LASER DISC REVIEW

JUNE 1985

Issue 3 £1

The magazine about LASERVISION

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A FIRST LOOK AT PIONEER'S NEW LD 700 FRONT LOADER

APRIL - JUNE 1985

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY ISSUE 3

LASER DISC REVIEW

FROM THE EDITOR

With this third issue, the magazine has just about caught up with what has happened so far in LaserVision. Just in time. New equipment is arriving, sooner than expected, and it is to be hoped that some of the neglected aspects of software releasing will now be given some attention in order to do justice to the hardware. Repetition of the obvious can become boring, but LaserVision is totally software dependent, and the cultivation of a strong disc catalogue is the foundation from which improved player sales inevitably result. There are proven instances of this in other markets. Why not here?

Building a UK catalogue of substance would seem to demand attention be paid to the appeal of titles to other European countries yet to be lasered. Indeed, all the remaining PAL & SECAM territories. With mastering costs being the prohibitive factor in the equation, greater emphasis on dual language and teletext subtitling would give many discs several times the sales potential. The Arts International discs would seem a step in the right direction, where the same disc can be sold in any country without the need to remaster and repress. There is still room for improvement in these issues (see reviews), but the principle is sound. Can we have more international releases such as this?

Why music on LV is not available in every European country is a puzzle. A look at some of the Japanese domestic issues illustrates that, with a little forethought, discs can be made equally saleable in an English speaking country (the USA in this instance). Without wishing to upset any French readers, the understanding of the English language is now so great that there would be virtually no need to even reprint disc sleeves for specific markets. Possibly just a loose songsheet type flyer might suffice to give the non-English speaker all the relevant information - cheap to produce, and the sort of thoughtful touch to give that little bit of sales appeal.

Still, back to the contents of this edition. I feel we are getting a better coverage of the LV catalogue although I am a little disappointed about the limited number of film reviews - things planned did not work out in time. A more thorough look at films is promised for next time. It is not yet clear what will be in the next issue. Surround Sound and Setting Up For NTSC are two topics being prepared, but will not necessarily appear in No.4.

More observant readers may have noticed a subtle change in the magazine's title. This is no more than a blatant attempt at commercialism. In an effort to increase the circulation of the mag (we confidently expect to be into double figures any day now), we have had to resort to a title that presses the 'laser' thing home. The number of people who continue to be confused by the various disc systems in (and out of) existence.....

Also, it is becoming evident that people, on reading this magazine, have then bought a LaserVision player. I suppose it was more than likely that the reviews would sell discs, but the prospect of selling the hardware originally seemed outside the scope of the publication. In truth, I doubt whether the magazine has yet sold a player on its own, but there are a lot of people out there apparently very interested in LV, and the mere existence of this publication would tend to dispel many of the unfortunate rumours of its continuation.

Finally, thanks to all those who have taken the trouble to write. Normally, people don't bother. Everyone who was expecting a reply should have received one , so if you haven't, you'd best remind me. Don't forget to enclose an SAE if you wish your letter replied to.

Till the next time

EDITOR

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Letters

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From: Mark Dowd, Merseyside

Regarding the 'Star Wars' review in issue one. I agree that a poor master has been used with this disc. I also noticed a few changes in the soundtrack. Being a great fan of the 'Star Wars' saga, I have watched my TV recording many times and it is very upsetting when the soundtrack differs from the original. I would very much like to know why CBS/FOX found it neccesary to use a soundtrack which differs from the one with which the public is familiar. I noticed sounds out of sync or missing ("Close the blast doors"). Is it possible that this disc may be re-mastered in future? An active play version would be good.

On a lighter note, I find the quality of 'Alien' very high. I find no problems with the disc and enjoy viewing it over and over. The exterior shots of the Nostromo are astoundingly realistic, unlike many spacecraft scenes from 'Star Wars' appearing with white borders. No film on laser should be of lesser quality than that of the 'Alien' disc.

Many readers have been relieved to find that the focus fault on side 2 of 'Star Wars' was not a fault of their equipment (or eyesight!). Inasmuch as the film also appears to have been edited a trifle is no doubt due to the film falling perilously close to the maximum playing time for a single disc. Let Andre Corteil, a video editor for Belgian TV put you in the picture - "A few months ago I compared 'Star Wars' on disc with the cassette version. The disc is shorter but little, if anything, appears to be missing. So I made a U-matic copy of the disc and cassette, including EBU Time Code (VITC). The first hour on disc and tape are mainly the same but several minutes of the disc on side 2 are missing. What they have done is remove a few frames at the end of each shot on the disc version. For example, if the shot takes 10 seconds and 13 frames, the disc version is cut back to 10 seconds and 10 frames, and so on." [The fact that this time compression appears to have been confined to side 2 may relate to the focus defect - Ed.]

Even American laser fans who seem to have a comparitively easy time of it have to resort to the Japanese import version for the "as released" version. 'Star Wars' has also just been re-issued in CAV in the US, presumably though still not quite complete as the 30minute a side playing time of NTSC CAV discs still leaves it a minute short. To complicate this whole debate still further, readers should bear in mind that films transferred to PAL TV standards are always 4% faster than the original running time. This is true of tape, disc, TV broadcast - the lot. In simple terms, a film with a cinema running time of 100 minutes will only go to 96 minutes on video.

The other comment about special effects showing up on 'Star Wars' would seem to be a difficulty also encountered in transferring film to video - see this month's review of 'Return Of The Pink Panther'

From: A.J. Kelly, Essex

With regards to the cutting of video releases I would like to draw your attention to one of the discs that you reviewed - 'Star Trek-Wrath Of Khan! This video is not as its original cinema release. Two segments have been cut, both concerning some nasty little creatures entering and leaving the ears of certain crew members. I contacted CIC VIDEO about this to find out why they had, for me anyway, ruined an otherwise excellent movie. I received no answer.

MGM/UA state on their sleeves that the video is as its original cinema release. I think it would be a good idea if all companies were made to put on their sleeves whether we are getting the original cinema version or, for whatever reason, a cut version. I mean, is all this playing the game as regards the Trade Descriptions Act?

There were suspicions of cuts when reviewing the film but without definite information, nothing was said. (Is there not also a cut where the Genesis' crew are found killed?) These cuts appear to be on both tape and disc versions although there is some doubt as to the completeness of the cinema version, possibly cut to avoid a restrictive rating.

From: J.J. Fisher, West Sussex

I work for BOWERS & WILKINS as a TV engineer. We have been a PHILIPS dealership for more than twenty years and, sometime in the Summer of 1983, the regular rep left us a machine to have a look at. The three lads in the workshop are heavily committed to tape and the shop wasn't really interested. The dust gathered and three months later I took it home for the weekend. It changed my life (just as the advertisements say!).

Tape has never inspired me, its quality being generally inferior and the pre-recorded tapes quite often diabolical. Why pay £400+ and look at rubbish? However, my feelings were not to be universally shared as all my friends consider that quality is not important, especially when you can't record. The shop has gone along with my enthusiasm, somewhat reluctantly, but as we sell CD, why not LaserVision? Where we do make a sale the customer is almost always pleased with their machine.

Not all the discs are perfect by any means, but most are acceptable and the comments on disc quality in the review section of the magazine would tend to tie in with my own observations.

From: Robert Maynard, London

I have been a LaserVision owner for just over a year now and have some 25 discs, mainly feature films. As you are aware they vary in quality - both very good and very poor. The problems of mastering and getting good pressing I am well aware of, but my beef is the distributors who seem happy to give PHILIPS any old master material they have around for the LaserVision release.

'El Cid', from INTERVISION, is a good example. Originally a 70mm, six-track stereo film is reduced to a very grainy, poor quality mono version on LV. with appalling pan and scan of the widescreen frame. It is this type of poor master that defeats the whole object of the LaserVision system's potential. It is the lack of stereo sound on many features originally released in stereo that makes me not buy the LV versions.

The titles that distributors seem to be putting out recently are getting worse. They seem to give the impression that any old title is ok for LV. They don't release the good material. There are a lot of titles in the last list that were flops in the cinema - is it any wonder they do not sell when issued on LV. After all, it costs just the same to master up and press a good title as a bad one! Too many of the good titles already out on tape are still not out on laser - 'Empire Strikes Back', 'Gone With The Wind', 'Singing In The Rain' etc.

Let's have these releases out on LV now and it should be a pre-requisite that all masters submitted to PHILIPS for pressing must be up to the highest broadcast standards. Too many NTSC transfers are being used where you are dropping a generation in quality just to get it on the PAL master tape. Only direct film to PAL transfers should be acceptable for PAL LaserVision.

I could go on. Collecting LV discs is a hobby of mine but seeing what can be achieved on LV when they do get it right only makes the disappointment greater when confronted by one of the lesser issues.

The period between issues 1 & 2 has produced responses from a lot of film fans who take the same interest in their movies as has long been an accepted facet of record collecting. Obviously, being the superior system, LV has attracted the support of many of them and the unforgiving nature of the LV process has shown up a lot of what would be considered 'acceptable' masters for the tape market to be totally unsatisfactory for LV. One wonders whether PHILIPS realised this when they set out to introduce LaserVision to the world. With their strong connections in the audio/hi-fi world, possibly they assumed that gaining access to high quality original film masters would be as simple as the record business, and as a result, have found themselves at the front-line in the push for improved quality in home video.

It is becoming embarrasingly obvious that low-budget pop-music video crews can get better quality on to laser discs by simple virtue of the fewer process stages involved, even though 35mm and 70mm film has by far the superior theoretical advantage.

From: Michael Bell, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

Do you think an adaptor or adaption by PHILIPS engineers will be available to connect MSX computers to VLP 600/700 machines? Or have I already been "zapped" into obsolescence?

