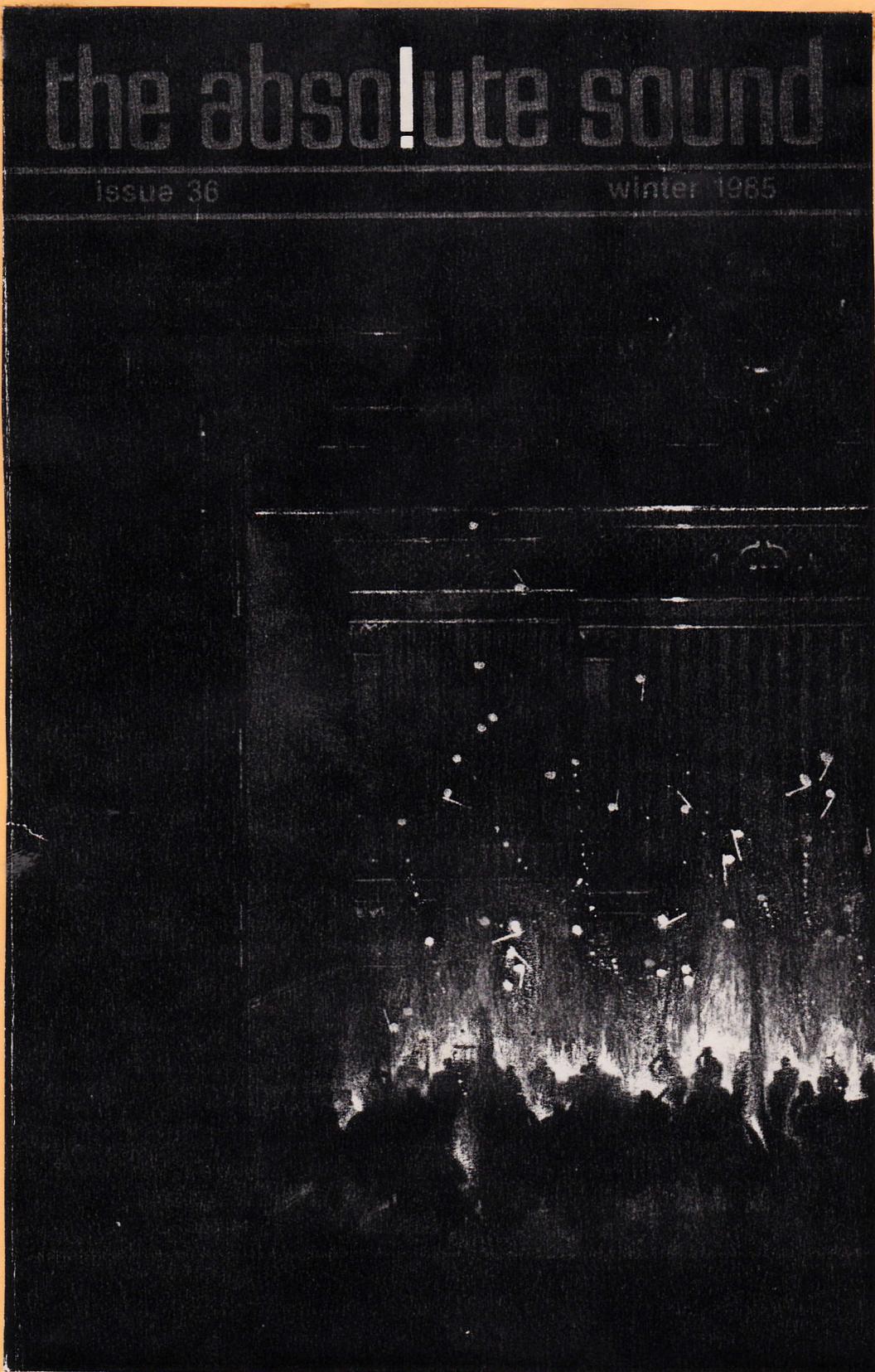


the absolute sound

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Letter from England: II

Dear Uncle Harry:

Following the reorganization of Decca Records into London Records and the swallowing up of both these into Polygram, the whole caboodle has moved around London to new premises. One of the saddest consequences of this is that their Records Library section, the keeper of the company's paper archives, has been stuffed into cardboard boxes and relegated to cupboards—a situation that can be repaired. Not so the loss of some past record sleeves, which were thrown out in the housecleaning. Sad that such a major label does not even have a copy of each of the record sleeves that it has issued. Thus do more artifacts of the golden age of recording pass into oblivion.

And speaking of Decca Records Library, the Publicity Services Manager has a new title: She is now in charge of Repertoire Registration Department. What this means, in theory, is that this department allocates the catalogue number for each Decca issue. This number is purportedly the same for the record wherever it is issued in the world, thus eliminating confusion. Unfortunately, some subsidiaries still insist on using their own unique numerical designations.

Intimate revelations from Pink Triangle who held a two-day seminar for members of the audio press: The fascinating presentations clearly demonstrated the company's three-fold philosophy of low coloration, system impedance matching (mechanical as well as electrical), and dedication to high quality. I might also add a fourth item to that philosophy: To have fun while doing it. This was very much in evidence during the evening's outrageous party in the Union Tavern, Camberwell, for press representatives, dealers, and other assorted hi-f(!)iers. Entertainment was provided by Dave Dale, in a variety of dress, who entertained with a hugely mobile mouth, tongue, and football legs. What he/she did with a banana cannot be reported in these pages.*

You should'a been there, Harry.

In addition to admiring the achievements at Pink Triangle, I left the seminar excited about the prototype arm it has developed based on the use of double pivot points. As frustrating as attending a two-day conference on love-making techniques without getting to try any. Surely it was mere coincidence that Dave Dale's performance, sponsored by this company, was accompanied by the most horrendously awful distortion.

