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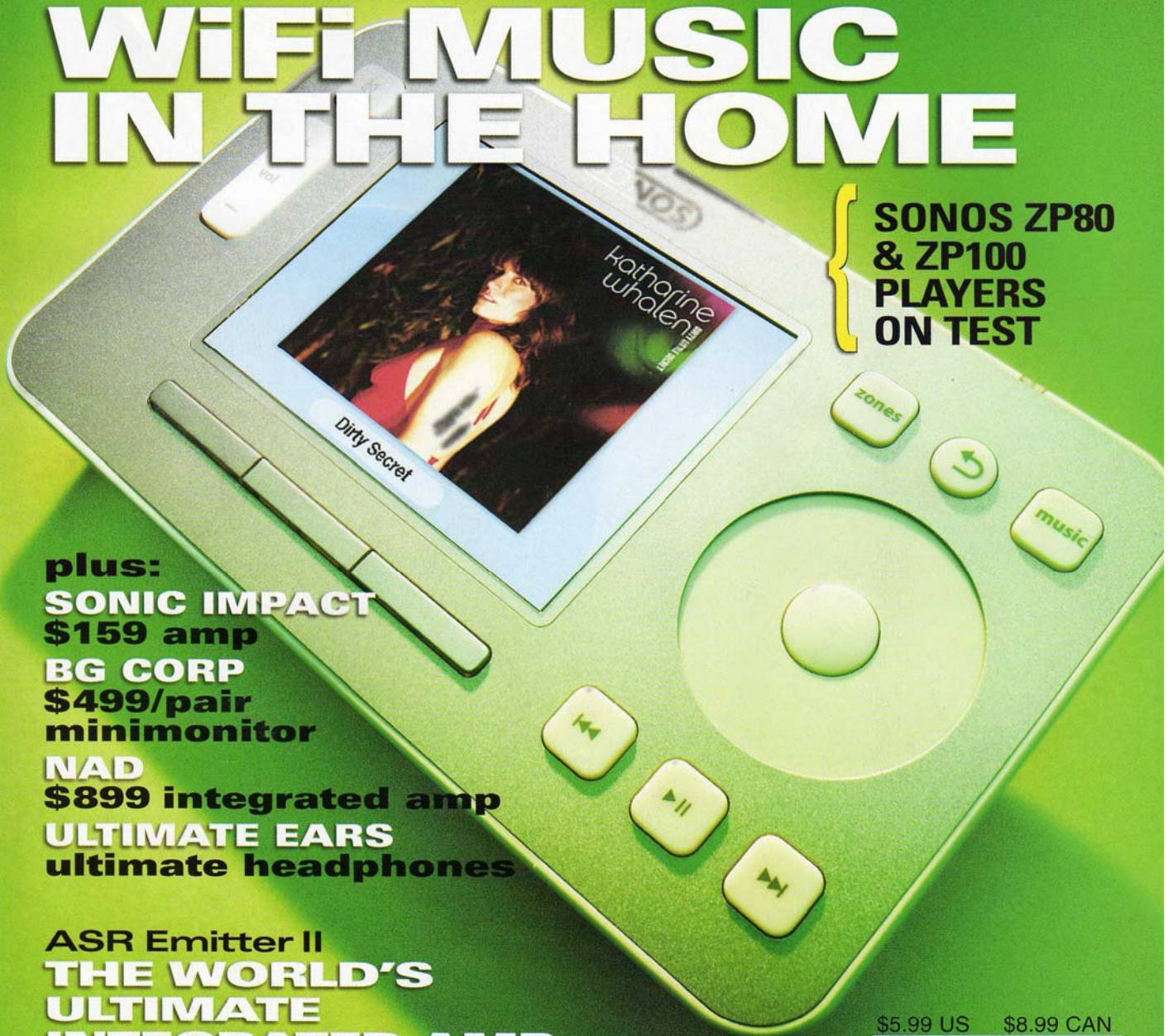
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OCTOBER 2006

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## ANALOG CORNER

Michael Fremer

### Demagnetizers, Cartridges, & a Turntable

**T**wo devices designed to “demagnetize” LPs arrived at my door the same week. *More BS*, I thought. Demagnetizing vinyl? Please. What next? Green magic markers?

One is the Furutech (\$1800, [www.furutech.com/newindex.asp](http://www.furutech.com/newindex.asp)), the other the Acoustic Revive (\$2995, distributed by Bertrand Audio Imports, [www.bertrandaudio.com](http://www.bertrandaudio.com)). Both are made in Japan. I didn't want them to work. I really didn't.

