

Stocking Stuffers

Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat—may we suggest a few affordable stocking stuffers to brighten this winter morning?

Wayne Garcia, Bob Gendron, Stephan Harrell, and Paul Seydor

Zerodust Stylus Cleaner Although not a replacement for fluid or brush cleaning, the Zerodust stylus cleaner (\$69) does a fine job and is much safer than those somewhat risky fluids and brushes. Made of a washable ultra-soft plastic which, according to the unintentionally humorous instruction sheet, "is softer than a baby skin and has 15 times more elasticity, this mysterious material will never damage a delicate stylus." To use, simply remove the lid from the Zerodust housing and lightly press the stylus tip once or twice onto the cleaning surface. Dust and microscopic cooties cling to the baby's-bottom-soft blob and that's that. You can even check the cleanliness of the tip with the lid's built-in magnifier. **WG**

Available from catalogs such as [Acoustic Sounds \(acousticsounds.com\)](http://Acoustic Sounds (acousticsounds.com)) and [Audio Advisor \(audioadvisor.com\)](http://Audio Advisor (audioadvisor.com)).



Tivoli Model Two It may require a few XXL stockings to accommodate the entire package, but Tivoli Audio's Model Two stereo radio (\$160) is an amazing, compact music machine. Designed by the late Henry Kloss as an update of his classic KLH table radio, the Model Two (the \$99 monaural Model One is also available) incorporates cell-phone technology for improved FM reception, and can be turned into a three-piece mini-system by adding the new Model CD player (price unavailable at press time), or a quartet with the optional Model Subwoofer (\$80). The main unit includes the left-channel speaker, amplifier, tuner, auxiliary and "mixing" inputs (allowing you to feed your computer sound through the Model Two), tape and headphone jacks, and an output to the powered subwoofer. A matching cabinet houses the right-channel speaker, and a supplied 15-foot cable joins the two. The sound is remarkably natural, rich, and refined, with a midrange that makes most table radios sound like the tizzy noisemakers they are. If you opt for the sub, expect deeper bass, a fuller midband, and the ability to play that much louder. With its classic look and sound, the Tivoli is a terrific way to add music to a kitchen, bedroom, office, or any room where space is limited. **WG**
For further information see www.tivoliaudio.com.



New High-Grade Vinyl From Sundazed and Classic Sixth in its outstanding Bob Dylan reissue campaign, Sundazed has released the first-ever mono reissue of the Bard's peerless *Blonde on Blonde* [5110, 2LP] on 180-gram vinyl. The record's colossal sounds (blends of restless country, blues, folk, and rock), allusionary images, and highly inflected vocals are amazingly transparent. It's a definitive pressing that will leave you speechless—particularly after experiencing the wheezing harmonica reeds during "Visions of Johanna," the album's superlative third track. Absolute bliss.



With its Led Zeppelin series concluding, *Peter Gabriel 1* [PG01] commences Classic's limited-edition run of Peter Gabriel's catalog on dazzling, gatefold-sleeved 200-gram LPs. Beginning with this, his 1977 debut, Gabriel amassed a constantly mutating body of music that lasts though 1989's *Passion*. Guitarist Robert Fripp's magical gold-dust notes, the London Symphony Orchestra, and nearly every conceivable instrument in tow, *Peter Gabriel 1* bids farewell to prog-rock and colorbursts into the world-music and pop territories, taking us on a journey through hallucinatory fantasylands and majestic limbo. Classic's LP resolves the production's multiple layers, extends bass notes, and needle-points minute details into an enormously deep soundstage. **BG**

For additional information or to order see www.sundazed.com and www.classicrecords.com.

Two Bits of Music and One Nifty Accessory *Live at Bernie's* [GrooveNote GRV1009-1DD, LP, SACD]. An album of contemporary traditional jazz: Ruminative, introspective, yet plumbing a surprising range and depth of emotions, recorded at 45rpm direct-to-disc in sonics so true and natural that you're never aware of the reproduction as such. [Review, Issue 136.] **Prokofiev: Waltz Suite, Gypsy Fantasy** [Cisco Music CLP 7002, vinyl only]. From the glory days of stereo (1959), this lovingly restored minor classic boasts brilliantly transparent, dynamic sonics, with playing that makes up in idiomatic style what it lacks in finesse. [Review, Issue 137.]