*And why not?

The Burmester line has been creating attention here and the equipment looks quite handsome sitting on dealer shelves. I have evaluated the 828 amp from a British point of view. The most striking aspect is, of course, the £4600 price (about \$6440) for the pair of mono amps, which places them in a very special class in this country. Kudos for the large and three-dimensional soundstage, firm bass, fast response, effortless power, and short warm-up period. Weak points include the over-sized phono inputs, over-complicated and unnecessary series of controls and switches, and a low bass that is not well integrated into the rest of the frequency range. On the one hand, the two units reviewed (Nos. 11 and 12) are being sent back to Germany to have the overly sensitive clipping level and the DC offset cut-out levels readjusted; on the other hand, I'm told that Martin Colloms, one of the most respected reviewers in this country, specifically requested these 828s as reference amps for his extended evaluation of speaker systems in *Hi-Fi Choice*.*

The Burmester 838 Phono Preamp takes a gamble that a £755 phono-only piece of equipment will find a market here. The inelegant feel of the volume control, the tacky on/off and dB gain switches (for the price), and the lack of charm to the sound are drawbacks. No reservations at all, however, about the absolute silence of the system, the flexibility of adjustable input sensitivities, and the adjustable phono loadings. Fast response, open and clean soundstage, and good imaging are all in its favor. I was sorry to see its departure from my system.

Gramophone recently published a reader survey questionnaire, and a great deal about that magazine's perceptions and biases regarding recording and the record buying public in Britain can be ascertained from it. For example, we can assume that the majority of the magazine's audience have equipment as poor (low cost) as many of its critics appear to have: "What was the approximate original purchase price of audio equipment for playing records:

Under 100 (pounds)

100-199

200-350

351-500

501-1,000

1,001-1,500

Over 1,500"

(at the time of writing 1£ = \$1.4)

*So what? If he wants to keep his reputation, he'll think twice.

Of the 28 questions in the survey, eight (almost a third) are concerned with Compact Discs. Speaking of which, Question 14:

"Do any of the following cause you concern (with regard to CDs)?

- Price of disc
- Variable playing time
 - Packaging
- Notes, librettos, etc.
- None of these"

Not a word, you'll notice, about the quality of sound of CDs; and note, again, the faulty and biased questionnaire technique in providing the response "None of these" while omitting to provide "All of these".

And, finally, Question 19:

"If your answer to Q18 [Are you proposing to buy CD equipment in the next 12 months?] was no, was it because of any of the following:

- Player too expensive
- Discs too expensive
- Satisfied with LP
- Satisfied with pre-recorded cassettes
 - Lack of CD repertoire
- Belief that the system will not last
- Belief that CD will be superseded by a better system
 - None of these"

Now, just what do you think's wrong with the formulation of *that* question, analogue fans?

A sign of the times is to be seen in the skull and cross bones that adorn the letterhead used by Decca over here. Under this logo of the pirate is the admonition "Home Taping Is Killing Music". Surely, they must sometimes, in their dreams, suspect the truth.

□□□

BBC television broadcasts a weekly science program aptly called *Tomorrow's World*. A recent program had a demonstration of the use of plants as radio and TV aerials. Aerial leads from a television set were pushed into the stem of a rubber plant and behold, a picture appeared on the box. Apparently giant South American water lilies are almost as good as earth station dishes. That's what they said. No, I am not Enid Lumley and no, I do not think that TV reception is improved by standing the set on an upturned plate of Oxtail soup—shaken and not stirred—and served at precisely 64 F. Geraniums grown in organic peat may, of course, be preferable as satellite dishes, since they have corrugated surfaces when fed Agent Orange and/or Miracle Gro.

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By far the biggest news over here at present has to be the fact that *The Absolute*

Sound is now being distributed in the UK by Moth Marketing.* The magazine was to be seen resplendent in the above-ground light of the Moth stand at the recent Penta Hi Fi show—right next to the big CD display.

With regard to that Penta show, which was held alongside Heathrow Airport's main runways and which was sponsored by *Hi Fi News & Record Review* magazine, there were other, non-mechanical delights to be found among the gadgets and gizmos. During a conversation with Ivor "Give my regards to Harry" Tiefenbrun, He pointed out that He found it interesting that the major labels were pushing CDs, while over the past few years the market has been moving steadily toward cassettes, which He finds to be "a fascinating and natural medium for digital". On the other hand, said the ebullient Scot, "Digital recording is just like Communism: wonderful in theory but a mess in practice."

After Magneplanar, Apogee. Ricardo Frasso, the derring-do importer, continues in his attempt to stick his finger in the economic dike** of this Sceptered Isle and to confound the experts who point out that we have one of the lowest disposable/per capita incomes in Europe. Now, from his Wimbledon sanctuary, the man is importing Apogee speakers at £9000 a pair. At the time of writing he's already sold—well, more than one pair.

As if £9000 weren't steep enough, Mike Harris of Trim records is trying to flog the Wilson WAMM speaker system and is offering anyone who buys a pair a *free* flight to the US of A for a personal audition at Dave Wilson's place. It probably has not occurred to him that for the price of the speakers the prospective buyer could probably buy her own Concorde.

After all the rumors, the van den Hull 300S speaker cable has finally appeared over here and was on display at the Penta Show. The moment that I saw it, I knew why we'd all had to wait so long for it: It was used to tie the boat up at dockside. It certainly looks like a ship's hawser. Actually, I was wrong again. The real reason for the delay was that the cable was all middle and no ends, since suitable high quality plugs could not be found.

—Ifan Payne



*Get out the camphor.

**What a weird scene he must be into.