



By C.J. Huss

Chapter Three – (Insert Clever Title Here)

Uh-oh... I'm back! (Pssst...Run away, escape while there's still time...)

(You're still here? Okay, you were warned!)

In the previous issue's column, I mentioned that there were a variety of reasons why the turntable market today generally sports much higher prices than during their heyday, roughly between 1970 and 1990. For example, a decently built semi-automatic or manual machine sold for around \$250.00 to \$400.00 in the early 70's, and today semi-automatics are rather rare, and a manual of equivalent quality is more like \$400.00 to \$800.00.



Oh—what's a "semi-automatic"? Or a "manual"?:

The industry has generally classified turntables into three varieties—a manual turntable is a minimalist design where you power it up, move the tonearm both onto and off the record by hand, and in a few instances, may add just enough automation to shut the motor off and/or lift the tonearm above the record at the end of play. Oddly enough, these types are usually the most costly machines to purchase—but more about that next time in Part Four.

A semi-automatic is like a record changer (where you stacked several records on a spindle for sequential playback) but without the stacking feature. Usually you press a button, or move a switch and the arm lifts, moves over to the record, cues down, starts playing. At record's end, the arm lifts, returns to the armrest, the motor shuts off. While these types of players lose the extended playback ability of a changer, they are also less complex mechanically, less expensive to build, and normally more reliable

That leaves what most people of a certain age think of when you say "record player", which is a changer, sometimes called a "stacker" or "fullyautomatic", although that last term could be misleading at times. These were overwhelmingly popular from the 1950's through to the early 1970's but then they faded away as younger buyers moved away from the old wooden consoles and tabletop phono compacts into separate audio components. That was also when the term "turntable" started to take over from "record player" in the audio industry vernacular.



Changers were, as previously mentioned, complicated little machines and costly to build, even with the advantages of mass production. One unfortunate by-product of this fact was that many of the more mainstream vendors had to cut costs somewhere in order to meet a target selling price to the general public, and what often got cut was the cartridge and tonearm quality.

Hmm...bad idea. These are the two most critical design elements if you want high quality sound reproduction. But, in the manufacturer's defense, the amplifiers and speakers of the day weren't always too spectacular either. That changed substantially in the early 70's, and fortunately turntable design improved along with them. The biggest sound quality innovation in turntables were the widespread, and finally universal adoption of magnetic cartridges, instead of the crystal and ceramic cartridges that came before. Along with them, and their ability to track a groove very accurately at far lighter pressures, came lighter and more precisely built tonearms.

Anywho, back to the future, and...the first thing one should know about purchasing a turntable is to avoid almost any design made before the late 1960's, or worse yet—some of the contemporary machines that play off the visual nostalgia of the 50's or 60's and put what is literally a \$30 or \$40 dollar plastic piece of recordplaying junk in a fancy-looking (fake) wooden cabinet or mini-suitcase, usually tucked in along with a CD player, radio, maybe a cassette deck and built-in speakers. Seriously now, this time—RUN AWAY! RUN AWAY NOW!!



If you have the bucks (at least about \$300.00), buy a new separate turntable, and connect it to a separate audio amplifier and speakers. There are some clever ways this can be done on the cheap(er) if you don't already own an existing stereo or home theatre system (see WGA Part Four in the next issue), but that's still the preferred method. The turntable, if new, will likely be a manual design, or possibly a semi-auto type. A number of decent types are made by companies such as Audio-Technica, Denon, Marantz, Music Hall, ProJect, VPI, etc.



On the used market, Dual, Technics, Denon, Pioneer, Harmon/Kardon, Philips, Marantz, Sony, Thorens can often offer high value for the price, sometimes better than buying new. (Bang & Olufsen turntables are also excellent, and visually distinctive, but the high cost of the proprietary replacement cartridges for them must be considered.)

One key point I'd like to leave you with this time-- a matter of perspective, as it were. If you own, say, a mere 50 LP records (and I know members of, and shoppers at, the Pennsylvania Music Expo who own hundreds, or even thousands of records) and you value those records at say, \$10.00 each—that's \$500.00. Is your record player worth less than your collection?

