

Arizona Audio Video Club

Newsletter for February, 2022

Steering Committee Members

Members-At-Large	Roy Cook, John Harvell, Dave Hjortland, Jeff Kalina, Paul Righello, Ben Taylor
Secretary	David Snyder
Treasurer	Deb Snyder
Newsletter Editor	David Snyder
Activity Groups Coordinator	Walter Nash

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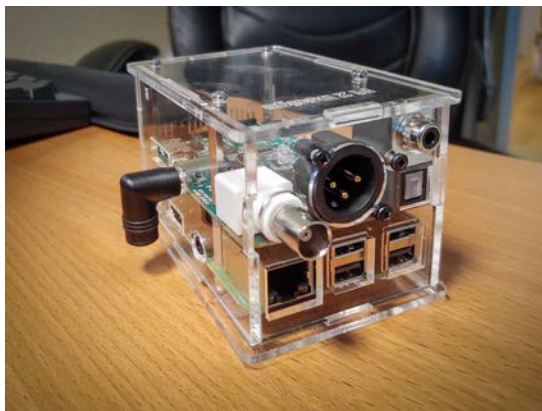
Letter from the Secretary

This newsletter is arriving a few days later than I had hoped. Thanks for your patience. If you don't read anything else, please jump down to page 9 now and read about our exciting February event on Wednesday, the 23rd at the usual time and place.

It's only February, and already 48 audio and video enthusiasts have renewed their AZAVClub membership for 2022 and 24 took the time to vote in our steering committee elections. Thanks so much for the valuable feedback that many of you provided. Your new Steering Committee will be following up on those suggestions over the next few months.

If you have yet not renewed but would like to do so, please visit the JOIN section of our website for instructions: <https://azavclub.com/join>

In future editions of this newsletter, I will publish a series of interviews with members who wish to share the story behind the assembly and setup of their main playback systems. Others will share their impressions of new gear they have added, why they added it, why they like it (or don't). I'll start with something new that the digital audiophiles may find interesting. I just added a [PI2AES](#) network audio transport to my main system.



This device accepts digital audio streams over the network and outputs simultaneously to five (5) different connections: AES/EBU, TOSLINK, BNC and COAX S/PDIF, and I²S. It works beautifully with Roon and is a great way to explore different DAC connection options.

Some assembly required but it's reasonably priced, starting at \$250 + s/h. It sounds great but is not without a few limitations. It only supports 24-bit, 192 kHz PCM, even over the I²S output. So, no DSD or DXD. MQA streams are passed through to an attached DAC and will be decoded or rendered if the DAC supports this controversial format. Overall, I'm pleased with its performance for the price.

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January Event Writeup

We had a great turnout at our January event. The idea was for us to compare the SACD and CD layers of a few popular SACD discs plus the same tracks downloaded from the Apple iTunes store. Our hypothesis was that the SACD layer would be clearly better in most cases. But, would it?

Equipment Notes

The system that Ben brought consisted of a pair of Adam Artist desktop powered monitors and a Benchmark DAC2 HGC. The Benchmark can perform as a standalone DAC or a DAC/preamp with one set of analog inputs. Digital inputs include SPDIF, Toslink, USB, and it's capable of decoding PCM formats up to 192 kHz plus DSD.

The Adam monitors were fed from the Benchmark via the two balanced (XLR) cables. These Adams are not made any more, being a sealed baffle (Acoustic Suspension) item, and the cabinets milled mostly from what looks like a solid billet of aluminum. They were not cheap (\$1,600/pr), and produced an amazingly full, even sound for their size. They may have been too costly to compete, in the pro market, with other home/pro studio models, but Ben is glad that he has them.

The final bit was an Apple MacBook Pro laptop, which we used as a digital audio transport to feed the Benchmark DAC.

Event Description and Results

For the evaluation process, we played the first minute or so of each track before switching to the next version. At the end of each set (A,B,C versions) we held votes on how many liked version A, B, or C the best and why. David matched levels of the tracks to within 0.01 dB to ensure that differences in playback volume would not be a factor. He could give a 30 minute talk on the process he used, but just know that the process was based on rev. 3 of ITU-R BS.1770 standard and was precisely executed.

