






## Last meeting recap


By Gary Koh

### The CD-R Olympiad


 The objective of the meeting's presentation by Gary Koh was to take PNWAS members through comparisons between various options in making the Absolute Fidelity™ CD from an original music CD and to show them that they can hear the difference between the two. Various refinement steps taken along the way in going from the original to the Absolute Fidelity™ disk was also demonstrated.

 A very high-resolution, low distortion, system was needed as some of the steps exhibited subtle (but important) differences that the club's system was probably not capable of resolving. Hence, members were invited to the Genesis premises, and such a system was assembled for the purpose.

 The system comprised of the Genesis 2.2 loudspeaker system (\$68,000), the Blue Moon award winning Genesis Reference Amplifiers with Maximum Dynamic Headroom Reservoir (\$11,500), FM Acoustics 255 preamplifier (\$48,000), and a Vacuum State Electronics modified Esoteric DV-50. Speaker cables were Genesis Absolute Fidelity Interface, and interconnects were FM Acoustics Precision Interface Technology.

 Subtle but very important accessories used were also the IsoTek Sigmas and IsoTek Titan power conditioners on the front and the back-end respectively. Also, the FIM Signature Isolation Platform was used under the CD player for the session and also under the CD burner when the Absolute Fidelity™ copies were made. A Genesis-designed

acrylic equipment rack with FIM isolation spikes provided the sonically neutral platform for the front-end.

 To introduce the club members to the differences achieved by the Absolute Fi-

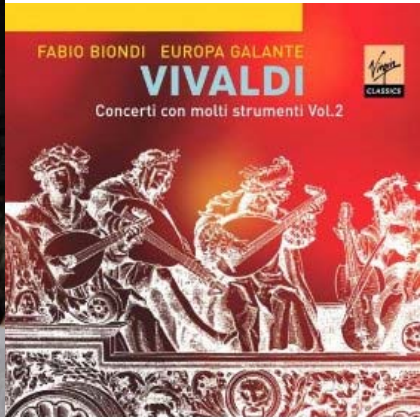


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Club's VP opened the meeting by welcoming a good sized crowd on a warm summer evening

maybe except to Jerry!!), and subtle nuances in her playing were not well communicated. With the Absolute Fidelity™ copy, the ambience of the



venue and the emotion of the crowd came through even before the music began. The piano was readily identified as a Bosendorfer, and from the rustle sound as she moved, Ms. Williams was wearing a silk dress.

delity™ process, a comparison between an original CD release and the “final” copy was made.



For the first comparison a typical example of pop music was used, Corinne Bailey Rae's self-titled debut album. The original sounded like poorly recorded, poorly mastered popular music that you would listen to on the car radio, and nowhere else. However, playing the Absolute Fidelity™ copy showed that it was neither poorly recorded, nor poorly mastered, just poorly published. The

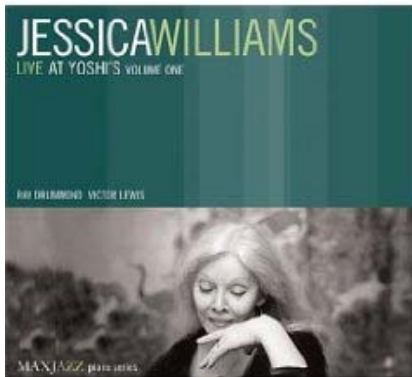
original CD.



The second example was a “live” jazz recording – Jessica Williams' Live at Yoshi's Volume One. The original CD almost did not sound like Ms. Williams was playing “live” as the atmosphere of the club did not come through the recording. The piano was also unrecognizable (well,



The final example played was a complex piece by Vivaldi performed by Europa Galante – Vivaldi's Concerti con molti stromenti (Concerto for Many Instruments). The piece played was the Concerto for 8 instruments RV 566.





sound from the CD-R was still not up to “audiophile quality” standards; but still, it was far improved over the




Is that a halo around Gary's head after he compared the original CD to the full meal deal? Setting on top the FIM Signature Isolation Platform is the one and only VSE modified Esoteric DV-50 and the FM Acoustics 255 pre-amp below


With the original, it was difficult to hear the important interplay between the various instruments that was so important to the success of this piece. With the Absolute Fidelity™ copy, members could easily discern the colorful sonic palette resulting from the contrast between the different timbres of the two violins, the two flutes, the two oboes, a bassoon and a strings section.