It would indeed be nice if LV players came with "a few more holes" in the back to allow for future expansion. The present vogue in consumer electronics of presenting the customer with a finished concept, and then expecting them to buy next years 'improved' model, often in reality very little improved, does work aginst LV where you feel the small size of the market is holding back new developments. This lack of adaptability does work against the owner wishing to pursue a specific interest before manufacturers consider the market is ready to accomodate a new model.

One firm, MAIDENHEAD AUDIO VISUAL, 38-40 Station Road, TWYFORD, Berks RG10 9NT. Telephone:

0734-340740 (Contact Andrew Purchase, Alan Edwards) can interface the VLP 600 / 700 for specific applications, and depending on the relative cost of the new computer ready players, might prove a viable means of upgrading.

From: Jerry Nicklin, Birmingham

May I raise a few points you or others may be able to answer?
1) Why do some films on tape and disc differ in run time? 'Star Wars' on tape is 119mins, while on LV it's 112mins. 'Raiders' is 5mins longer on disc.
2) Why don't software companies release laser discs at the same time as the video release? I would go out today and buy 'Empire Strikes Back'.
3) I get all my laser discs through a local record shop but the three discs I ordered for Xmas took two months to come. In fact I only got one of them in the first shipment. I would buy more discs if I could only get them.

1) The disc version of 'Star Wars', though listed at 112 mins on the sleeve, in reality runs for 115+mins. This problem with the 'correct' length of films is likely to be a recurring one. Mark Dowd's letter would indicate that readers' own observations are likely to be the best means of cross-checking. Some differences are grotesquely wrong, 'The Fan' is listed at 131 mins but is correctly 91 mins. The new Everly Brothers disc actually runs seven minutes longer than listed.

2) Why not indeed.

3) Discs on the current list are rarely available when the list is published. For older titles it can be very much the luck of the draw. Readers have complained of being unable to get discs in their locality when they are obviously available to readers in other parts of the country. It may pay to ring round a few other dealers to try and track down more elusive wants.

From: Steve Fielding, Staffordshire

In the 'High Anxiety' review the soundtrack is listed as mono but the disc I saw, although mono on the sleeve, said stereo on the label itself. Can you confirm which is correct? Early copies of 'Star Wars' also had contradictory information -the disc was marked as mono on the label in this instance.

In the LV Player Survey in issue 2 the VLP 830 is indicated as having elapsed time search and reverse slow motion, when in fact it has neither.

To those readers who have also had difficulty removing the shrink wrapping from their sleeves without taking the lamination with it I offer the following remedy: First, remove the disc from the sleeve (most important!). Put the sleeve near an even source of heat (fire, oven etc.) , not too hot, after a minute or so you should be able to detect the film going 'soft'. When this happens it should be possible to peel it off without damage to the sleeve itself. With practice, and getting the heat level right, this always works. It is mostly the older sleeves that give this problem as they had a much shinier lamination than the current ones where the problem rarely arises.

Finally, I would like to make a plea for due consideration to be given to choosing the changeover point in film discs. Some are very unsympathetic to the flow of the movie. I have recently bought 'Brainstorm', which is a good disc incidentally, and they got the end of side point just right on that.

What a lash-up ! With head bowed in shame, I have to confess that not only 'High Anxiety' but also 'Shock Treatment' and 'No Nukes - The MUSE Concert' reveal themselves to be STEREO - of a sort. It's not what I would call 'full stereo' but things do come out of different speakers, mostly the music. Although the discs have not yet been replayed in full, the dialogue appears mono on the sections so far auditioned.

The topic of 'Stereo On LV' would seem to deserve an article all of its own as there would seem to be something wrong in the way some of the discs are turning out, especially as regards to the 'surround-sound' information that should be cropping up on some of them. In the interim, elsewhere in the magazine should be a list of a few of the wrongly listed / labelled discs.

The error in the Player Survey was an unfortunate one. A document with the corrected info was dispatched from Croydon but took six weeks to get here by post (10 miles) - it missed the deadline.

From: Gordon M. Plummer, Oldham

I bought my PHILIPS LaserVision at Christmas 1982, it broke down on the day of purchase and the machine would only go in forward search - so I watched 'Star Trek' in something like sixty seconds flat! The machine was replaced.

Have you ever experienced playing a scratched disc? I had one that was so damaged and phoned PHILIPS about it. After explaining the symptoms to the engineer (skipping back a few frames and then repeating continuously) , he told me it sounded like a fine hairline scratch and advised me to find out roughly where the scratch was and rub it down with Duraglit or any other mild abrasive. Having got none of the said polish, I tried toothpaste and it worked quite well.

Looking at your Collectors' Page in issue two, it reminds me of when, just after I bought my player, I rented a copy of 'Wild Geese'. The film came to a stop at the end of side two and side three contained a copy of Charlie Chaplin's 'Gold Rush'. The dealer wouldn't part with it, saying it would have to go back for replacement.

I know there is little hope of seeing big bands on LaserVision, therefore I would like to see PHILIPS bring out a multi-standard machine so that we can watch discs from the American catalogue.

Last week I wrote to the BBC about new titles and they sent me a list [detailed elsewhere in this issue - Ed] out of which there are about eight discs that I will buy. However, I was sorry to see no mention of Tony Hancock. Please get on to PHILIPS about this omission.

Contrary to what one would expect, there is no big-band jazz on laser disc in the USA. They do have some rather interesting tape compilations and there would appear no reason why such material should not find its way on to a PAL disc.

The very first letter from a laser fan in Australia said "Are there any Hancock's out on disc yet ?". The WORLD awaits !

From: L.G. Watts, Kent

As one of the early purchasers of LaserVision (I was amonst the first 200), I would like to make a few observations. I feel that those of us who bought the player in the early days (£500 and no free discs) have had a poor deal when one considers the current price. I think if it were not for people like me, PHILIPS would not have got the system off the ground.

PHILIPS may have made a mistake on the launch by going for films, most of which were already on tape. I think they would have done better by going for music, and to push the player as a gramophone with pictures - then to bring in films, but only the latest, and then before they were on tape if possible. But this is all water under the bridge now. As to the system itself, I have several observations which I think might be of use.

The player should have been compatible with CD, and the sound should have been digital from the start. Maybe the next generation of players will be able to play digital, and also play LV discs with digital sound - especially for the likes of the Arts International collection.

I would like to see a pause on the machine with pictures when using CLV discs - showing 1 - 4 frames per revolution, depending on the speed (similar to CED and VHD players).

It would be better if sound were available on CAV discs in trick play mode - then have it switchable on/off from the remote.[Here, here!- Ed]. It should also have slow motion reverse on remote. Forward/reverse switches should be rocker type instead of separate buttons. On slow-motion, I would like to see the slider have a central position for normal speed and be pushed further to give fast forward.

As regards the discs I think as the maximum playing time is one hour it is silly showing "hours/minutes" on the display as the hour figure is always going to be zero [One hopes not - Ed]. I would prefer the display to show "minutes/seconds". Also, a number of films have been released on double discs with only three sides used. Many of these could have been mastered in CAV instead of CLV and still fitted on two discs, but on four sides. i.e.'Wild Geese' at 129mins. And what about split CAV/CLV single discs where the playing time is less than 90 mins? I mention this because , once you have seen a film several times, you feel you want to do more with the controls available - such as action sequences in slow motion.

For CAV discs would it not be a good idea to put the credits on single frames. Apart from getting them on a handful of frames instead of hundreds, it would also make it easier to read them. There are many other things I would like to say, but if I go on much further, I'm afraid this letter will turn into a novel.

The glory of being the first on the block with the new technology is supposed to compensate for the later reduction in price. It doesn't work out that way in practice, but it's about all one can keep telling oneself in these situations. It is reasonable to expect a free disc, even if it is only a demo / sampler.

The observations on improving the player and discs are interesting, many would get the editor's support at least. One thing though, the LV disc considerably pre-dated the CD and one could not have reasonably expected digital audio on LV at the start. Compatability with CD, yes. The impression is that CD was launched as soon as the expensive D / A circuitry was available in mass produced chips - several years after LV.

From: C.H. Murden, Essex

After much deliberation I finally bought a LaserVision player - the PIONEER LD1100. Unfortunately it went wrong in the first week but on replacement I have had no further trouble. It is an excellent machine but has one or two quirks which I decided to remedy. These are:
1) The sound is muted immediately the search key is pressed, preventing preselection of the next track to be viewed whilst still watching the previous one - very annoying with music videos.
2) The picture/sound are muted in pause - I was interested to see what pic-

ture would result with a CLV disc.

Two diodes produced the desired result! The pause picture, in fact, gives about 8 - 10 seconds of normal play mode, with only slight picture disturbance when the player jumps to the beginning of the section. (The picture/sound are still muted when the search key is pressed again after making a selection, as before, but sound is audible in scan mode.) In my opinion, this makes the player that much better.

About disc quality - all my discs are OK but film master tape quality is very variable (just like CD!) although I would mention the Duran Duran disc. The L & R channels are recorded out of phase and listening in mono or through a TV makes them sound like they are playing in the bathroom!

Memories of scrabbling around in the component bins down Lisle Street of a Saturday morning! This letter arrived within days of bumping into a VLP600 owner who had bought his machine cheap (otherwise he would have preferred the 700) and made up his own remote control out of a computer keypad and wired into his machine himself. It might be opportune to point out that manufacturers are likely to frown on any such mods if warranty repairs are later involved. (ie. they might wriggle out of repairing your machine for free under guarantee!).

