



By C.J. Huss
Chapter Seventeen

As We Sail Into The Mystic(al) ~ Part 3
~~~ ( Cleanliness strikes deep ! ) ----

"Dude! You're sure there isn't something about these cables you fixed me up with that... I mean, listen, it was great before, and now it's awesome to the nth! These have gotta be waaaay happier electrons, man, woof!"

"No, no, I promise, they're good cables, but there are other reasons why your rig sounds better now, and I agree, it does. There's several sort of sneaky little things that affect the sound that many audiophile sorts tend to either gloss over as to their importance or never become aware of at all. You need to keep in mind that audiophiles are still people with brains that process what are objectively the same things but are perceived differently in each individual."

"Whoa, getting all philosophical, man, cool! I do dig me some philosophy. I mean, I have to work at grokking it a bunch of the time, but there's nothing like that moment when your brain expands and takes in some new thing and, well, there you are!"

"Mmm, this stuff is really pretty straightforward in any technical sense, Bud. It's just overlooked more often than it should be. And not just with wires and cables, but with some other parts of the electronics, and even mechanicals. Like, capacitors got into the mystical realm some decades back, when some researchers did some perfectly valid work and determined that indeed, on an objective, measurement-based analysis, some types of capacitors were better suited for audio use than others. But anyway, as to the cable thing..."

"Some fare number of years ago, I realized that it had been much too long since I had taken all the components off the rack and given everything a good dusting, and also checked the jacks and speaker binding posts for oxidation. This was before using gold plating on those parts became more common on the better gear. Gold isn't a perfect solution, but it's a really big help."

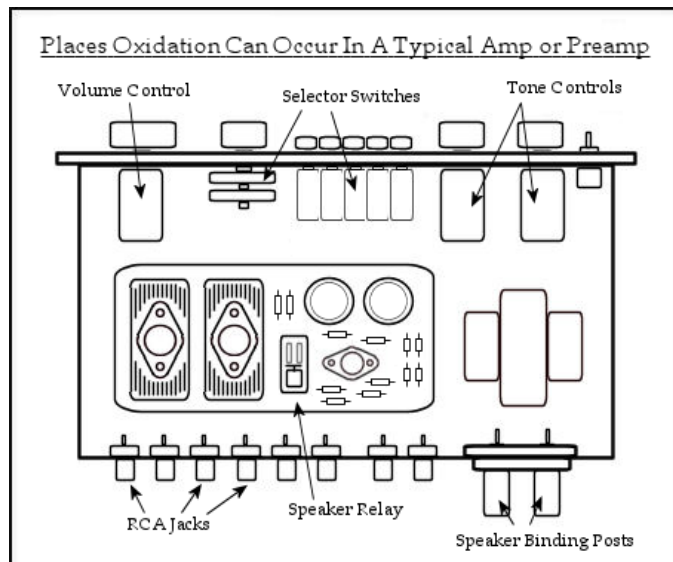
"Oh, yeah, that's 'cause gold doesn't rust, right? Oh, sorry, 'oxidize', like you just said. Corrode? That's another word for it?"

"Pretty much that, yes. What happens with most metal elements is that if they are exposed to oxygen, which of course is all around us all the time in the atmosphere, they absorb the oxygen atoms into their atomic structure, and become a new substance, at least on the surface. What we call 'rust' is a super-common example, although it's chemically specific to the iron element. But copper, aluminum, tin, nickel, brass—all of these metals can absorb oxygen and when they do, how well they can conduct electricity nearly always changes for the worse."

"Bummer! Always for the worse? No oxygen-welcoming metals out there? Seems kinda discriminating, but...then atoms don't have brains, so... huh."

"Mmm, not that we know of, anyway. High level physics and quantum mechanics not my specialty, but in this universe, no. So when the connections on your stereo get oxidized, the audio signal gets degraded. And getting back to my clean-up story, I did my thing, reassembled all the components, fired it back up with a favorite record to celebrate my efforts, and—I was amazed at how much better it sounded. It wasn't subtle."

"And this was all because you cleaned the jacks and plugs and stuff?"



"Since I had everything apart, I also took the time to put anything that had mechanical controls and switches in it on the bench, and treated them with a special chemical that the industry uses to clean those parts."

"Way back then we called it 'Cramolin', later on it tended to be known simply as 'DeOxit'. There's actually several varieties of the basic formula, but the commonest one is used for any part that has sliding contacts in it, like volume controls and selector switches. It's not simply a cleaner, it has a critical chemical in it that clears oxidation and then repels it for an extended future time."

"That's the stuff in the red can, right? I've seen you use that, that's what it does?"

"Yep. But why my system suddenly sounded so much better was because as time passed the sound slowly degraded, but I didn't notice it because my brain simply adapted to the change bit by bit. But once all the connections inside and out were cleaned, now the audio was accurately reproduced again. The sneaky part as to the cable changes though... get ready for this..."

"The process of simply unplugging and re-plugging an audio cable from a jack on the back of your tuner, preamp, tape deck, CD player, whatever—almost inevitably scrapes the metal surfaces just from the friction. So, you change out to a new set of magic wires, and lo, better sound! But what you really did was, at least temporarily, clean the contact area."

