

THEY HEARD, THEY WROTE, THEY WON

The winners of the *HFNR/RR* Test CD competition

LAST NOVEMBER WE RAN A competition for readers to write their own review of the *HFNR/RR* Test Compact Disc. The standard of entry was very high – our thanks to everyone who entered – and the judges had a hard job picking the best six reviews. There was no difficulty in picking the winner of the Musical Fidelity A-1 integrated amplifier, however. The verdict was unanimous that the entry from José Vitor Henriques, from Estoril in Portugal, was the most interesting in that it included critical comment in an unorthodox style. We were glad that we didn't have to choose between the five runners-up, who each win a 10-pack of *CYX* CD Damping Foils. In no particular order they were: Jonathan Angel, from Palo Alto, California; Alan Watling, from Colchester, Essex; Heino Anderson, from Leicester; Barry Hann, from Caulfield, Australia; and Kenneth Muir, from Runcorn in Cheshire.

The winning entries are printed below, but if your appetite for the Test CD has been whetted, it is still available for £11.95, including post and packing, from the *HFNR/RR* Accessories Club. Apart from a comprehensive selection of test tones, there are 14 music tracks, listed in the Table, which were chosen because we felt they illustrated how natural mixing can produce unexaggerated balances which are nevertheless musical in the extreme. Full details of the recording techniques used for each track are included in the CD's booklet.



FOR JUST OVER A TENNER THIS test disc is a bargain. A well produced TV commercial could make it go all the way up to the charts. Thus:

OPENING SCENE:

(A backlit wide-angle view of a well-decorated office. *Hi-Fi* News reviewers are shown blissfully discussing their points of view.)

Sue is saying the Vivaldi strings have no trace of harshness or overbrilliance, just a natural bloom.

'Well, I find them aggressively close,' admits Peter Branscombe defiantly. 'It's the 'Erica' that sounds natural and unadulterated. . . .'

'Natural? You call that natural?' interrupts Sue sitting bolt upright. 'For me, it's as dull as can be.'

'One uses Roederstein resistors (score: 84%), while the other uses Holco resistors (score: 91%); hence the argument,' Martin Colloms explains with a patronising smile to a flabbergasted JA.

'The Denon piano recording spreads the upper and lower registers too much for my taste,' throws in Roger Bowen, absent-mindedly playing with his pen.

And while everybody else takes the opportunity to butter up the boss on account of his fine piano recording, Arthur Jacobs declares contemptuously that the piano tone on the Andras Schiff recording is unbeatable. And if that doesn't say much for his ears, it says a lot for his guts. . . .

CLOSING SCENE:

(KK is trying to convert his wife to the joys of hi-fi, by demonstrating the garage door track)

'It sounds just like you, when you come home late and don't have your key,' she comments nonchalantly.

(Here KK looks straight at the camera and with an embarrassed, yet meaningful, smile asks:)

'How's that for real?'

FADE OUT:

(The cymbal crash is heard dying away in the darkness while birds sing in the background.)

José Vitor Henriques

WHERE'S THE CD EQUIVALENT of trying different turntable mats, changing paddles on your silicon damper, or varying tracking force over a Shure 'Audio Obstacle Course'?

The ultimate in enjoyable tweakiness was once *HFNR/RR*'s limited edition quad set, pressed in SQ, QS, CD-4, and stereo (too bad Halfler was the best I could muster). Now it's *HFNR/RR* again which has produced the first real test CD. Its test tones might appear useless now that equalisers are no longer in for flattening response, but no – they're perfect for testing tape recorder frequency response and stability. (A dream, but hopeless to access with a Philips CD-100.)

Music (classical, hence with real space and dynamics) is mostly reissued from commercial labels, but it's great Tony Faulkner stuff, and Mike Skeet has contributed a superb drum kit and 'garage door'. Martin Colloms' own taping of Deputy Editor Ivor Humphreys' flute has two microphone placements, and I enjoyed disagreeing with the notes about which was best.

Speaking of notes, the real point of an issue like this is to know the mikes used for each recording, where they and the instruments were, and the dimensions of each hall. *HFNR/RR*'s notes only stimulate the appetite; if each track had come with a map, it would be easy to check imaging.

For me, the best track is from Dvorak's *String Serenade*. It won't stop me from trying to find CD tweaks forever, but it makes me settle back with the player on 'repeat'. Strange, this feeling of contentment, from a test record of all things!

Jonathan Angel

FROM COMPLETE SILENCE THE MID-Atlantic voice declaims left and right channels, balance and phase. Cat panics: what is 'out of phase'? To dive from this into Dvorak is a cold bath, albeit with the plug-hole open for the cellos to slide down. The bathroom acoustic expands to envelope Hildegard, proving that reverbation can improve even Tony Faulkner's phased array – or be enhanced by it.

Exit Hildegard, enter Queen of Sheba, as regal as ever and well spread out, if she will forgive me. The transition to Vivaldi in Hampstead is almost immediate, with the Faulkner mikes producing no unnatural hiatus. Just good engineering. ▶

Track Listing

- 1-2 Chamber check and phasing
- 3 Dvorak: *String Serenade*, movement (Chamber Orchestra of Europe, from ASV COE 801)
- 4 Hildegard of Bingen: *Columba apexit* (Parley of Instruments with Emma Kirkby, from Hyperion CDA 66039)
- 5 Handel: *Entry of the Queen of Sheba* (Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Laredo, from IMP 'Red' PCD 802)
- 6 Vivaldi: *The Four Seasons*, 'Spring' 1st movement (Taverner Players/Parrott from Denon 38C37-7283)
- 7 Bartok: *Roumanian Dance* (Andras Schiff, piano, from Denon 38C37-7092)
- 8 Bruckner: *Symphony 4*, 3rd movement (Dresden Staatskapelle/Biomstedt, from Denon 38C37-7126)
- 9 JS Bach: *Chorale Prelude BWV 645* (Hans Otto, organ, from Denon C37-7004)
- 10 Beethoven: *Symphony 3*, 1st movement (Berlin Staatskapelle/Suiter, from Denon 38C37-7011)
- 11 Chopin: *Waltz in C-sharp minor Op.64/2* (Anna Maria Stanczyk, piano, from Ensemble ENS118)
- 12 Gluck: *Dance of the Blessed Spirits* (Ivor Humphreys, flute, Marjorie Dutton, piano: First part recorded with crossed ribbon mics; second with the Calrec Soundfield mic)
- 13 Solo Percussion (Andie Brooke-Mellor, from Ensemble MGS001)
- 14 The Garage Door! (Mike Skeet, from Ensemble MGS001)
- 15-64 Technical test tones

HFNR/RR TEST CD

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