And, by remarkable coincidence, this gent was in the very process of returning a copy of the same Duran Duran disc that also had this phase reversal fault (which can be cured by reversing your speaker leads + to - , and vice versa. This is not what you expect to be lumbered with doing everytime you play this particular disc, even at only £9.99 a time). What made his copy of this defectively mastered disc twice as bad was the fact that it was a double-sided disc ie. the programme fits on one side of a disc and two recorded sides had been mistakenly bonded together in the factory. Other copies of this title have also turned up double sided, so, presumably, there must be some completely blank Duran Duran discs floating round (Enormous cheers from Wham fans!). There is an earlier pressing of this disc, a German one, where the sound would seem to be OK. Well, no-one has written in.....yet!

From: Pat Olsen, York

I think you should start doing a correction list each issue stating which discs are in stereo but not labelled or catalogued as such. MGM are the worst, they just don't put anything on their sleeves at all! As for CBS/FOX, why 'Oklahoma' was not done in stereo I just don't Know. The original was when in TODD-AO, which, by the way, is not as Keith Arnold described it in his review of the disc.

TODD-AO is not a three-camera wide-screen process. The only two systems employing three cameras and then to show them on three projectors were CINERAMA and CINEMIRACLE. About ten films were done in CINERAMA, mostly travelogues. Then CINEMIRACLE came along, supposedly better than CINERAMA, and instead of having the projection boxes left, right, and centre in the cinema, like at the Casino in London (now the Prince Edward Theatre), it had three projectors in a central projection box downstairs, and mirrors were used to send the picture to the left and right. It was easier having everything in one box and solved the problems involved with having the three. The only film made in this process was called 'Windjammer' and was shown in the Odeon cinema half-way down the Tottenham Court Road (now pulled down). I believe it was the largest cinema in the circuit and had a screen bigger than CINERAMA. I know because I saw the film - and all the CINERAMA ones at the Casino.

TODD-AO was devised by Mike Todd and the AMERICAN OPTICAL CO. (That's how the name was arrived at.) To get over the very problem of three screens and the "joins", they devised a special lens to give a very wide angle on a deep, curved, large screen. The first film was 'Oklahoma' then 'Around The World In Eighty Days' (which Mike Todd made before his tragic death). So, if 'Oklahoma' had been a three-screen process preserved as a CINEMASCOPE print you would have still seen the joins, as happened in the CINEMASCOPE release of 'How The West Was Won'. You can't get rid of any joins with CINEMASCOPE.

Can some article be done on Surround Sound in a future edition. It seems that if a film is in DOLBY STEREO it does not necessarily also have Surround Sound. Do they just have ambience sound? It would be nice to have things cleared up.

Maybe one could hope for a revised copy of the master catalogue sometime soon with revised and corrected details. In the short term we will try and print all the corrections that come to light.

Recent MGM sleeves do seem to be more informative as regards stereo or mono.

Keith was most upset at the erroneous information in the 'Oklahoma' review, doubly so as a former member of the 'Wide-Screen Association' (if we had known he was a wide boy!.....). Anyway, he apologises, and we've cut the plug off his disc player and it will not be returned to him for at least a week. Is this punishment enough?

Although not apparent from his letter, Pat is one of several readers who are already geared up with surround-sound facilities - an interesting means of enhancing the appreciation of feature films especially, and it is a topic we will be giving greater coverage to in future issues.

From: Bengt O.Fernerud, Stockholm

Thanks for the copy of the magazine - it's interesting to read about LaserVision which is not yet available in Sweden. That is unless you are dealing with it on a professional or industrial level. We will have to wait maybe two to three years!

IF YOUR VIEWS ON LASERVISION ARE NOT REPRESENTED ON THESE PAGES - write with your opinions to LASER DISC REVIEW, PO BOX 526, LONDON SW10 9AB.

Find The Disc

Finding a LaserVision player in a hi-fi/ video shop can be quite a challenge in itself. Owning the player allows you to proceed to the next stage - 'Find The Disc'. Readers have expressed considerable difficulty locating dealers who hold decent stocks of discs or who can supply discs to order by post. A list of possible sources is detailed below, each with their own style of operation, and readers are advised to try the ones most suited to their needs. As more sources come to light we will add to the list.

For those of you in the London area who can make their way to Oxford Street, the well-known HMV SHOP - 363 Oxford Street, LONDON W1R 2BJ (Tel: 01 - 629 1240) carries a sustantial stock of discs in all categories and can be relied on to stock most of the new releases as they become available. Mail order is charged at an additional £1-00 per disc and they will supply discs overseas. Opening hours are Mon - Sat 9.30 - 18.30, Thurs extended till 20.00, Sat close at 18.00.

Just round the corner STEREO REGENT STREET - 245 Regent Street, LONDON WIR 7AF (Tel: 01 - 491 7922) now carry quite a stock of discs too. Opening hours are 9.00 - 18.00 Mon - Sat, closed lunchtime 12.00 - 13.00. Although primarily a retail outlet they will mail discs inland and overseas (as well as PIONEER LV machines) and they quote an inland mail charge of £2-50. Orders can be taken by phone and payment made with VISA/ACCESS/DINERS/AMEX. Overseas orders are tax-free.

Out to Southampton now, PINEDENE FILMS - 99 Hill Lane, SOUTHAMPTON, Hampshire SO1 5AE (Tel: 0703 - 31680) are long established dealers in movie films and see laser discs as a possible replacement for these in the coming years. Predominently mail-order they can also accomodate callers most evenings 18.00 - 22.00. Substantial printed lists are available on request and they make claim to carrying most of the discs that are currently available (sealed copies). Second hand discs are sometimes available. Inland mail charges run from 75p and overseas customers are served.

Another mail-order (only) dealer with a substantial printed list is SIDEWINDER VIDEO - 17 Church Lane, SUTTON COLDFIELD, West Midlands B76 OBJ. Both domestic and overseas customers can be supplied. Inland charges are 50p per disc under £13-00, overseas £2-00 per order, over £50-00 free.

A mail-order specialist in Compact Discs who can also supply LaserVision discs to order is MAILDISC - 280 Central Park Road, LONDON E6 3AD (Tel: 01- 472 8969). Opening hours 10.00 - 17.30, ask for Mike Carroll. Postage charges are £1-50 on inland orders under £40-00, overseas under £60-00 at cost. Above these amounts surface post is free. Telephone orders and VISA payment is possible. Overseas orders are tax free.

Retail dealer CAMBRIDGE VIDEO - 8 Seymour Street, CAMBRIDGE CB1 3DQ (Tel: 0223 - 213042) whose Nick Hopper speaks highly of the LaserVision system, especially the VP830, stock discs in the shop and can supply mail order too. They can take VISA/ACCESS orders over the telephone but they make a point of saying that the shop can be busy at times, so be patient when phoning. Postage (sent First Class) is £1-25 for single discs, £1-75 doubles. Discounts are available for larger orders and overseas customers can be supplied.

Finally, for those of you within reach of Worthing, CHURCHER AUDIO VIDEO - 154 Montague Street, WORTHING , Sussex BN11 3HH (Tel: 0903 - 30558) are a very active LaserVision dealer and though the benefits of their service do not run to postal customers, a visit might be in order if you are in the area. They stock over 500 discs for purchase or rental.

The PIONEER LD 700

A First Look

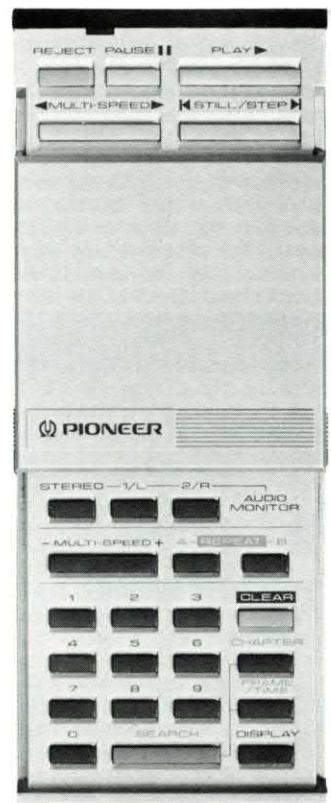
Rumblings of increased Laser-Vision activity from PIONEER have indeed come to pass and March saw the launch of a bunch of video components (see elsewhere in this review) , most significant of which is the LD 700 LaserVision player - solid-state laser, front loading, and at 420mm width, eminently rackable (this latter aspect seems to count for a lot in marketing these days). PIONEER promised immediate supply of the new machine and to give you an idea of what to expect when confronted with it at your local dealer I offer these observations on an NTSC version of the LD 700 I have had the opportunity of playing with the last few weeks.

Silver-grey in colour with the odd blue detail, this LV player certainly has a pleasing 'hi-tech' appearance and even isolated from other components , an unknowing visitor could easily mistake it for something else. Hidden away in a rack you'd have to point it out to the neighbours! Rear panel connections are antenna, UHF out, video, audio, an 8 pin I/O port, and, on the PAL version, a Euroconnector (not present on this NTSC model).

Back to the front, there is a power on/off switch, TV/VDP for switching between broadcast reception and disc play, and, to the right of the drawer front, two large blue-tinged switches. Once power is on, the left hand switch causes the drawer to open partially, or to reject a disc already in play. The right hand switch engages play once a disc is loaded. In practice, these are very convenient switches as they save you carrying the otherwise all-controlling remote to the player when loading and changing discs, though if you prefer, these functions are controllable from the remote itself. There is a clear plastic window under the drawer that encloses 8 function lights and there is also a window for the remote sensor. These function lights are quite easily visible and informative, even from a distance.