New from Elex Atelier is the **LP Gear Zero Reference Level**, made to fit *over* the spindle of turntables. Why has no one thought of this before? At \$50, perhaps a little pricey, but, beautifully machined with extreme precision, it's the last and only such device you'll ever need. Highly recommended. PS
Check it out at www.elexatelier.com.

The "New" Auric Illuminator Kit by Audience... Here's a \$40 tweak that can improve the playback of between 200 and 400 CDs. How much of an improvement? Enough so that I took the time to paint and polish dozens of discs after discovering its frequently (but not universally) compelling charms. The treatment requires three steps. First, an "absorbing pen" is used to blacken the inside and outside edges of the CD. Next, a few drops of "gel" are placed on the label side of the CD, which is then polished with one of the lint-free cloths provided; repeat on the media side of disc. Finally, using the supplied cardboard template, with the same pen used for Step One, you blacken the disc's center area. According to Audience's John McDonald, the result is the same as using a disc mat for the absorption of light. If you are not



pleased with the effects on some recordings, you can remove the treatment with water surfactant or isopropyl alcohol. Audience says that the Auric Illuminator: (1) improves the optical signal-to-noise ratio by reducing ambient light in the disc material; (2) improves optical transparency by reducing reflection and refraction; (3) removes stored energy from the disc surface and prevents future static build-up, which eliminates charge-induced wobble, making the disc easier to track. I tried the treatment. First, the black pen by itself smoothed the sound out a bit in the midrange and lower highs. Bass was smoother, too, but a bit leaner and somewhat less weighted—discernible, but not dramatic. After treatment with the gel, recordings sounded less digitized and mechanical (especially, but not limited to, the upper frequencies). At the same time, these recordings offered more detail and improved tonal contrasts. When the AI worked, it worked well. Thanks to the increase in air and extension, sopranos were saved from suffocation. Cymbals sounded less synthetic and more as if wooden sticks were striking them. Low-level sounds such as bells and blocks became more apparent and lifelike. Harmonic overtones emerged from previously anorexic recordings. The most common traits across most discs were more low-level detail, a bigger soundstage, more ambience, and seemingly louder volume at the same setting. So here's the *Reader's Digest* version: The AI has the ability to make your CDs sound different and better, different but not better, and on occasion, not different at all. So why bother? 'Cause when it does the first of the three, you'll realize that it can be indispensable. Cautionary note for SACD adoptees: Do *not* use the AI on Sonopress CDs. Sonopress applies another silicon layer to hybrid SACDs, intending to prevent moisture from entering the layers of the discs. You can identify such SACDs by a Sonopress marking around the inner-spindle circumference. Sonopress makes SACDs for Chesky, Lyrinx, Opus 3, Linn, and Challenge Records (and others). SH

...And Audience "powerChord" While fancy power cords and conditioners have been available for years from any number of manufacturers, a relative newcomer to the field, Audience, has been turning heads. The company's powerChord is a low resistance, low impedance design that, unlike many after-market power cords, is flexible, apparently quite rugged, and a breeze to install. Audience says that the "low impedance design has the ability to naturally reject noise and interference and it also radiates much less energy." Whatever is going on here, the thing works. I experimented with my Balanced Audio Technology VK-D5 CD player, VK-3i preamp, and VK-6200 multichannel amplifier, and in each case heard improvements to the noise floor (less garble and grunge), dynamic range (in both low-level nuance and high-level impact), and overall clarity and detail. Music's sense of time improved, too. The thing doesn't cost a fortune, either. A standard six-footer goes for \$379, while shorter lengths start at \$252. WG



For more dope on both see www.audience-av.com.

An Audiophile Tool Kit from WBT

For the audiophile (or other hobbyist) who has everything, this beautiful Dynamometric key set (\$199) from Germany's WBT is an ergonomically designed, precision adjustable-torque screwdriver made of highly polished stainless steel. The adjustable torque allows for precise operation at controlled maximum pressure and comes with 18 4mm bits (Slot screw, Phillips, Torx, and Hex), all fashioned from hardened chrome vanadium steel for long life. A spring-action ball acts as a pressure point, making for both a solid fit and easy bit exchange. This sweet little tool kit also includes a Torx T.6 test bolt. WG
Available from Audio Advisor (audioadvisor.com).