 With the difference between the original CD and an Absolute Fidelity™ copy firmly established, members were then taken through the subtle differences that multiple refinement steps make along the way to Absolute Fidelity™.

 The first comparison made was between the original CD and an “ordinary” copy. This was made on a CD burner mounted in a desktop PC using the “default” (highest speed) settings of Windows Media. A very good internal CD writer was used, the Yamaha CRW-F1. Despite this, the copies were clearly inferior to the original disc. In this comparison the following CD-R media was used:

1. “Ordinary” copy with Taiyo Yuden media – supposedly the “best” media technically
2. “Best Audiophile CDR” – Mobile Fidelity Ultradisc 24k

 Next, a comparison was done between a CD-R burned on an internal drive, and on an external drive. The computer used was the same, as was the drive (a Yamaha CRW-F1), with the same burning software and its settings. Going back and forth between the two discs, members clearly heard the difference and the improvement when the disc was burned on an external burner.

 Things got more subtle with a CD-R burned using the complete process but with the only difference being the way the source was stored:


1. Burned from fragmented files




Genesis Reference Amplifiers with Maximum Dynamic Headroom Reservoir flanked by the Genesis 2.2 speaker system. Note the special-acoustic-properties packing paper on the floor.

- from hard disk
2. Burned from de-fragmented (contiguous) files on the same hard disk
  3. Burned from contiguous files from a Compact Flash Card (solid-state disk)

It was clear that the quality improved from the first CD-R to the third CD-R.


 Next, different CD-R’s were tried. We showed that even the same brand of black CD-R could sound different. Two different Memorex Black CD-Rs were used. Most of the members thought that the first was the better of the two.

1. Memorex Black All-Use (made by Mitsui) – bought from Best Buy
2. Memorex Black All-Use (made by Ritek) – bought from Walmart

In the final comparison, we demonstrated the differences between a selection of  CD - R ’ s among the hundreds that Gary had tried. ‘Tutu’s Promise’ from Jessica William’s Live at Yoshi’s was used to demon-

strate the subtle difference between:

1. “Green Tune” – a \$14 mastering quality CD-R sold to recording studios
2. Mobile Fidelity Ultradisc 24k (supposedly an audiophile CD-R)
3. Melody Black CD-R – obsolete Cyanine dye unobtainium CD-R
4. First Impression Music Audio Master CDR

 With the first, the music was a stand-out, but “liveness” seemed to be taken away from the recording, with ambience and audience noise being suppressed. In contrast, with the second disc, audience noise seemed to be highlighted and intruding on the musical performance. It was as if the background noise was being accentuated. Of the three discs, the Melody Black was the “warmest” and most musical, but this was the unobtainium CD-R. Moreover, these discs starts to deteriorate immediately after burning, so the quality cannot be maintained.

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Far and away, the best CD-R was the First Impression Music Audio Master. This is a special resonance control coated, dynamically balanced, ionic water cleaned, 300-year archival-quality Gold CD-R. They will retail at \$45 each, and worth every penny. Now, after 26 years since the introduction of the Compact Disc, we are beginning to approach the reality of the "Perfect Sound Forever".



Finally, three recordings brought in by the members were copied to a FIM CDR. The first was Charlie Hayden on the double bass, and while there was a subtle improvement, it was not hugely noticeable. The improvement in the second disc – Children of Sanchez by Chuck Mangione – floored everybody. The improvement was huge, and it was like a different recording and a totally different sound system. The improvement on the third recording was also not subtle.



As a finale, we played "This is K2 HD Sound!" – a sampler by FIM Recordings. This is one of the best sounding CDs ever made. When we played the original, it sounded so good that most of the



Winston Ma explains the intricacies of producing the best sounding CDs available and some special limited CDs to be released in the near future.

audience thought that there was no way that this disc could be improved upon. If there ever was a perfect CD, this would be it.