Switching on the power causes POWER and the two AUDIO indicators to light up. Pressing the REJECT/OPEN button causes the drawer to push out about 50mm, leaving you to do the rest (interactive!). Pulling the drawer fully out reveals a circular recess the size of a 30cm disc with a smaller marked circle for 20cm discs (when ? !). The middle of the drawer is cut out to allow for the spindle to rise and clamp the disc (when closed), and the objective to track the disc (this travels from the centre towards the back of the machine). Dropping the disc in is fairly straightforward, though as the drawer does not pull completely out it is necessary to tuck the leading edge of the disc into the machine, and being quite a tight gap, the height at which you locate the machine can make a difference to the ease of execution of this operation. Or so I found. There is a foam strip on the inside edge of the aperture to prevent you scratching carelessly loaded discs.

Pushing the loaded drawer closed causes the DISC SET light to illuminate (above REJECT/OPEN button) and a press on the PLAY switch does the obvious. The light above the PLAY switch flashes while the disc moves into play (a few seconds) and then stays on permanently. The CLV light comes on if appropriate as does the CX. One point about the CX switching on this machine. Older CX encoded discs need to be set manually, but more recent ones have an automatic engage function incorporated in the disc itself and there is no need for you to bother about selecting the correct switch position. These automatic switching CX discs can only be played with the CX on - it is not possible to defeat it should you wish to make CX on/CX off comparisons.



At this stage you have to resort to the remote for anything other than watching the disc straight the way through. A look at the accompanying photographs will probably achieve more than a wordy description, but briefly, the top controls relate to the most used functions. MULTI-SPEED is PIONEER'S term for slow-motion etc. and is more appropriate a term as the control covers both slow and fast ranges. The bottom part of the remote carries the MULTI-SPEED variation control (from 1 frame every 3 secs - 3× normal speed, in nine stepped stages ie. it is not continuously variable. Pushing the MULTI-

SPEED rate button causes the stages to be displayed on the TV screen, you just keep pushing until the desired rate is reached. Releasing the button removes the on-screen display). Next to the MULTI-SPEED control are REPEAT A - B function buttons. Pressing 'A' establishes the return point, and when you reach the end of the sequence you wish to be repeated, you press 'B' and the disc returns to the pre-selected start point and replays the complete passage, up to 256 times. There is a front panel indicator light to remind you this function is in operation, which really only works at its best on CAV discs as the repeat is only accurate to the nearest minute in Chapter or Elapsed Time repeat. It will not repeat parts of films and songs particularly well unless the desired repeat points are conveniently close to the beginning of a minute point on the disc.

For audio control (the player always starts off in stereo) a L and R channel button allows selection of individual channels - the output being automatically spread between the two speakers. Pressing STEREO causes the machine to revert to normal twin channel replay. A DISPLAY button at the bottom right hand corner produces a Time/Frame/Chapter readout on the screen - all visible (where appropriate) simultaneously on one press of the button. A second push removes it.

The numerical keypad serves to select Frame No.(CAV), Chapter, and Elapsed Time (CLV) e.g. Press FRAME, punch in desired number (shown on screen), press SEARCH button. Or, press CHAPTER, press desired number (shown on screen), press SEARCH etc, etc. All very straightforward. Unlike the Repeat function, Search/Chapter will locate the exact start of the Chapter regardless of the coincidence of a minute/start point. If for any reason you wish to junk a keyed command without engaging it, just press the CLEAR button. (This also clears the A - B Repeat commands.)

This just about covers the basic functions of the LD 700 although the intricacies of some of them have been omitted for clarity in this introductory review (and for space considerations - the instruction book runs to nearly 30 pages!). Certainly this is a very sophisticated and elegant piece of machinery and what will no doubt endear it to film fans is its quietness, unparalleled in relation to anything that has gone before. I have gotten to looking forward to engaging the Search function every now and then just to get the player to emit the friendly chirp it makes on completion. If it were not for the on-screen picture you would think the machine had ceased operating at times! Wonderful. CAV discs do induce a greater level of noise, when in still-frame mode particularly.

What will attract most other people to the LD 700 is the speed of access. In Search mode it takes no longer than 7 seconds to get from one end of a disc to the other. Scan, time, in fact, is longer than its predecessor - 40 seconds, but more visible, and useable this way. This is a good compromise between the two functions. For fear of upsetting people, I put on the Duran, Duran disc - 'Dancing On The Valentine' (pictured elsewhere). It has only three tracks and a fifteen minute running time, and zipping between tracks using the Search/Chapter facility was a doddle. This is the immediacy and excitement that a snappy LV player can bring to pop music that outclasses tape entirely! Terrific sound too.

One thing that does work against the smooth image this machine projects is the curious sliding cover on the remote control which always manages to obscure certain combinations of buttons. The instruction booklet suggests this cover is "not removeable". Hmm. Maybe pressing too many buttons confuses the control logic but I, for one, do find that I use the Scan and Audio controls at the same time ie. skipping back on music discs and isolating individual performers on the left and right channels. The sliding cover is expertly designed to prevent this (although it looks real neat!).

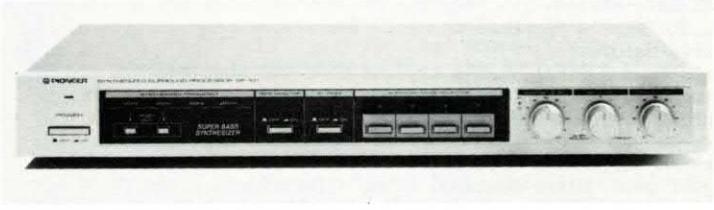
The Accessories

Something owners of the LD 700 will be able to look forward to in the Summer is the introduction of PIONEER's MSX computer - the PSX - 7, a 48K (expandable to 64K) personal computer which will interface directly with the LD 700 through the I/O port, without need for any additional componentry. Optional joysticks and a graphics tablet will also be available as extras. The PSX - 7 will list somewhere around the £300 mark which is a bit higher priced than some other MSX units, but the direct interface and text overlay ability are seen as added value for money over what a 'basic' MSX would cost with the necessary add-ons. PIONEER envisage this computer as "an overall video control device".

What, hopefully, will be among the first things to control are some domestic versions of various arcade games. At the press launch PIONEER had an NTSC games system up and running with the illustrated games disc, and also 'Astron Belt', but the computer programs incorporated into these discs have to be re-written for the PAL system (it is not possible to do a straight-forward NTSC/PAL conversion, as for films and music discs) so we will not necessarily get these titles. Whatever, there will certainly be something to shoot at come the warm weather.

Also in the summer we will get the SP 101 Surround Sound Processor (£200) which , with four different creatable room acoustics (stadium, theatre, studio, & simulated stereo) should give added realism, to film discs especially. Providing we can track down some discs with the surround sound encoding intact, we hope to report further on this topic in a future issue.

Available now is the Bodysonic chair, an intriguing idea that one recalls a British firm, somewhere down in Surrey, coming up with several years ago, though whether it ever got beyond prototype stage is not known. This PIONEER device is good fun and offers a couple of interesting features. One is the ability to transmit low frequency sounds through speakers incorporated in the body of the chair and hence give some remarkable added



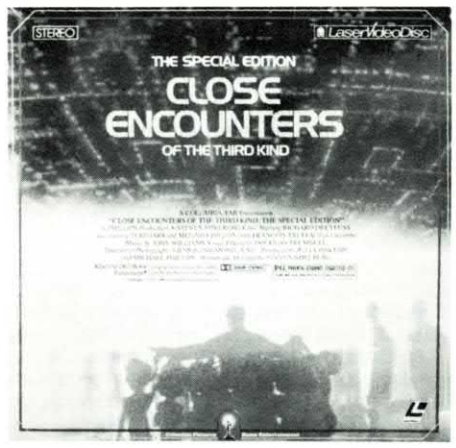
realism to a lot of film soundtrack effects. The editor still can't decide whether he'd be able to pluck up enough courage to watch a horror blood & guts number while sitting in it! There are controls to adjust balance etc. situated in the arm rest. The other asset to the chair is that, using the 'ear-pad' speakers as well, it is possible to experience discs at considerable apparent volume, though when you get up from the chair itself, you realise that not much noise is actually transmitted beyond the environs of the chair. This is a good asset if you have neighbour trouble (and £600). This chair definitely deserves your attention and one regrets that its price, though possibly realistic for what is offered, puts out of the reach of many of us.

The last item in PIONEER's launch was the SD 26 Monitor/TV, as already described in the last issue, though apparently not of European origin as previously reported. The set incorporates a mass of rear socketry that is certainly indicative of the future of home entertainment. Unfortunately, for the £800 price, the monitor does not have NTSC/PAL capability which must put it at something of a disadvantage against the already established SONY Profeel system.

All in all, quite a change of image here for PIONEER who have really only previously projected themselves as an audio company. The highlight of ensemble must, for readers of this magazine, be the LD 700, and armed with the operational rundown contained in these pages, an early inspection is recommended. By the way, the LD 700 lists for £499.

Further information from: PIONEER HI-FIDELITY (GB) LTD.,
1 - 6 FIELD WAY, GREENFORD,
MIDDLESEX. Tel : 01 - 575 5757.

'What we want on LaserVision'



The reaction to the request for suggestions for future LaserVision releases has proved to be far greater than expected. If it had been apparent that close on a 100 replies would have come in, possibly a more rigid and precise questionnaire would have been prepared to meet the scale of the response. Replies are still coming in but as of this date, towards the end of February, this initial batch will have to be put into some kind of perspective to meet the deadline for the next issue.

Without doubt, the film fans were the most responsive, and outspoken. It was something of a revelation to discover how many film fans had felt they had been let down in recent months. "Where's 'Empire Strikes Back'?"..."Why no Warner/Thorn-EMI/RCA titles yet?"...."What's happened to the MGM Classic series?"...."Why are the new releases not in stereo?" ....."What's happened to CIC?" There were many letters of this nature.