Excuse my skepticism, but before wasting another nanosecond on this nonsense, I needed at least a semi-plausible explanation—even one from Peter Belt.<sup>1</sup> I got reasonably good explanations from spokespersons for both products. Apparently the dye infused into clear PVC to make records black contains metallic, easily magnetized contaminants that can interfere with a phono cartridge's motor. That's plausible, I guess. I decided to waste some nanoseconds after all.

I'm sorry to report that demagnetizing LPs works—consistently and decidedly. Nor am I the only one to hear it, but I'm not going to Bob Novak anyone here. I'll let those listeners blow their own covers (at least one of them has a well-known byline).

For whatever reasons, demagnetizing an LP definitely removed a high-frequency glaze or glare and seemed to enrich the midband—or seems to do the latter by removing the former. Period. It did. Every time. I documented this by playing “Banquet,” from my original promo copy of Joni Mitchell's *For the Roses*—a record I've been playing steadily since 1972. I recorded the track on the Alesis MasterLink hard-disk recorder, then demagnetized the LP, then recorded the track again, then went back and forth between the two recordings. The difference was obvious.

Then I asked myself: What records do I own that I think are really great recordings marred only by an “edge”? I thought of Nanci Griffith's *Storms* and

<sup>1</sup> Peter Belt purveys creams and foils that he claims cause profound sonic changes in audio systems. See [www.belt.demon.co.uk](http://www.belt.demon.co.uk).

PHOTOS: MICHAEL FREMER



Furutech De Mag Record Demagnetizer.

Furutech costs \$1800, the Acoustic Revive a heaping \$2995. Let's say it costs Furutech a reasonable \$225 to make their device (a slice of the general cost of doing business factored in, as it must be). They sell it

Marti Jones' *Used Guitars*. I gave them the same treatment as “Banquet,” and the results were convincing—witnessed, heard, and confirmed first by that well-known audio writer, and

later by a confounded equipment importer. I'll spare you the list of the other LPs I've demagged. Demagnetizing LPs works. Better yet, once a record has been demagnetized, it seems to stay that way.

What about clear vinyl? I demagged a David Bowie album that Rykodisc had reissued on clear virgin vinyl tinted slightly green. I heard no difference. I know, I know—it's because I didn't want to. Maybe, but believe me—I didn't want to hear a difference with black vinyl either.

The problem is the cost. The



Acoustic Revive RL-30 Mk.3 Record Demagnetizer.

to the importer for \$450. He sells it to the retailer for \$900. The retailer sells it to you for \$1800. In specialty audio or specialty anything else, when the numbers of units sold is low, that's how it works. Why the Acoustic Revive costs so much more, I don't know.

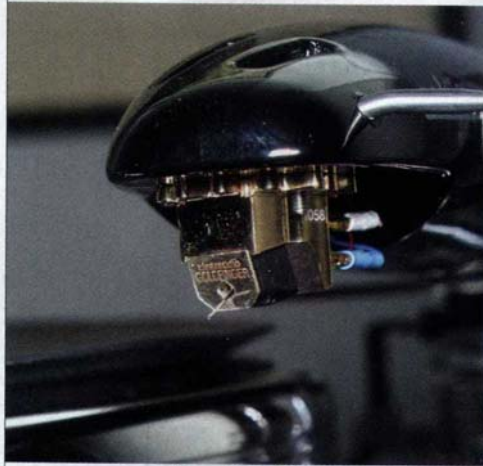
Both devices worked equally well and were easy to use: Put the record on the surface and push a button. The circuit ramps the magnetic field up and down in less than a minute. Flip and repeat. I preferred the conservative looks of the Acoustic Revive, and I

appreciated its dust cover. Make sure the Furutech's uncovered surface is clean before you put any freshly scrubbed vinyl on it. And do *not* try one of these devices unless you're prepared to buy it.

### Clearaudio Goldfinger MC cartridge

I've always considered Clearaudio's Peter Suchy to be more of a technocrat than an artist. Yoshiaki Sugano was an artist. I didn't spend a great deal of time with Clearaudio's Insider phono cartridges, but the one I heard was more easily appreciated than loved. However, in the past few years the Clearaudio cartridges I've heard have achieved great sonority without hyper-romanticism and without sacrificing resolution.

The Concerto (\$2000, [www.musical-surroundings.com](http://www.musical-surroundings.com)), which I reviewed some years ago, was the best Clearaudio cartridge I'd ever heard. The new Goldfinger, the top model of the same line, takes the Concerto's performance into the stratosphere and beyond, along with its price: \$8000. The Goldfinger shares the Concerto's irregular, gear-shaped top plate, which is said to break



Clearaudio Goldfinger

up resonances, but instead of wood, the plate and the rest of the body are made of gold. Clearaudio claims that gold's density and mass make it a good damping material. The moving coils are wound with 24K gold wire.