However, when we played the Collector's Edition of this disc, most of the members could hear the improvement. This is a pressed CD that has been specially

selected for outstanding quality, and then it is resonance control coated and dynamically balanced, and then ionic-water washed. When these are released, they will be in limited quantities.



Finally, we played the Second Master Edition, and this was yet another leap forward over the Collector's Edition. The Second Master, as the name implies, is not a copy, but a recording made from the original studio masters, and burned onto a FIM Audio Master CDR. They will be the ultimate in reference-quality CDs. These Second Masters will only be sold to subscribers who have signed an undertaking not to make copies in whatever format. Each disc is serially numbered and engraved with the name of the subscriber. It will also come with two certificates showing the specifications of that particular disc. Only very limited quantities will be produced, and they will cost \$150 per disc.



You could hear a pin drop when Winston was speaking



## The Absolute Fidelity™ process

By Gary Koh

1. Extract the music from the original CD using Exact Audio Copy (available for free at [www.exactaudiocopy.de](http://www.exactaudiocopy.de)) using Paranoid mode. Make sure that you do proper detection of the features of your CD drive (accurate stream, caching, C2 error) before using it to extract the music data. When you use Paranoid mode, the software will warn you that it is not recommended, and you will damage your drive, but proceed anyway. It WILL wear out your drive, so use a cheap CD-ROM drive as using a better drive makes no difference at this stage.
2. Just before burning, copy the files to an empty Compact Flash Card (you will need at least 1Gb capacity) that is DIRECTLY connected to the synchronous master bus of your computer, not connected via USB. Highly recommended is a laptop computer with an ExpressCard bus interface. The advantage of this is that the laptop is run on batteries during the burning process, with the screen turned off.
3. Burn the CDR using the best external CD Burner available – I recommend the Plextor Premium-2 or the Yamaha CRW-F1. Both features Audio Master Quality Recording mode – use the fastest speed for AMQR, which is 4x. Place the CD Burner on a resonance-controlled surface like the FIM Signature Platform, and power the burner with a linear power supply plugged into the IsoTek Sigmas power conditioner.
4. Choose the best CDR to use in your burner:
  - a. Black CDRs sound the warmest and most musical. However, they do not seem to last, and hence they should only be considered as “disposable” discs. Also, it is almost impossible to find a great-sounding black CDR these days. The Memorex Black All-Use that is made by Mitsui is very, very good.
  - b. The Mitsui plant in Colorado makes the best archival-quality gold CDR – the MAM-A Pro Audio Gold Master. However, it is sold 50 pieces in a “cakebox” and you will find that the discs on the bottom do not sound as good as the discs on the top. If you manage to get a “fresh” cakebox, store them in a cool dark place on its side (like you would store your vinyl).
  - c. The MAM-A Archive Gold is sold individually packed in jewel cases, and these are more consistent. They don’t sound as good as the best of the Pro Audio Gold, but sound better than the worst of the Pro Audio Gold.
  - d. The absolute best CDR to use is the First Impressions Music version of the Pro Audio Gold Master. However, at \$45 a disc, you will probably reserve it only for your best music.

## CD care

By Jerry Pomeroy

To lessen the wear on your CD drive when using Exact Audio Copy (EAC) clean the CD you want to copy first. The software will continue to re-read the disc until it has a complete (100%) read of the data. This is why it will wear out the drive. For a dirty/scratched, or otherwise marginal CD this could take hours. Obviously, it is important to make the disc as easy to read as possible. This will save the time and wear on the drive. To get the best results the disc should be clean, free from scratches and balanced. If you are just going to play the disc (and not copy it), having the disc in good condition will yield a better listening session as well.

Although CDs will play with surface scuffs, always try to avoid them. This cuts down on error correction that will degrade the playback. The polycarbonate surface of a disc is soft and can easily be scratched or damaged by harsh cleaners. I have read several things on the Net about alcohol-based cleaners. I don’t know if alcohol cleaners will dry-out the CD or cause hairline cracks or not. If a residue remains on the surface from Windex or plastic polish, it will make the disc harder to read.

Over the last several years I have used Optrix on fingerprints; it is an alcohol based solution, and takes off just about anything. I plan on trying some non-alcohol based cleaners. like *Record Research* and the *Novus* plastic cleaner that Gary recommends. Conventional knowledge is to always wipe CDs from the inside out (from center to edge), never with the grooves. Always use a clean cloth. Nano or Micro fiber wipes work well with just distilled water.