But first, let's try and find out what exactly are the sort of films you want. Due to the imprecise way the request for suggestions was made, there were many letters that we had to redefine in order to accomodate some form of tabulation ie. some people might ask for 'Dirty Harry', others just said "Clint Eastwood films". Therefore, although of necessity the film aspect of the survey has to be in the form of a list, one must assume that certain titles could easily go up or down a few divisions (when they could have been requested under two headings).

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (very nearly half of the replies requested this title, and most included RETURN OF THE JEDI as well)

JAMES BOND films

DISNEY CARTOONS / HITCHCOCKS / CLOSE ENCOUNTERS / SUPERMANS

BLADE RUNNER

BEN HUR

ROCKYS / GONE WITH THE WIND / STAR TREK 3

MAD MAXES

SINGING IN THE RAIN

CLINT EASTWOODS / INDIANA JONES / ET / BEATLES films / DARK CRYSTAL

MONTY PYTHON films / GHOSTBUSTERS / MIDNIGHT EXPRESS / FLASH GORDON

WEST SIDE STORY / SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS / WIZARD OF OZ / EARTHQUAKE / TRADING PLACES / TOWERING INFERNO / AIRPLANE 2 / TIME BANDITS

TRON / FIRST BLOOD / SCARFACE (new) / GREMLINS / FORBIDDEN PLANET / 10 COMMANDMENTS / DR ZHIVAGO / DISNEY FILMS / THE WALL / SOUTH PACIFIC / SPAGHETTI WESTERNS / 'ADULT' / CONANS / BOGARTS

HAMMER HORRORS / LAUREL & HARDYS / KISS ME KATE / TERMINATOR / HIGH SOCIETY / CAROUSEL / JOLSON STORY / JOLSON SINGS AGAIN / WOODSTOCK / ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW / WATERSHIP DOWN/CAMELOT/ GODFATHERS/OUTLANDS / WAR GAMES / DEERHUNTER /EXORCIST

Even if you make adjustments for statistical error etc. and move individual titles up and down a few divisions, overall, this list does not relate to any recent tape rental chart, a comparison that is obviously tempting to make if you are a software producer. Another assumption that is tempting to make is that seeing 'Mad Max' next to 'Singing In The Rain' would imply that there are sharply divided factions at work here, each pushing for their own narrow tastes. In fact, these two titles, and similarly contrasting ones, did regularly appear on the same request lists. The most interesting aspect must be the virtual absence of certain very popular titles. 'Tootsie' only got one mention, as did 'Police Academy'. 'Terms Of Endearment' and 'Officer And A Gentleman' also did not make much of a showing. Elvis films rated as strongly as 'Flashdance', but nowhere near as strongly as Beatles films. No doubt readers will be aware of other titles unexpectedly absent. Probably most of this latter category did get a mention, but not in sufficient quantity as to warrant an inclusion in the above list.

Excerpts from some of the letters received might possibly give greater insight into the disc buying/collecting mentality that, with encouragement and a well considered selection of titles for release, could produce substantially better sales than the present small size of the laser market would indicate.

"Is MGM going to release the second batch of musicals already out on tape eg 'Seven Brides...' and also 'Gone With The Wind'. Can we have some of FOX's early fifties films like 'House In The Square' and 'Bird Of Paradise', and some Alice Faye musicals such as 'Hello Frisco Hello' and 'Rose Of Washington Square'." (D.A. COLLINS)

"Would like to see a greater range of new films and more John Wayne and Clint Eastwood Westerns." (D. JOHNSON)

"...."The Alamo','Jesse James'(1939), 'Wild Bunch', 'Gunfight At The OK Coral', 'Broken Arrow', and War films the like of 'Battle Of The Bulge', 'A Bridge Too Far', 'Battle Of Britain', 'Dirty Dozen', 'Where Eagles Dare', '633 Squadron', 'Battle Of Midway', 'Cross Of Iron'." (S.COVINGTON)

"...'Summer Holiday', 'Dam Busters', 'Local Hero', 'Gregory's Girl', 'Spitfire', 'Lancaster', 'Conquest Of Everest', 'Scott Of The Antartic', 'Genevieve', 'Doctor In The House', 'Robin Hood'(Errol Flynn)." (JOHN FISHER)

"...."Warner Bros. films of the 30's and 40's, Will Hay -'Oh Mr Porter', 'Ask A Policeman', Ealing comedies - Peter Sellers 'Two Way Stretch', 'LadyKillers'." (G. PIGGOTT)

"I bought my player on the strength of 'Henry V', '39 Steps', and 'The Lady Vanishes' with the expectation of more to come. Would suggest 'A Canterbury Tale', 'Life And Death Of Colonel Blimp', 'I Know Where I'm Going', 'Black Narcissus', 'A Matter Of Life And Death', 'Major Barbara'(MARK SPRY)

P.FAULKS makes a plea for some good foreign language films with either dual language or teletext subtitles.

JOHN EAVES mentioned a couple of existing titles that he would buy if re-released in stereo. "Also what about some Universal 3D films (with two pairs of specs, free)."

"What about the balance of the 'Ape' films... also the rest of the 'Trinitys' and 'Cyclone Attack' and 'Conquest Of The Earth'." (I.G. STREETER)

J. COOKE of Liverpool appended a list of mostly modern X-rated Horror/Action films with a request for "Most of the Bogart, Cagney, Robinson movies."

A.P. BENMORE requests 'Scarface' - the Pacino version, but not shortened. Also Chuck Norris movies. He puts the case for 'Tron' very succinctly with the comment "This film deserves the LaserVision treatment" though he expresses the fear that it might appear without a stereo soundtrack!

D. BOTTOMLEY sent a large list which you get the impression he would indeed buy in total if available and it was one of those lists that did contain the likes of 'Mad Max 2', '42nd Street', 'Mary Poppins'. 'Flashdance', 'Golden Voyage Of Sinbad', and 'Singing In The Rain'."

Other popular requests included old Universal horrors, 'Carry On' films, Marx Bros, Woody Allens, Bruce Lees, Astaire/Rogers, Judy Garlands, Marilyn Monroes. Music related

films get frequently mentioned and the inclusion of Chapter Stops in film musicals, in addition to their use in straight music titles, would seem to be worth considering in future. Comments like "in stereo only", "uncut", and "if the film was made in wide-screen, let's have it kept in wide-screen" cropped up with monotonous regularity. The wide-screen problem is always likely to be debated but filling the TV screen up with an image is obviously not popular. Would an intermediate level of cropping serve as a compromise till the advent of a new TV standard?

It is fairly evident that people know that the enjoyment their requested films will give is going to last an extended time into the future and they do not want to buy a mutilated or poor quality master of a film that will pale quickly on repeated viewing. Like it or not, LaserVision has attracted a group of film fans who take their interest very seriously.

LaserMusic

Recent activity in the music section of the LaserVision catalogue has established the prospect of a genuinely affordable means of collecting music video. The response to all this appears quite straightforward - "Can we have more?" And indeed, pursuing the laser on music approach would seem a pretty good way of establishing (in pure number terms) LaserVision as a viable carrier medium. It will bring its own problems - in the field of pop music especially as people are not prepared to wait for chart-related product and LV will, in future, have to be considerably quicker off the mark if it is to be taken seriously in this endeavour. In this respect, although the production costs of the mini-discs (Laser 45s ?) might not be significantly different from full-size discs, a shorter turn-round time due to them containing shorter, promo-type trailers may be all that is required to give LV the right 'image' in the market.

Pop artistes who produced the greatest number of requests were - Blondie/Ultravox/Michael Jackson - Jacksons/ Meatloaf/Rolling Stones (noteably 'Video Rewind')/ZZ Top/ Neil Diamond/Linda Rondstadt/Bowie ('Serious Moonlight')/ UB40/Eurythmics/U2. Obviously the timing of pop releases is critical and even in the life of this issue of the magazine variations in this list could be anticipated, although most of the above could reasonably be expected to be steady sellers. Other requests included Jean Michael Jarre's'China Concerts' (Topical !)/50's Rock'n Roll/Historical compilations/Elvis TV concerts. For fear of upsetting fans by lumping all the following artistes together, there seemed to be strong support for what one might call 'quieter MOR' artistes such as Cliff & Shadows/Culture Club/Diana Ross/Boney M/ Fame Concert/Dolly Parton/Bucks Fizz and the 'post-hippy' group of Crosby,Stills,&Nash/Bob Dylan/Band/Bruce/Pink Floyd/Genesis/Hendrix/Yes. Heavy-metal fans must be reasonably satisfied with their lot (or too brain-damaged to do anything about it) as there was but a solitary request for Rainbow & Deep Purple, and none of the more modern stuff. Maybe HM fans do not yet realise the goodies available to them already through the wonders of LV. Of the 'older' artistes only Frank Sinatra and Shirley Bassey elicited response.

Jazz appears of no interest to existing owners although Big Band material definitely is lacking in the catalogue. Anything from 30's originals to James Last and Syd Lawrence in the modern style would seem to be needed. There are some interesting tape compilations of the older type material floating about , and a few intelligently compiled discs would appear to be in order.

Whether this is the correct place to put it or not is uncertain but a few people mentioned dance and/or tap-dance programmes - from movies to music to instructional, and you get the impression that something mastered up in CAV would go down well. Emulating the star performers in the privacy of one's own home would seem infinitely preferable to making a complete berk of yourself in public.

Classical music drew less response than pop, but like the jazz field, one imagines that there needs to be a bit more of a showing of this type of material before the classical fans invest in a player. Many letters that contained lists of already owned discs featured classical discs far out of proportion to their quantity in the LV catalogue EMI's 'Castles & Concerts' series and 'The Proms' were the commonly mentioned choices though there were suggestions for Holst/Planets, Sibelius (Channel 4), Rodriguez Guitar Concerto/ and John Williams.