With all that gold, the Goldfinger weighs 16gm. Not every tonearm can accommodate such a heavy cartridge, though its medium-compliance rating should make the Goldfinger compatible with most arms of medium to high mass. The only problem most users might encounter is not having a heavy enough counterweight. I understand that SME's Alistair Robertson-Aikman was so enthralled by the Goldfinger that, to better accommodate it, he put a special high-mass counterweight into production for his SME V arm.

Protruding from the Goldfinger's body is a long, unprotected cantilever of boron, terminated with an ultra-low-mass "HD" diamond stylus. Eight powerful, carefully matched magnets are said to create an ultrasymmetrical drive system with a relatively high output of 0.8mV. Clearaudio claims exceptional crosstalk—more than 45dB—but using the Cardas test record and an accurate digital voltmeter, I was able to achieve only slightly more than 30dB, which is still plenty good. (Most cartridges with a claimed crosstalk of 30dB don't achieve more than 28dB or so.) Nor can I vouch for the test record's accuracy. Clearaudio also claims a dynamic range of 100dB, but I couldn't confirm or reject that using measurements.

Clearaudio recommends that the Goldfinger track at 2.9gm, which is on the heavy side of the 1.75–2.00gm norm. Of course, back in the 1960s,

tracking claims of 1gm were common with ultra-high-compliance cartridges and low-mass arms. I can't tell you how many records I ruined in my quest to track (too) light. I'm not worried about tracking at 2.9gm.

**The Midas Touch:** Once it was perfectly aligned, fully broken in (at least 50 hours), and loaded to around 100 ohms (no 47k ohms for *this* cartridge), the Clearaudio Goldfinger provided an exciting, unforgettable listening experience. Easily the "fastest" cartridge I've ever heard, it was also among the purest, most

transparent, and most effervescent—like the finest electrostatic loudspeaker, but one with both extension and exuberant dynamics. The Goldfinger was not edgy, crunchy, bright, or overly analytical. If it had any sort of tonal character at all, it was one of smooth forwardness in the upper mids to lower highs that helped develop an enormous, bubble-like overall presentation.

The Goldfinger's transient response was lightning-fast, but each initial impulse was followed by an enticing, delicately supple afterglow that helped keep the sound free of any crunch or etch. The cartridge produced breathtakingly well-defined images that were cushioned in the manner of delicate crystal surrounded by bubble wrap. The result was utterly convincing pianos, brass, reeds, and especially female voices. While the Goldfinger is said to have been designed with classical music in mind, I found it equally convincing with rock, jazz, and even electronica, though if those were what I listened to exclusively, I'd probably consider something with more bottom-end punch.

Excellent low-level dynamics and resolution often brought new information subtly to the surface. Speaking of surface, perhaps due to the HD stylus profile, the Goldfinger proved an ultra-quiet groove tracer, deftly casting off noise and unwanted impulses. It also was an excellent tracker. At 2.9gm VTF, it damn well better be!

But more than any of these picky parameters, what the Goldfinger did better than any other cartridge I've ever heard was to deliver and sustain instrumental lines. Familiar riffs that used to stop, get lost, or even lose my interest, suddenly rolled on. Last night, playing my original Elektra gold-label pressing of Love's *For-*

### IN HEAVY ROTATION

- 1) Anne McCue, *Amazing Ordinary Things*, Cisco 180gm LP
- 2) Amos Lee, *Amos Lee*, Blue Note/Classic 200gm Quix SV-P LP
- 3) Muddy Waters, *The Best of Muddy Waters*, Chess/Speakers Corner 180gm LP
- 4) Louis Armstrong, *Plays W.C. Handy*, Columbia/Pure Pleasure 180gm LPs (2)
- 5) Margo Guryan, *Words and Music*, Sundazed 180gm LP
- 6) The Monty Alexander Trio, *Full Steam Ahead*, Pure Audiophile 180gm LPs (2)
- 7) Thom Yorke, *The Eraser*, XL 180gm LP
- 8) Rosemary Clooney & Duke Ellington, *Blue Rose*, Columbia/Pure Pleasure 180gm LP
- 9) John Lee Hooker, *The Healer*, Chameleon/Classic 200gm Quix SV-P LP
- 10) Death Cab For Cutie, *Transatlanticism*, Sonic Boom 180gm LPs (2)

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