<http://www.novuspolish.com/>

If you just have dust build up, it can be removed with compressed air. Ion generators work great at making the dust fall off and in getting rid of the static charge. If you have an anti static system, such as an Ion generator or a Tourmaline enhanced product (such as the hair dryers from Andrew) it is a good idea to clean the CD cases as well. When you store the CDs put them in the case, on edge just like you would an LP.

Lastly (only because of the cost), is the CD lathe. The only company I know of that makes these CD edge trim-

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mers is *AudioDesk*. Although The Lathe costs upward of \$800, I have found this device to make a tremendous improvement in sound quality. The concept is to trim the outside edge of the disc concentric to the center hole, thus “balancing” the CD. This trimming leaves a 45-degree bevel on the outside edge that is easy to paint. I have seen disc that were so out of balance they wouldn’t play before trimming, so actually hearing music is an

enormous improvement in sound. **A word of warning about trimming CDs;** some pinch roller load players may not like the slick painted edges.

There are several other tweaks that will change the sound of your CDs, but this is enough for now.

Everything makes a difference, the question becomes; can you hear it **now**?

## Tech stuff

By Jerry Pomeroy

### BDPs:

◆ This month the latest entry to the Blu-Ray Players is the new Pioneer Elite BDP-05FD, MSRP \$799. This is still a 1.1 profile player so it doesn’t have BD live capability. It does have a full compliment of video outputs. The Wolfson DAC will put out 8 channels analog decoded from any of the new HD consumer formats, it will also bit-stream any of those formats.

◆ Pioneer also announced a 2.0 profile machine but didn’t give a release date for it. The Elite BDP-09 will be their new flagship player with a MSRP of \$2200. This is the same price as the Denon and Marantz however those are only BD profile 1.1 players.

### BD Rebates:

◆ Paramount and Dreamworks announced they will put coupons in select BDs for a \$10 rebate on the purchase of BD movies. The offer requires proof of purchase from both the DVD and BD version of the movie along with receipt for the BD.

The first movie this will be available on is *Transformers*, the offer is effective for disc purchased till Dec 31, 2010.

### BDP price cut:

◆ Unconfirmed by Sony but published in C.E. Daily, the company will lower MSRP on the new BDP-S350 by \$100 on Sept 28<sup>th</sup>. The S550 release will be delayed till mid October with MSRP of \$399 this also reflects a \$100 price drop. Funai; manufacture of BDPs sold under Insignia, Philips/Magnavox and Sylvania confirmed a price drop of \$50 in late September. Speculation this will drive a price drop of most brands.

### Computer music:

◆ Yahoo to shut down music servers 9/30: Customers who purchased DRM protected music from Yahoo are eligible for coupons for MP3s from Rhapsody.

◆ Apple: to upgrade the computers this fall-winter. As usual the company isn’t saying much about it yet. I

anticipate BD drives and touch screens in the new machines.

◆ Sonos ([www.sonos.com](http://www.sonos.com)) has updated their line of whole-house music player products. Both Zone Players have gotten smaller, and the amplified one has now a more powerful amplifier. In related news, the elegant but closed (as in proprietary) system will have a worthy competitor once Logitech (which acquired Slim Devices, the maker of open source Squeezebox network players) works out bugs out of their nearly as capable (though with only 4 zones vs. 32 for Sonos), and nearly as good looking, Duet product.

◆ Netgear ([www.netgear.com](http://www.netgear.com)) has finally stepped closer to earth price-wise with their (Infrant acquired) highly regarded ReadyNas line of NAS drives/media servers. The Duo is a two disk (only) device (one disk included, redundancy, not space, achieved with the addition of a second disk) with 0.5, 0.75, and 1 TB of hot-swappable space and street prices starting at around \$350.00.