Yep. Didn't think so.

All for now, fearless readers! Next time, I'll go into some specifics of what to look for technical/designwise that makes one machine better than another performance-wise, plus some budget-enhancing hints.

Thanks again for reading, and... See ya!



Remaining 2020 show dates: 3/8, 4/19, 5/3, 6/14, 7/12, 8/9, 9/13, 10/11, 11/8, 12/13

THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC! A farewell to some of the talent who passed away in 2019... Painstakingly compiled by B. Derek Shaw

**January 2<sup>nd</sup>: Daryl Dragon**, 76, known as Captain from the Captain & Tennille, musician and songwriter, kidney failure. Dragon's stage name came via Mike Love from his time as keyboard player with The Beach Boys, (1967-72); **12<sup>th</sup>: Bonnie Guitar**, 95, singer, musician, producer, and businesswoman, congestive heart failure. Best known for her 1957 country-pop crossover "Dark Moon", one of the first female country music singers to have hit songs cross over from country to pop charts; **17<sup>th</sup>: Lorna Doom**, 61, German bassist and founding member of The Germs punk band, cancer; **17<sup>th</sup>: Maxine Brown**, 87, country singer, complications of heart and kidney disease. Originally a member of the 1950s trio the Browns; **26<sup>th</sup>: Michel Legrand**, 86, French composer, jazz musician, who won three Oscars for his songs ("The Windmills of Your Mind") and film scores ("Summer of '42," "Yentl"); **29<sup>th</sup>: James Ingram**, 66, R&B singer/songwriter, record producer, instrumentalist, brain cancer. He was a two-time Grammy Award-winner (1982, 1985) and a two-time Academy Award nominee for Best Original Song with "Somewhere Out There." (Also "Baby, Come to Me", "I Don't Have the Heart" and "Yah Mo B There.")



**February 12<sup>th</sup>: Joe Hardy**, 66, producer, engineer, musician, after a brief illness. He worked on many ZZ Top albums from 1985's After Burner to playing bass on Billy Gibbon's 2018 release The Big Bad Blues. Hardy worked with a range of artists, from engineering and mixing The Replacements' Pleased To Meet Me and Steve Earle's Copperhead Road to producing The Georgia Satellites' Another Chance and Steve Earle and The Dukes' The Hard Way.

**19<sup>th</sup>: Linda (Jansen) Russo**, original lead singer of the Angels, 74, no cause give (ncg). Jensen fronted the trio early on, singing lead on "Til," "Cry Baby Cry" and "Everybody Loves a Lover" all on the Caprice label; **21<sup>st</sup>: Peter Tork**, 77, The Monkees keyboardist and bass guitarist and actor, cancer. On the TV show, he was relegated to playing the "lovable dummy", a persona Tork developed as a folk singer in Greenwich Village. He subsequently played banjo, harpsichord and other instruments on the Monkees recordings; **21<sup>st</sup>: Jackie Shane**, 78, soul singer, died in her sleep. The transgender singer was successful in 1960's Toronto nightclubs. She left the music scene in 1971. A few of the songs she sang included, "Any Other Way" and "Walking the Dog;" **23<sup>rd</sup>: Mark Hollis**, 64, lead singer and songwriter of the English band, Talk Talk, ("It's My Life"), after a short illness; **28<sup>th</sup>: Stephan Ellis**, 69, bass player, Survivor ("Eye of the Tiger"), ncg, **28<sup>th</sup>: André Previn**, 89, musician and composer, ncg. He worked on music for 50 films including "My Fair Lady." Previn was also the music director of many symphonies including the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.



**March 4<sup>th</sup>: Keith Flint**, 49, frontman with the electronic dance act, The Prodigy, suicide; **11<sup>th</sup>: Hal Blaine**, 90, Hall of Fame session drummer (The Wrecking Crew), natural causes. He is widely regarded as one of the most in-demand drummers in rock and roll history, claiming over 35,000 sessions and 6,000 singles. In 2000, Blaine was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2018 he received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