"....more of the 'Castles & Concerts' series (what is no. 1 of this series?). We need some good BBC musical items on disc."(ERIC SHAW)

D'Oyly Carte productions of Gilbert & Sullivan were requested by Tony Wells who also suggested some more operas and operettas, but in English, even if the original was foreign language, and cited productions from the English National Opera Co. Alex Marsh endorsed 'I Pagliacci', and there were requests for "the great classic singers". Leonard Roberts remembered a Dame Janet Baker Memorial Hall recital from TV's earlier days that makes you realise that the laser disc is the medium for transferring all those 'lost' transmissions to and thereby returning them to the public gaze.

I prompted John Wise to suggest some things in the opera field that might follow on from the initial batch of Arts International releases as there is the obvious fear, on past experience, that the initial momentum of the 1984 releases will not be maintained without some prompting from LV owners. Here's what he said:

"It would be desirable to have some of the "old" Glyndebourne productions on LV but all letters to Longman Video have produced no response though writing to the copyright holders, Southern Television Ltd., did produce a lengthy reply, but they gave no hope of LV release for the reason that the productions were only recorded in mono for TV broadcast. I have replied pointing out the error of their reasoning citing EMI and DECCA's recent re-issuing of thirty year old mono recordings on CD. Possibly something might be stirring behind the scenes but I can't help wondering, in a case like this, whether it shouldn't be down to PHILIPS as manufacturers to try and get such productions on to disc, rather than just leave it to the programme producers. I did write to Thames TV about the E.N.O.'Rigoletto' and they said they were negotiating with PHILIPS for an LV release this year.

Naturally one wants the best sound and picture possible but I could get equally enthusiastic about any of the Callas material from 405-line B&W mono TV. The magic comes through even on multi-generation tape copies I have seen so returning to the original master for LV release would surely be more than worthwhile. As well as old TV material there is quite a bit of early film available though one might doubt sufficient demand to warrant LV release. Here are some suggestions for consideration:

Glyndebourne Festival Opera

Macbeth/Verdi(1972), Le Nozzi Di Figaro/Mozart(1973), Il Ritorno D'Ulisse In Patria/Monteverdi(1973), Idomeneo/Mozart (1974), Cosi Fan Tutte/Mozart(1975), Falstaff/Verdi(1976), Don Giovanni/Mozart(1977), Fidelio/Beethoven(1979) - all Southern TV productions.

Midsummer Nights Dream/Britten(1981), Orfeo Ed Euridice/ Gluck(1982) - T.V.S. productions.

La Calisto/Cavilli(1971), Capriccio/R.Strauss(1976), Cosi Fan Tutte/Mozart(1978) - B.B.C.

Brent Walker Productions

Gilbert & Sullivan -'Patience','Iolanthe'(more or less ENO)
Offenbach - 'Orpheus In The Underworld'

BBC Productions

Flying Dutchman/Wagner(1972), Gondoliers/G&S(1972), Falstaff/Verdi(1970).

When it comes to the BBC the potential is endless in their musical output. There is the series 'Profile In Music' in which Bernard Levin interviewed several opera singers, which included vocal extracts of very high quality. The one on Beverly Sills won a USA TV award. There was also one with Janet Baker, but I feel the whole series could be very popular. Then there are many recitals, often from the B&W era, with Gerald Moore, excerpts of which with Schwarzkopf have been shown from time to time. Then there were three recitals in the early days of colour with Schwarzkopf, Söderström, and a duet with Janet Baker and D. Fisher Dieskau.

I have just remembered the three operas recorded at the Maltings in Snape, all Britten conducted I think,'Idomeneo', 'Peter Grimes', and 'Owen Wingrave'. As I start thinking back, all sorts of things get remembered, like the 'Dream Of Gerontius' with Janet Baker, Peter Pears, John Shirley Quirk conducted by Sir Adrian Boult...."

One thing that the opera/classical/pop music fan obviously share is the desire to get access to the wealth of broadcast material, often forgotten about, lying in the vaults of the various ITV companies, the BBC, and, indeed, TV companies around the world. This magazine takes the view that the laser disc is the ultimate collectors' medium and every effort must be made to ensure that these 'lost' recordings end up on a silver disc.

The fields of TV originated material and what is generally referred to as "Special Interest" have been held over till the next issue due to space limitations. It is most unfortunate that the detail of many people's letters could not have been further exposed to the public view, but hopefully the underlying motivations of the laser disc buyer have been made a little clearer and will no doubt be of interest to software suppliers who may wonder why some of the previously released LV titles have not produced the anticipated sales figures.

STEREO !

These discs have been reported as being in STEREO, contrary to either sleeve, catalogue, or otherwise listed information. No doubt additional titles can be expected to turn up. Special mention must be made of '2001'. When originally pressed part of the master was missing and the disc came out with a ten minute segment (on the moon) omitted. This version was also MONO, but the second pressing is complete, and in STEREO. Readers who may have the 'wrong' version (a few did get out) would be well advised to return it for replacement.

STEREO

THE BLUE MAX
THE CHAMP
CLASH OF THE TITANS
DEATH HUNT
DRACULA
THE ESSENTIAL MIKE OLDFIELD
FANTASTIC VOYAGE
THE FINAL CONFLICT
GIGI
THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER
GUYS & DOLLS
HAWK THE SLAYER
HIGH ANXIETY
INVADERS FROM THE DEEP
THE LAST AMERICAN VIRGIN
9 TO 5
NO NUKES - THE MUSE CONCERT
POLTERGEIST
THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE
RAISE THE TITANIC
THE SAILOR WHO FELL FROM GRACE FROM SEA
SHOCK TREATMENT
STAR WARS
TAPS
TARZAN THE APEMAN
THE TUBES
2001
VICTOR, VICTORIA
YES GEORGIO

MONO

BLOW OUT
BLUES BROTHERS
CAPRICORN ONE (To be confirmed)
DR. DOLITTLE
THE ISLAND
READY, STEADY, GO 1 & 2
THE SWORD AND THE SORCERER
THE THING (This title in doubt - maybe two versions exist?)

Finally, 'The Essential MIke Oldfield' is apparently not in CAV as listed. If anyone has managed to get this disc into still-frame, please let us know!

Thanks for the above information go to Paul Ronchetti, Marc Comfort, John Fisher, and J.Y. Yap.

NEW FRATS

PHILIPS has signed a £90,000,000 contract with the municipal government of Shenzhen in the People's Republic of China for the supply of LV players, and equipment for assembly of players in China itself at a later date. This announcement follows an initial order for £12,000,000 placed last December for 10,000 players and 1,500,000 discs.

Assembly of the players in Shenzen, supervised by PHILIPS, should begin towards the end of 1985. Parts for 200,000 players will be delivered to the assembly plant in 1985 up to 1987. Before the factory start-up date, PHILIPS will deliver 20,000 ready assembled machines.

Shenzhen is one of four specially designated economic zones in the People's Republic which can independently buy Western technology. Before the second, larger part of the Shenzhen order was announced vice-president of PHILIPS, C.J. Van Der Klugt, was quoted in a Dutch newspaper as follows. "We think we can sell many more LaserVision players in China, while the Western market will have a rapid growth, thanks to a cost price reduction which is now possible."

PHOTOGRAPH - John Whybrow, plant director, presents Li Ding, leader of the Chinese delegation, with commemorative disc during visit to Blackburn LaserVision pressing facility. (Further investigation reveals the disc to be 'Wrath Of Khan !)

SHOW '84

The first CAV disc in a long time is this documentary recording of the East of England Agricultural Show, Peterborough. INTERACTIVE PICTURES, who produced the disc, containing 15,000 still frames as well as movie footage, hope to release more discs of its type in order to establish an archive for professional animal breeders. The disc also contains coverage of other activities of the show from floral arrangements to parachuting.

The disc is available now, at a price of £29.99, and we hope to carry a review in the next issue.

THE PRICE OF LV

The revised prices for CIC discs that we printed was something of a revelation to many readers who are still finding these discs at £17.99 or more in some outlets. Obviously communication down the distribution line is not all it could be and so as an approximate guide, these are the maximum prices you should be paying for 'currently available in the catalogue' discs.

FILM TITLES
CBS/FOX £13.99 single, £15.99 double. (most double film discs are £15.99)
GUILD £11.99 & £13.99.
PRECISION £13.99
MGM £9.99, £11.99, and £13.99.
EMBASSY £11.99 & £13.99.
CIC £11.99 & £13.99.
RANK £13.99.
SPECTRUM £11.99 & £13.99.
INTERVISION £13.99.
HOME VIDEO £13.99.

The only discs above the £15.99 price are Gary Numan, Elton John/New York, Van Gough, ARTS INT. releases (£19.99 single, £23.99 double), and the PIONEER label discs which retail between £18.95 and £24.95.

Most music discs are now £9.99 though there is a handful at £11.99.

Should readers be confronted with wrongly priced discs the best advice would be to shop elsewhere. PHILIPS initiated a dealer rebate scheme last year when re-structuring the LaserVision price list and consequently current prices should be 'as list'.

GIVEAWAY !

April through June, PHILIPS are running a '5 for the price of 3' disc promotion. Owners who purchase three discs (not necessarily on one go) will be able to select their two free discs from a list of 100 specially designated titles that will be redeemable through PHILIPS Silver Disc Club. Details of this offer, which is open to every LaserVision owner, will be available from your LaserVision Centre.

