everything you know about A/V technology and start over. We're on the gravity-friendly side of a slippery slope.

We can trace this new era to any number of origin stories. For example, Bill Gates dropping out of Harvard, or Steve Wozniak hand-building computers in Steve Jobs's garage. I prefer a more esoteric origin: By placing a "P" flag in the CD subcode during the format's development, Philips and Sony engineers provided a rudimentary way for players that did not contain a microprocessor to find tracks. But all the CD players that came out had a microprocessor, so the "P" flag was never used, although it's still present in every disc as a marker for the end of an evolutionary path. Starting with the CD, we entered the new era of computer-based consumer products. Throw in a teaspoon of plummeting memory prices, a tablespoon of cellular technology, and a cup of Internet, bake at globalization temperature, and you have a steaming-hot paradigm-shift pie.

Gears and pulley belts are now for nostalgia buffs; they've been replaced by logic and gigahertz. Similarly, it's hard to get consumers excited about an A/V receiver when they're more interested in smartphones and the newest apps. This computerization of audio/video entertainment has shaken up the industry. Tellingly, in 2007, Apple Computer Inc. changed its name to Apple Inc. — a clear sign that it had expanded from computers to consumer electronics. Or, more accurately, that consumer electronics products had become computers. Either way, Apple's core mission remains unchanged: to create paradigm shifts.

All of which brings us to the iPad. Elsewhere in this issue, you've read about its diverse A/V applications. Sure, laptops, netbooks, and smartphones already have a huge footprint in the personal-entertainment world. But iPads more conclusively validate the crossover. You can use other computers to do spread-

sheets, or your phone to take calls from your boss, but the iPad is more about fun. To me, that's another sign of the new paradigm.

Of course, following the iPad's success, everyone wants a piece of the newest Apple pie. Enter the "iPad killers." To cite a few examples, entertainment tablet computers are arriving from Acer, Archos, Asus, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Lenovo, Sony, and Verizon. About 40 tablet computers and 10 new e-readers are reportedly in the works. Intel has a version of its Atom processor specifically tweaked for tablets. Hardware, however, is the easy part. The key to success is the underlying software, and Apple's rivals have a powerful weapon in Google's Android operating system. And Android will easily make the leap from smartphones to tablets, plus try to bring along as many of its 50,000 phone apps as possible.

This catch-up scenario is nothing new, and neither is the iPad's innovation. Apple didn't invent the tablet computer (although the company's failed Newton was an early one). It made a better tablet — Amazon's Kindle notwithstanding — that revolutionized the product category. Likewise, Apple didn't invent the personal computer, the MP3 player, or the smartphone; other companies had already marketed them. But Apple made them sexier, the market took off, and everyone else followed.

What's the next big thing? Interestingly, it may now be Apple's turn to be outfoxed. Apple TV is a moribund niche product that has never been commercially successful. Google, perhaps borrowing Apple's recipe, has announced that it will partner with Intel and Sony to launch Google TV, an Internet-based service that uses Android and Google's search engine to stream video, music, and other Web content to TVs. Google's motive? To grab at TV's \$150 billion advertising market. Apple will likely fight back by introducing a new, less expensive version of Apple TV — one that might borrow the iPhone's hardware innards and operating system so it can upscale iPhone apps to the big screen. The winner here may get a big, hot, steaming slice of the Internet TV pie. Final note: I like pie. 



KEN C. POHLMANN



Ken C. Pohlmann is well known as an audio educator, consultant, and author. He is professor emeritus at the University of Miami in Coral Gables and the author of numerous articles and books. I think buying two of his tomes — *Principles of Digital Audio* and *Master Handbook of Acoustics* — would be quite an iWise investment indeed. (iSorry.)

Read more of Ken's high-def reality morsels at soundandvisionmag.com

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