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Once we had gone through all the tracks, Paul tallied the votes and then had Ben play two of them again without disclosing the results of the sessions yet. We did this because two formats were very close in preference and we wanted to see if we got the same results again. In this second round, we compared two versions of each track using the formats that were close in preference. Below are the results:

Session 1:

Celine Dion A (SACD)	= 1	sounds like an mp3.
Celine Dion B = 4 (CD)	= 4	tambourine life like, tails longer, better decay
Celine Dion C = 4 (AAC)	= 4	smoothest of all, analogue like, great definition and tone.
Dead Can Dance A (AAC)	= 0	
Dead Can Dance B (CD)	= 6	most analogue, richer, open, smoother
Dead Can Dance C (SACD)	= 3	rolled off highs, presence
Dire Straits A (AAC)	= 3	fuller, liquid, bloom, dynamic
Dire Straits B (SACD)	= 3	2nd order harmonics present, background instrument clarity, body & depth
Dire Straits C (CD)	= 4	vocal clarity, more definition
Pink Floyd A (CD)	= 2	clearer in beginning with record track
Pink Floyd B (AAC)	= 6	universally better than other versions
Pink Floyd C (SACD)	= 0	
Santana A (SACD)	= 3	presence, depth
Santana B (CD)	= 1	definition
Santana C (AAC)	= 6	vibrant attack on drums, better percussion overall

Session 2:

Dire Straights A (AAC)	= 4
Dire Straights C (CD)	= 5
Pink Floyd A (CD)	= 1
Pink Floyd B (AAC)	= 9

Counts weren't always consistent as sometimes folks abstained from voting. By total votes **AAC was the most preferred** but this was really driven by a couple of tracks. The results of session two were similar to session one. To some extent the results seem track dependent but one thing does stand out for me, SACD was never the preferred version across any track.

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Our takeaway from these results was that the **quality of the recording matters more than the format** and that CD or AAC are acceptable resolutions for enjoyment. For example, the Celine Dion track was almost universally disliked across all formats from a sound quality perspective by the participants.

Another thing to note, the Pink Floyd and Santana tracks were both Apple Digital Masters (or Master for iTunes as they rebranded a few years ago). This is interesting as AAC was strongly preferred both times. None of the other AAC versions were Apple Digital Masters. Maybe there is something to this process? Paul read a little bit about it and it's not for earbuds but rather it uses the 24 bit masters as the source material for the AAC version. The idea is to make a high quality AAC version of the track and perhaps it does indeed work.

Sorry...no photos from this event, but hopefully we'll have some to share for the event in February.

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Tentative 2022 Event Calendar

February:	Poetry on Plastic speaker Michael Johnson
March:	Open House at Acoustic Design Group Saturday
April:	Wine and Audio – does it influence the sound
May:	Digital File Formats – what is the difference if any?
June:	Realities of the recording process
July:	Member Music Night
August:	Cables – do they make a difference
September:	Subwoofers
October:	Progressive Listening Night
November/December:	Swap Meet

This calendar is subject to change as we have many more great ideas coming in from members, so please stay tuned. I hope we can count on you to participate in 2022!

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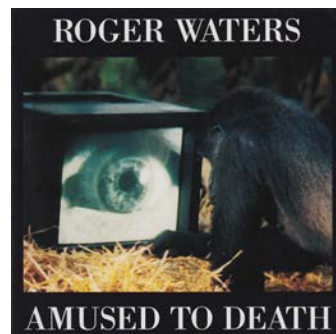
Dave's Record Reviews

From Dave Hjortland

Roger Waters – [Amused to Death](#)
(Columbia, 1992)

Available in any format you want

Amused to Death was the third solo album to be released by Waters following his split from that little-known group called... what was it, now...? Pink Droid or something. You will hear echoes of that group in this work, as Waters was one of its primary leaders. It is largely regarded as Waters' finest solo achievement, but... what does that mean? Waters' solo career consists of five studio albums, plus four live albums and a compilation album. While some of those garnered some critical attention, none of them attained anything near the popular success of that other group he was with. (Sink Freud? Link Void? Whatever.)



The music of Amused is built around a deep, profound theme, that being... well, the deterioration of society due to mass media and the resulting negativity and desolation of spirit. And if that's not depressing enough, there is some sort of commentary about war, too. At least, that's what I think it's about – it's not totally clear and is left somewhat open to interpretation. But hey – that's what art is supposed to be, right?