SMALL ADS

####### AIRPLANE, ALIEN, AMERICAN WEREWOLF, THE AMATEUR, ANIMAL HOUSE, APOCALYPSE NOW, BEDAZZLED, BLUES BROS, BORDER, BRUBAKER, CAT PEOPLE, CHARIOTS OF FIRE, FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, JANITOR, MASH, McVICAR, 9 to 5, POLTERGEIST, QUEST FOR FIRE, RAIDERS OF LOST ARK, RAISE THE TITANIC, RETURN OF THE PINK PANTHER, ROADGAMES, ROSE, SOPHIE'S CHOICE, STAR TREK 1 & 2, STAR WARS, THING, WARRIORS, COMPLEAT BEATLES, SIMON & GARFUNKEL, TINA TURNER, FALKLANDS, WOODHOUSE/DOGS. Around £8.00 each. Also a PIONEER LD 1100 - £230. Tel 01-671 1357

####### TOYAH AT THE RAINBOW £6, CAT PEOPLE, THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE, SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER, RAISE THE TITANIC, POLTERGEIST - all £8, including post. Exchanges welcome.
Jack Haynes, Manchester. Tel 061-793-1219.

####### THE BORDER, ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK, FINAL CONFLICT, HOUSE OF LONG SHADOWS, JUST BEFORE DAWN, SCANNERS, SISTERS, TOM & JERRY 1, LORETTA, PHYSICAL, DAMIEN OMEN 2 - all £6, postage extra. Also INFERNO, VISITING HOURS £9, post extra.
James Ager, Essex. Tel 0799 21355.
(James also deals in film memorabilia such as photos, books, posters etc. Send 40p for list to - 29 Newport Rd. Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4BS.

####### STARFLIGHT ONE, BEING THERE, THRILLER, RAISE THE TITANIC . Wish to exchange for others.
Neville Chance, Essex. Tel 01-502 1740.

####### STARWARS available for an APE exchange.
John Guerrati, Hants. Tel 01-934 5696.

####### Wanted by Roy Dennison, 3 Glebe Road, Hertford SG14 3JY - James Last/LIVE.

####### TOYAH AT THE RAINBOW £6 incl. post or exchange. Also having bought a new player have Philips VLP 600 for sale @ £90-00.
R. Chrichton, Bordon, Hants. Tel BORDON 3771.

####### Deep Purple/Rock Flashback - sale or exchange. Also, a brand new Philips VLP 700 player @ £150.(Unwanted prize).
J.S. Pickersgill, Telford. Tel 0952 585553.

Readers may advertise discs for sale in this column at no charge. Please put details on a separate sheet of paper from other correspondence and mail by 30th May for Issue 4.

Special NTSC Disc Review

200,000 Photographs

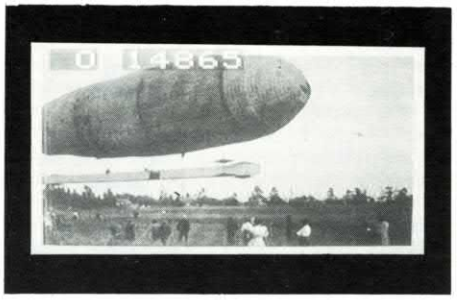
Douglas Pratt

If they were on slides, the slides would stack as high as the Empire State Building. If every snapshot were three inches wide, and most look wider, they would stretch for ten miles. Instead, 200,000 photographs from the archives of the National Air & Space Museum have been pressed on to a pair of laser discs. At $30 a piece, National Air & Space Museum Archival Video Disc 1 and National Air & Space Museum Archival Video Disc 2 are bargains of incomprehensible proportion. Even skimming through them at comfortable pace could take an interested viewer weeks. If you looked at at a disc just a little bit at a time. it might take a year to get through a single side.

Organised in alphabetical progression, the photographs represented on the discs are primarily black and white and cover all aspects of aviation. Volume 1 is specifically about airplanes, listing so many makes and models that it only goes to the beginning of the W's. Volume 2, which is the disc to buy if are tempted to get just one, finishes the alphabet (including the Wright Brothers' work, which makes no appearance on the first disc) and then goes on to provide photos of everything from balloons to airports, including a 32,000 portrait collection of important contributors to achievements in flight.

The first disc is put together a little sloppily. The titles are inconsistent; some of the snapshots are upside down, and in one frame, hands can be seen holding the picture steady. Most of the photos, especially of the post World War 2 aircraft, are brochure type shots, with the planes neatly centered and spotlessly in focus. But the volume wears down one's resistance; with over 8000 photos of aircraft manufactured by Curtiss, you get an impression that slim lines and light construction was a common hallmark of that company's designs for more than fifty years. This is education by osmosis.

The absence of colour removes a level of detail from the pictures and makes one more aware of the limitations of video reproduction. On both discs, the images rarely fill the screen and are instead captured in their entirety - worn borders, old Scotchtape marks, and all. Nearly every picture leaves some kind of impression (some are just too dark, blurry etc to understand). The brochure photos are so prevalent that a viewer will quickly become blind to the style and see only what is different about each airplane. The news or neutrally candid photos are more captivating, even if they tell one less about the aeroplanes. In one photo, a Fairman Bluebird is seen passing about twenty feet above a road and twenty inches above some electrical wires as a group of people, their backs to the camera, watch it pass. There is a sense of immediacy, and the more you stare at the image, the more you want to know where the plane is going. In another picture, a small plane has crashed and people are searching through the debris. Their shoulders are hunched and everyone is looking decisively downwards.



The oddities - the Miller Flying Platform, the McDonnell Goblin, provide more than simple amusement. While it is obvious today that the short fat Goblin is an awful idea for a plane, someone had to try building it to make sure. You can see which ideas failed - multiple wings, multiple parallel cockpits, blunt noses, and which ideas continued to develop into the airplanes we have today. Perhaps the most amusing concept was the autogiro, a small personal helicopter which more than one magazine predicted would someday become a fixture in every suburban home, replacing even the family station-wagon. Photographs of the machine fluttering above the White House lawn serve to emphasise this idea. If you owned one, you could go visit the President anytime you wanted to. This traffic controller/Secret Service nightmare has not come to pass, but not for the want of trying.

There are many shots of planes flying above Manhattan. This seems to be a 'must' exhibition for every aircraft worth its weight, and even those which were lighter than air. Some planes are more photogenic than others. The Lockheed Constellation and Starfighter were beautiful looking planes, while nothing from McDonald-Douglas has even a semblance of personality.

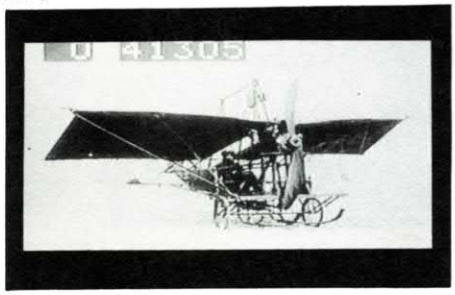
A section on boomerangs and a section on kites probably belong on the other disc but are squeezed in among the manufacturers for variety. The most dis-

appointing segment is the short (about fifty pictures) spread given to Lear jets. Examples of interior decoration would be particularly interesting in a plane which is designed for customisation, but none are offered. The Gossamer fuel-less vehicles are represented with but three stills.

The catalogue which comes with the first disc identifies each aircraft (eg. Sopwith Camel 39699 - 39776). There is no other accompanying literature, and further information must be obtained from other sources. This is where the second disc is so effective. For one thing, you can see what Mr. Sopwith looks like - and with his rounded cheeks and boyish expression he seems like the sort

who would name his aircraft after animals. More importantly, the photographs on the second disc begin to place aircraft in a wider context of purpose and utility. The disc is an important addition for those who purchased the first and felt short-changed by the restricted (if gargantuan) scope. For those who wish to purchase this one, there is a reiteration of the airplane manufacturers (2000 Curtiss photos, for example) that will adequately orientate a viewer to the range of aeronautical invention.

The catalogue for the second disc is a mess, with the listing of the first frames pasted in the middle of the document. The disc, however, is a great improvement over the first one, with thorough title cards, a handy index at the end of each side, and every photograph right side up. (The pressing by 3M was good, on both discs. One frame on each was flawed, and only half a dozen more had minor quivers on the copies we viewed.)



The disc opens with a compact repetition of the material from the first disc. The prints are a bit darker, but every one we checked was on both discs. We were reminded of a Tom Stoppard play where the actors pause to perform 'MacBeth' in fifteen minutes flat. Responding to audience applause when they have finished, they do 'MacBeth' again - in sixty seconds.

Video Disc 2 has so many other images. Balloons, airline schedules, logos, World War 2 'nose' art, more photos of pressure guages than you would ever wish to examine in a lifetime, airports, air bases, air museums, air shows, air photography, airline seats, ejection seats, parachutes, the Goodyear blimp, air-mail postage stamps, an air cargo pictorial, air awards, the Victorian dining facilities of the early passenger cruisers, and something called aerobic flying. There is also a cute little art and literature section, with fantasy drawings (some in colour), black & white stills from '2001' and 'My Favorite Martian' etc., and depictions of flight in religion.

The "Aerospace Personalities" division is the most valuable aspect of the disc. You can construct biographies of Amelia Earhart (450 photos) and Charles Lindberg (420 photos) from what has been provided. There are a few questionable inclusions. Literary greats not known for their aerial feats, such as William Thackeray and Dr. Samuel Johnson, show up in a porttrait here and there, yet no picture of Ernest K. Gann, who may not be in the same league but certainly contributed far more to the literature of flight, is included. Every American president of this century is represented, as are other world leaders who by chance strolled past an aeroplane. One of the nicest portraits is of Alexander Graham Bell. He has a bushy white beard and is standing in front of an early flying machine with a child sitting on the wing above Bell's shoulder. The child is wearing Bell's helmet. Knowing what we do today, could any vision of the future be more naturalistic or more promising?