## Title Track

By Jerry Pomeroy

### ◆ Cowboy Junkies: Taking Away the Magic

The Cowboy Junkies got together at the Trinity Church in Toronto to make an album and DVD comprised of many of the songs from the original landmark album ‘Trinity Sessions.’ The 20-th anniversary per-

formance is called ‘Trinity Revisited.’ The performers were arranged in a circle similar to how the original session was recorded instead of a typical performance stage layout. In addition to the Cowboys, Ryan Adams and Natalie Merchant joined in. Margo Timmins

still has a haunting quality in her vocal arrangements, and Natalie is a great compliment to her, but it is my opinion that both are past their prime.

The production of this event took

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three days, one day to set up, one day to rehearse, and the recording took from about 7 PM 'till midnight on the third day. Some of the performances sound a bit tired and forced as opposed to the heartfelt performances during the original session. I have listened to the entire CD and I only liked the last song, Walking After Midnight. I have no recollection of it being on the original recording (but it was), so I don't have a mental imprint as to what it could sound like. In short, this sounds more like a studio album than a live performance.

By now, you have probably read between the lines and concluded I didn't like it. You are right. When I heard this album was coming out, I could hardly wait. Rarely I have been this disappointed in the performance, and the recording quality; but then, memories are often hard to surpass. I haven't looked at the DVD video yet and in some ways fear it will further damage the love and respect I have for the original.

You will probably see this CD/DVD in a raffle shortly.

◆By the time you read this the Sep 6th Puget Sound speaker contest will most likely have come and gone [Ed. Not!] so look forward to the next month's article. There will be lots of fun and many people to talk to at the all day event.

Don't forget our Sept 11th meet-

ing will be at Mike Lavigne's house in Northbend. If you have never been to Mike's barn; you need to. It is a ways out so allow some time to get there and don't speed on the road. Not sure what he has up his sleeve for the meeting but the Rockport Turntable always sounds great. I haven't had a chance to hear his new CD player or his Reel to Reel yet, so come join me at Mike's place. I am serious; this is a room you have got to experience. Here is the URL to an article Mike wrote about his room for Positive Feedback.

<http://www.positive-feedback.com/Issue16/lavigneroom.htm>

◆Getting ready for Nov meeting, I would like your input. In November the meeting will center on Hi-Def music and video. I will continue to expand my collection of Blu-Ray disc for this event and have started reviewing them for content to use at the meeting. At this time I have some classical, rock, blues and jazz. I intend on playing as many types of HD music and video as I can get my hands on. Let me know what types of music you would like to hear and I will make the program content lean toward your input.

◆I have had the opportunity to change things around in my audio system over the last month. This is always interesting, fun and frustrating, all at the same time. About 5

years ago I switched to from an active Audible Illusions IIC tube preamp to an inexpensive Stan Warren designed passive stage. At the time I was using a Jeff Rowland Model II amp. Comparatively, I found the passive to be quieter and with more detail and a high degree of transparency. Lower cost and better sound was an equation that worked for me, I was very happy. Since my primary source was a CD player, I had mine modified with hot output levels specifically to deal with the diminutive properties of the passive stage. After several years I could see no use in hanging on to an active preamplifier, and I sold the Audible Illusion.

Skip forward to today; I have a Genesis I60 integrated tube amp as my reference. I borrowed a transistor amp (will remain nameless for now) and tried to use it with my Placette passive. I decided this is not a good combination and borrowed an Adcom GFP-750 active/passive preamp. I can't say I notice allot of difference in detail, but I do notice differences when it comes to impact and dynamics. Active preamps can do some really cool stuff, but so can passives.

The moral of this story? Mix things up every once and a while. In the process you may gain an appreciation for something different. I am going to start looking for another active preamp. Anybody got any suggestions?

## Upcoming events

### September 6th, 2008

#### The "Puget Sound"

The club will be hosting our bi-annual DIY speaker contest. This contest is always fun. More details forthcoming.

### September 11th, 2008

#### PNWAS Meeting (Off site!)

Mike Lavigne will host this months meeting at his place with a presentation of his listening room and system. Event not to be missed! [If you need the address and directions to Mike's house contact Jerry \(jerry@audiosociety.org\) at least 1 day prior to the meeting.](#) If you get lost on the way call Jerry at 253-350-3916.

### October 9th, 2008

#### PNWAS Meeting

Andrew will show us some tweaks that work. Tweaks are always a fun topic, it's great to speculate why they work or don't.