You may like or dislike the music and associated themes of this work. But there is not much pop-rock here (none, actually), and very little by way of hooks, melody, or memorable tunes – you won't find yourself humming a line from this the day after you hear it. That said, it does incorporate some very fine guitar work by well-known guitar slinger Jeff Beck in spots.

At times (well, much of the time) it is dense and hard to decipher what's going on, even in highest fidelity. You almost have to have read about the album to understand Waters' intent and meaning. If you are into obtuse and challenging social commentary in your music – and I know some people are – hey, this is the album for you!

So what are its virtues? What is fascinating about this album is not so much its music as – and I hate to admit this – its audiophile capability. It was recorded with a process called Q Sound, which is, “a positional three-dimensional (3D) sound processing algorithm from QSound Labs that creates 3D audio effects from multiple

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monophonic sources and sums the outputs to two channels for presentation over regular stereo speakers.” (Thank you, Wikipedia.) The process is used by video games and a limited number of other record albums produced in the 1990’s. The resulting sound and sound effects on this album are truly extraordinary. On a good system (note caveat), sounds appear not only “out of the box,” but almost seem to emanate from different spaces on the walls – or maybe from the next room or your neighbor’s house. You would not believe that a stereo – that is, two speakers – could reproduce what you are hearing. It becomes almost a surround-sound experience. At least, it does on vinyl – I have not heard and therefore cannot attest to the sound quality in CD or other formats. [from the editor: effects on 2-channel digital are equally astonishing]

Speaking of formats, the album has been released and re-released in most every one you could want except perhaps 8-track, which is one I hope you wouldn’t want anyway. The version I have is in vinyl, two discs on 200 gram vinyl produced by Analogue Productions in 2015. It is still available from Acoustic Sounds. And if you want to go all-in, there’s also a 45 RPM, 180 gram 4 LP box set.

Roger Plant & Alison Krause – [Raise the Roof](#)

(Rounder, CD & LP, 2021)

So one night last November I caught The Late Show on TV, on which Steven Colbert occasionally has musical guests perform – some of them good, others not. On that night Plant and Krause appeared and did a song from their new album, the subject of this review. The song was called “Can’t Let Go,” and I was surprised that it was a well-done, smooth but lively song that actually (dare I say it?) rocked. I was excited, and thought to myself, “Hey, maybe—just maybe – here’s a couple of aging musicians that haven’t forsaken their up-tempo, edgy popular roots to wallow in slower, ballady, ‘pretty’ music befitting their ages.” (Krause isn’t all that old, but Plant has become rather grizzled.) I ordered the two-disc vinyl album on the internet, and when it finally arrived I discovered that... well, I was wrong.



Robert Plant was of course the former lead singer and lyricist of Led Zeppelin in the heyday of that classic rock group. Alison Krause has been a highly successful country/bluegrass/folk Americana singer and musician, both in solo work and with the band Union Station. This was not their first pairing; In 2007 they released an album called Raising Sand, which went platinum and won five Grammy awards.

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Noted producer T Bone Burnett, who produced and had much to do with that album, returned to do similar work on this new outing. I don't own that one, but recall being less impressed than many people with what I did hear of it.

So what do we have this time around? Well, it certainly ain't all bad, and additional listening has raised my impression somewhat from the initial yawns it induced. The vocals of both Krauss and Plant are well done, Krauss in particular often impressing with her pure, honest, country-tinged interpretations. The several backing musicians include a few names I recognize; Bill Frisell, Lucinda Williams, and Marc Ribot are on board. Producer Burnett is credited on guitar on a number of cuts. (BTW, though best known as a producer, Burnett has also released a dozen albums of his own, some of them extremely good.)

Of the album's twelve cuts, the previously mentioned "Can't Let Go" is a highlight and my fav on the album. That's as close as they come to rocking out, though. A few of the others manage to catch my attention and sort of pull me in with their sheer musicianship and songwriting.

But... many of the songs sound like they were trying to employ as many side people as they could throw into the mix – rather cluttered. And many cuts are on the slow side and uninvolved. Many are 'pretty,' which is not a compliment in my personal music lexicon.

Many people will enjoy this album, and more power to them. Whether you will or not is of course your call. It may even garner some awards, though I doubt as many as their previous outing. For my part, I'll only be going back to it for about three of the songs.