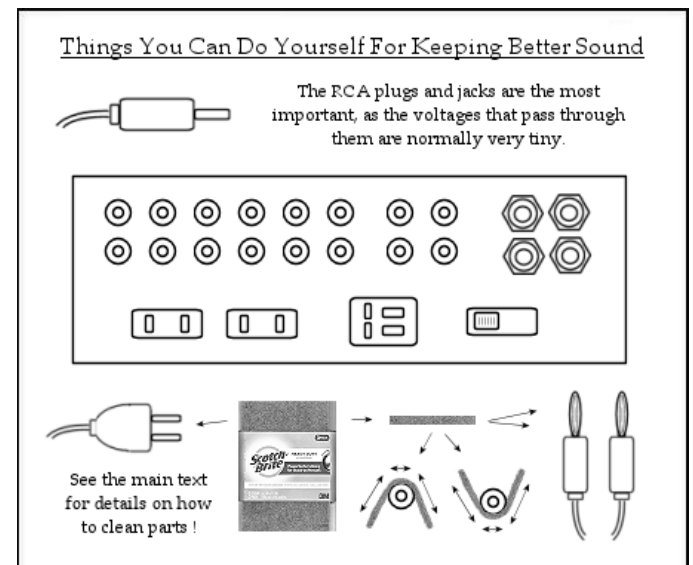
The sound will likely soon start to slowly degrade again, since the connection wasn't really properly cleaned, but—your brain adapts, you don't notice."

"Whoa, Dude, that is sneaky! Never, like ever, would that have occurred to me."

"I think it's likely something now inevitable in the highly technological society we live in, that we get so immersed in the complexity of things, that after a while things that are simple start to escape our notice. I mean, someone goes to a doctor thinking that whatever it is that is currently ailing them is some exotic or hard-to-treat condition, and then after tests and an examination the doctor tells them that they're just pre-diabetic, and you need to start watching what you eat and get more daily exercise. You're like, 'Huh, that's it?'"

"Now-- it's probably better if I don't mess around inside the gear, right, Doc? I'm not usually really sure what all I'm looking at, or how I should be spraying chemicals around. I could make things worse, best intentions or not."

"Some things are best left to a tech, yes. But there are things you can do that are pretty safe, just use a bit of common sense. For example, cleaning the plugs and jacks. The simple method I've used for decades involves something you can get at any supermarket, which is a plain, untreated, no-foam-attached Scotch-Brite pad, or any generic version of same. You cut a little strip maybe a quarter-inch wide, then use it to do a little shoe-shine action on the jacks. Not on any gold ones, of course, you can damage them and they usually don't need anything done anyway, maybe just wiping down with some alcohol."



"That's it? People pay you money for that? Just kidding, I know you do other stuff too, like on the insides!"

"I do, but as to the paying part, cleaning the jacks may be simple, but it can be very tedious. On some older gear, the oxidation is severe, and I can spend literally five minutes on every jack to get it clean again. Multiply that by sometimes 20 or 30 jacks? You need some patience. I also use the pads on things like speaker banana plugs or spade terminals, anything the audio passes through. I do the AC plug prongs too for good measure, if they're tarnished. Doesn't usually affect the sound, but I'm kinda paranoid, just in case."

"Well, hey, like the man said, 'Paranoia strikes deep, into your life it will creep'. So, like, stereo-wise, you need to watch your connections and keep your system exercised, don't let it sit around gathering dust. No problem for me there, I play it pretty much every day, even if it's only the radio for background tunes!"

"Same here, pretty much use it or lose it, as in biological life. Speaking of, this biological system needs an exercise walk. All repairs and no relaxation makes for that paranoia line you mentioned. DO NOT want that!"

"Cool, Dude, enjoy! Happy walk... and tunes!"

-- CJ

**(33rpm vs. 45rpm, continued from front page)**

Let's talk about a few cons of albums.

The variety of songs on albums can't match the variety of songs on singles. There are many more varieties of songs and labels on 45's.

The pros of singles...

On singles you will find many songs that are not on albums. Back in the day, bands were trying to get out of the basement. They maybe had one song that people especially liked. The artist/group would lean towards 45's. They were much more inexpensive per unit and today some are much more worthy than some albums. Today some of these small run private press singles can be worth some fairly good money.

The cons of 45's...

You constantly have to change the record, meaning you are glued to the turntable, unless, you have a 45 changer. (Note: some 45 players and consoles will hold up to ten 45's and will automatically drop them one by one to be played. This is the equivalent a complete album and that you will have to turn once while the 45 player is rolling smoothly through ten singles.)

So far it sounds like I favor 45's. Well, I do, but I am still an album collector as well as a single collector. Collecting multiple music media, I still love the sound of vinyl. Whether it be a 33rpm vinyl, a 45rpm vinyl, tape or CD, the important part is that we enjoy what we are listening to.

Analog has now gone digital. Music is played through many types of computerized files. You can listen to these anywhere but when the time comes to kick back and relax, vinyl is the best choice of media. There is nothing that compares to the sound of a record. Sit back, close your eyes and enjoy your tunes on vinyl.

The Keystone Record Collectors, are record collectors **for** record collectors. We don't just say this, we live it. This month marks our 44th year in operation. We are also proud to serve south central Pennsylvania and beyond, promoting the hobby of collecting and enjoying vinyl records.

Take time to tell us about your preferences of music media. Tell us your collecting stories. Your story could be a part of a future Key-Notes. Send your story to: vinylab@comcast.net