### November 13th, 2008

#### PNWAS Meeting

Jerry will talk about Multimedia and Home Theater developments

### December 11th, 2008

#### PNWAS Meeting

Christmas raffle and music sharing. Our annual party at which each of us can spread the joy by inflicting his/her musical tastes on others. Start planning your gifts now!

## Classified Ads

Ads are free to members and will run for three consecutive issues unless renewed. Please limit ads to make, model, short description, condition, MSRP, asking price, contact information.

### **EMM Labs/Meitner DAC8 IV**

8-channel DAC with ST Optical, SDIF and AES/EBU inputs. DSD or PCM up to 24/96. It will also do a D/D conversion up or down. Latest model in excellent condition. \$5000.00

Call Bruce at 425-369-1392

### **Gallo Reference 3.1 speakers**

Black and stainless with black base. Great for 2 channel audio or home theatre.

Very good condition. New \$3400 asking \$1800

Call Ken at 425-785-7517

### **Genesis I60 integrated amplifier**

This sold out and much sought after 60 watt stereo integrated tube amplifier is being offered at a special price [to PNWAS members only](#). This unit is brand new, in unopened box. It was recovered from a dealer. \$2250 or best offer. Submit your bids to [garyk@audiosociety.org](mailto:garyk@audiosociety.org)

## Club discounts

### **Northwest Sinfonietta**

The Northwest Sinfonietta (a classical chamber orchestra) provides discounts to members of our club for performances of the 2007-2008 season. The regular single ticket price of \$38 will be only \$20 per person per performance at the door (or by phone or mail). Just tell them or note on your order that you are a member of the PNWAS. Information and order forms are also available at their website: [www.nwsinfonietta.org](http://www.nwsinfonietta.org).

### **Kosmic**

[www.kosmic.us](http://www.kosmic.us)

Contact Joe Pittman

206-878-3833

### **Pro Sound and Vision**

Contact George H. Pro

425-889-9499, 425-445-3308 (cell)

### **Revolution Power**

[Www.revolutionpower.com](http://Www.revolutionpower.com)

Contact: Ken Garza

### **Visitors Welcome!**

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at 4545 Island Crest Way, Mercer Island, WA 98040.

### **PNWAS Mission Statement**

- ◆ To bring together people with a common interest in music reproduced at its best, for their mutual edification and pleasure.
- ◆ To facilitate the exchange and dissemination of accurate data concerning audio equipment and musical recordings.
- ◆ To promote, sponsor, and cultivate the highest quality reproduction of music in the home.
- ◆ To encourage maintenance of high standards in the performance, recording and transmission of music.

### **PNWAS Objectives**

1. Provide a forum for meeting other audiophiles and exchanging information on musical recordings and audio equipment.
2. Demonstrate and compare equipment and recordings.
3. Give members opportunities to become familiar with the techniques of audio manufacturing,

testing, repair, recording, broadcasting, etc.

4. Explore related avenues as the membership deems appropriate.

### **Club website**

[www.audiosociety.org](http://www.audiosociety.org)

### **E-mail**

[info@audiosociety.org](mailto:info@audiosociety.org)

### **U.S. Mail**

Pacific Northwest Audio Society, P.O. Box 435, Mercer Island, WA 98040

### **Annual dues**

\$60 due each January. New members pay a prorated \$5 per month for remainder of year.

### **Executive Committee**

President: Andrew Kosobutsky

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Vice-President: Bruce Brown

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[Mariusz@audiosociety.org](mailto:Mariusz@audiosociety.org)

### **Action Committee Chairs:**

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[jerry@audiosociety.org](mailto:jerry@audiosociety.org)

Refreshment: Laura Francis-Brown

[lgfwo@yahoo.com](mailto:lgfwo@yahoo.com)

### **Editorial**

Editorial submissions are welcome.

Content must be audio-related or of general interest to the club in plain text or Word document format without automation (macros or scripts). We reserve the right to edit for style, content, and length.

Editorial deadline: two weeks before meeting date.

Publishing any editorial material is contingent upon the approval of the Executive Committee.

### **Disclaimer**

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**Pacific Northwest  
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