CLASSICS CORNER

Al Hirt & Ann-Margret – [Beauty and the Beard](#)

(LP, RCA, 1964. CD, Bear Family, 2011)

After a couple of lukewarm reviews I am pleased to share an enthusiastic recommendation!

Whoever thought of the unlikely pairing of trumpeter Al Hirt with singer/actress Ann-Margret on a record album somehow struck gold. These two talents play off of and compliment each other to create a musical experience which is greater than at least most of the work either of the two produced separately. The songs are "standards" of the "American Songbook," but here they are not mere chestnuts of the past. They are



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interpreted and infused with a kind of light-hearted good humor not often conveyed through recorded music.

Ann-Margret was unquestionably a multitalented woman, with many stage and screen credits as well as a dozen-some record albums. She may not have been a singer to rank with Julie London or Peggy Lee – her albums varied greatly in quality. However she was actually an excellent singer, and her vocals on this album are arguably the best that she recorded. She conveys a sexy coquettishness that will be appreciated by all. Well... at least by most males.

It is good that Hirt did not quit trumpet playing for a singing career – he would not have gotten far. His singing voice is a gravelly baritone but one that plays well with others, and it certainly does so on this album. Oh, he works in some quite tasty trumpet playing on most songs as well, but his voice is what you'll be paying the most attention to here. It is not great by any standard, but it is a natural and effective contrast with Ann-Margret's.

Marty Paich was a well-known arranger/conductor/producer in the late 50's into the 80's, who worked with some of the biggest names in popular music. He arranged and conducted the orchestra here, and he is also in good form.

One enthusiastic fan on Amazon labeled this, "One of the finest jazz CD's ever produced!!!" I don't think most jazz aficionados would call this jazz, but it certainly is a most enjoyable listen. The stereo separation is exemplary, with Ann on the left, Al on the right, and the orchestra seemingly in the middle. The sound quality itself is really quite good, despite the fact that the LP was pressed by RCA with their infamous Dynagroove processing.

The original LP was released by RCA in 1964, and will occasionally turn up at used record stores. Don't hesitate to grab it if you happen to come across a copy in decent condition! It's also available through Discogs. Bear Family released a CD version in 2011 under the marque of their Velvet Lounge series. Just to make it interesting they renamed it *Personalities*, presumably after the lead cut on the album. This is a fine version, with good quality sound though perhaps a bit "cooler" than the LP. (Possibly they were able to access the master tapes, before RCA applied their Dynagroove "processing" to it.) I believe The Japanese also produced a version or two.

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February Event Announcement

Michael Johnson is a noted expert on vinyl from almost every perspective. He has made a serious study of the audio quality available from both vintage and currently issued music on vinyl.

He has a very popular and widely followed set of presentations that he's done on YouTube called [Poetry on Plastic](#). On that channel he covers a wide range of topics ranging from labels known for high quality, intricate details about vintage vinyl recordings from the 50s, 60s and 70s, and modern vinyl releases to look for or avoid.



He is a professional classical musician who plays oboe with a symphony orchestra. His music tastes, however, are extremely varied and go deeply into jazz and Rock from classic to present day. He is also into other truly arcane areas of music, including Japanese pop. His YouTube videos are widely followed and admired.

I expect he will do a wonderful presentation and the question and answer session could possibly go on for a very long time as he also knows a great deal about the best approach to vinyl sound production for audiophiles.

We will meet at Faith Lutheran Church, [801 E Camelback Rd, Phoenix, AZ 85014](#) at **7:00 pm on Wednesday, February 23rd**. If you are unable to attend in person, please use the Zoom link below:

Join Zoom Meeting - please plan to join a few minutes early to get setup
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82673410623?pwd=c3Jza3l4Q3dlYUN3QnY2WjMxN25zdz09>

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Dealer Area

As always we want to recognize and thank all the local retailers who support our club so graciously

Equipment Dealers:

[Acoustic Designs Group](#)

[Dedicated Audio](#)

[LMC Entertainment](#)

[Woolson Audio](#)

[Arizona HiFi](#)

[USA Tube Audio](#)

[Audio Video Excellence](#)

[Big Ear Stereo](#)

Vinyl:

[Record High in Phoenix](#)

[In-Groove Records](#)

Repairs:

James Koch

james@highendrepair.com

Audio Doctor

<http://www.audiodoctor.biz/>

Jeff's Professional Audio Repair - also car stereo work

4221 North 19th Ave

Phoenix, AZ 85015

602-274-0794 | jparepair@yahoo.com

M-F 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM

Michael Mitchell - Refoaming Speaker Surround Service

480-749-7003 | mmiller43228@yahoo.com

Richard Jensen - Turntable Set-up and record cleaning

ANALOG resource

602 717 2399 | worksbau@gmail.com

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Humor



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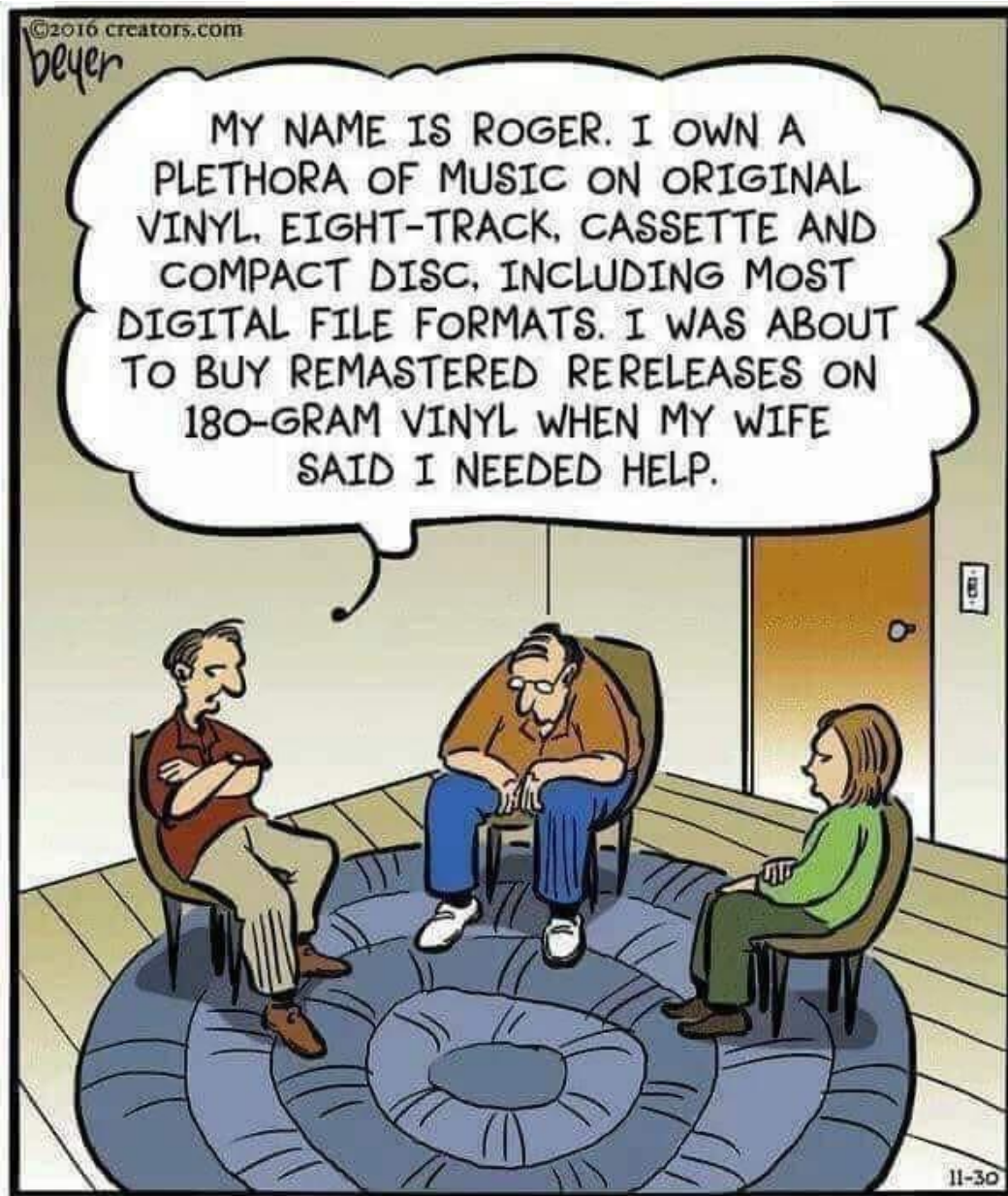
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"In the old days, your Grandma and I
watched TV with rabbit ears."

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Audiophiles Anonymous

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