THE PROMISE OF THE LASER DISC'S ABILITY TO STORE VAST NUMBERS OF STILL FRAMES HAS BECOME A REALITY IN THESE AMERICAN NTSC DISCS THAT ARE UNFORTUNATELY INCOMPATIBLE WITH UK PAL LASERVISION PLAYERS. THE PRODUCERS, THE NATIONAL AIR & SPACE MUSEUM WASHINGTON DC, PLAN EVENTUALLY TO TRANSFER THEIR ENTIRE COLLECTION OF 1,000,000 PHOTOGRAPHS ON TO 10 LASER DISCS.

"No More Films On LV ?"

Many readers have been expressing concern at the current state of film releases. Even distributors who previously could have been relied on to come up with new product have been noticeably absent from recent release sheets. Last year's announcement of "800 titles within the year" is beginning to look an increasingly unlikely eventuality. Are the rumours of PHILIPS pulling out of the film market true? Read on.

It will come as no news to readers that the standard of film releases on LV since the launch has been questionable. Some people put it more strongly than that. Continuing on this route is now being seen as a fruitless endeavour by PHILIPS and there is reason to hope that a major re-think on film releases is underway. PHILIPS, in common with most electronics manufacturers, do not see themselves as software producers and would rather leave this to the people who do have the expertise. The trouble is that it is just not feasible to launch a new technology like LaserVision without software support. It is a playback only medium. Up to now PHILIPS have been trying to produce a catalogue of some substance, but substance in their eyes is number related. Quantity of titles has seemed the priority where, in actual fact, quality is what users want. 'Empire Strikes Back' and 'Ben Hur' are each worth ten lesser titles in most people's opinions. This thinking would now appear to be coming apparent to them.

The Survey

In recent months PHILIPS have been conducting a random survey of LV owners covering a huge number of topics (it runs to 20 pages of A4 paper) and selection of program material does figure within it. Of course this magazine's survey also now has produced a set of statistics for them to mull over.

What would conclude this article in the most satisfactory manner would be the intimation of likely future film releases as a result of all this. Unfortunately, things do not work out that way. PHILIPS want the software producers to take greater control of their LV output, which ultimately comes down to money. The impression is given (it is more than an impression, in fact; the film companies don't think they can sell enough discs) that releasing on LV is not worthwhile financially. In respect of some of the titles that have appeared in the past, this is undoubtedly true, but there has to be some give and take in launching these new technologies and this magazine must take the view that it is about time the film companies did start releasing a few of the better titles on LV. Looking at the list of readers requests might bring home to some of the companies the fact that there are some of the older titles that, inspite of the small size of the LaserVision market at present, would probably do better sales on disc than on tape. I mean, how many Hitchcocks and old Musicals do you see in the Tape Rental charts? Not too many.

The Stand-off

So, at present, there would appear to be a stand-off between PHILIPS and many of the film companies. This might be good business but it is not what many people will accept having bought disc players on the expectation (and promise) of future film releases. It would seem too early in the development of the market for PHILIPS to leave it all to the film companies themselves. Even if the film companies bit, one could envisage the sales that could be lost by suppliers preparing their release schedules in isolation and inadvertently swamping the consumer one moment and providing nothing the next. What is crucial at this early stage is to have the market overseen by one distributor, presumably PHILIPS, selecting and scheduling releases in a balanced and organised manner. The recent release sheets have tended to throw too many of the same type of programs at the LV owner in one go. There is a desperate need to reduce the size of the present release sheets to smaller, balanced, and preferably monthly lists. This way the maximum number of discs are sold and it would enable PHILIPS to prepare the release announcements when the tapes are in the factory and mastered, ready for pressing. The bad feeling caused by promised, but undelivered titles causes untold anger amongst owners and dealers. Could you imagine how chaotic it would be if the software companies were to take on their own releasing?

Possibly this is all a bit of an oversimplification, but essentially, it is not on for the apparent method of film releasing to continue as it is (or isn't !). Machine owners are probably going to have to accept a more modest output of film titles than promised in the past - but the crucial thing is that future film releases must be carefully selected and scheduled if LaserVision is ever going to be taken seriously.

The Laser Disc Newsletter

The author of this article, Douglas Pratt, publishes a monthly newsletter that, primarily, deals with reviews of the latest NTSC releases, but also covers many aspects of LaserVision. Douglas' reviews would often appear to be more entertaining than the contents of the films themselves and this densely printed 8 page publication is recommended to anyone who has an NTSC system. Seeing the high calibre of films being released in the USA and Japan may reduce PAL readers to a state of despair, but if you can bear it, the $15.00 annual sub that will ensure monthly delivery of 'The Laser Disc Newsletter' is well worth the price. Single copies are $2.00.

THE LASER DISC NEWSLETTER - Suite 428, 444 Hudson Street, NEW YORK, NY 10014, USA.

####### These names already appear, or are scheduled to appear, stuck on the front of a LaserVision or combined LV/CD player - TEAC, SANSUI, HARMAN-KARDON, HITACHI, MARANTZ, and NAD, though, along with SONY, these will be in NTSC territories only ####### Latest estimates of LV player ownership are 165,000 (Japan) and 150,000 (USA), and both countries boast a catalogue of around 1000 titles ######## CBS/FOX have introduced a replacement scheme for rental dealers "worn-out" tapes ####### At the Japan Electronics Show last October (Tokyo), SONY unveiled its interesting new KV - 27 DXR1 Digital Scan TV that electronically doubles up the number of lines in the TV picture thus giving the illusion of greater definition, and, at the same time, reducing the viewer's awareness of the line structure of the TV picture itself. No news of when a PAL version might appear. Just for the sake of keeping the "on/off new Profeels" story going, there really do appear to be a couple of the new black-screen models on their way. Or then again..... ####### As a consequence of the piece on PIONEER's 'LaserDisc Experience' promotion reported in the last issue (still available from the back-number department), the editor was roped in to pull out the

winning entries in the accompanying 'Find the Frame' competition. The lucky winner was Mr. Shirley, an LD1100 owner, who won a PIONEER audio rack system (no discs?). Mr. Shah, the proprietor (pictured left), congratulates the winner. While the ed was badgering the PIONEER representatives about his theory of world LV domination Mr. Shah had to pop off and order another LV player to fulfill a sale! He also showed me letters from Australia and the USA as a result of the PHOTOSTEREO mention ####### CASIO are now promising a 30cm Flat-screen colour LCD TV for 1986 (NTSC only) ####### THORN-EMI titles to appear on LV! Yes, but only in the USA as yet ####### The much proclaimed ITT digital processing chips designed to replace large quantities of the components in existing TV sets promise, in future developments, to simplify standards conversion in video signals thus making NTSC/PAL compatability an everyday reality. Digital processing also has things to offer for the internal electronics of LV players, indeed all video components ####### COMBINED OPTICAL SYSTEMS of Slough have announced an all-in-one plastic moulded lens system able to replace the intricate mirror/prism assembly currently employed in LV players ####### THORN - EMI are making their (well JVC's) VHD video jukebox available in the UK and Europe, and consequently, are showing up the LV camp with their initiative. Why no laser jukebox, and a bunch of 'Laser 45s' that consumers can buy too? ####### A new abbreviation - VCP (Video Cassette Player) looms on the horizon, Manufacturers now consider there is a market for a playback only tape machine - even though it will not be significantly cheaper than a regular VCR (eg INGERSOLL). But it doesn't record..... ####### In the USA there is a new manufacturer of LaserVision discs - TECHNIDISC. Their first major contract was the WARNER BROS. release of 'Greystoke' ####### Sales of 'Raiders Of The Lost Ark' increased after its Xmas TV showing ####### The BBC showing of 'High Anxiety' in wide-screen apparently did not go down well with a lot of viewers who thought their TV screens were on the blink. This does not really seem a good enough reason for us to put up with badly scanned features on LV

####### 30% of PIONEER's income is reported to come from LaserVision products ####### LASERVIDEO of Chicago, USA have announced a new short run process for LV discs involving a direct photographic type contact print transfer from the master to an emulsion coated disc blank. The resulting discs are compatable with existing LV players ####### SONY's Terre Haute, USA LaserVision disc pressing plant at present under construction and designed to produce 1,000,000 discs a year, has the potential for expansion to 3,000,000 disc output ####### Some interesting Japanese releases (NTSC) are a seven disc aeroplane CAV series. Individual titles are 'Biplanes', 'WW1', 'Lindberg etc', 'The Race For Speed', 'WW2', 'Breaking The Sound Barrier', and a double 'Recap' disc with a commentary by Neil Armstrong. In the 'Railroads Of The World' series (also CAV) are 'England', 'France', 'Africa', 'The Orient Express', 'Japan C62', and again, a double recap 'Steam Locomotives' disc. Ships are covered in a three-disc CLV and two-disc CAV duo. A rocket disc, including rare Russian footage, is also available (CAV). The 1984 Olympics has produced six discs - 'Volleyball', 'Gymnastics', 'Judo & Wrestling', 'Swimming', 'Track & Field Sports', and one on the opening ceremonies. Further 'Digital Sound' releases include another WINDHAM HILL disc (three are now available - 'Water's Path', 'Western Light', 'Autumn Portraits'), a recording of Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons', and a Milt Jackson/Ray Brown 'Midnight Session' disc ####### PHILIPS have recently done a £4,000,000 deal with Lloyds Bank for an interactive LV set up to be used for instructing and training staff ####### 'Brainstorm' and 'Yes Georgio' have both been spoken highly of from a technical quality point of view. Although it would be unwise to make a chance purchase, the following titles in the Winter '84 list should have been in stereo: 'Champions', 'Class Reunion', 'Spinal Tap', 'Underfire', and 'Racoons & the Lost Star'. If these discs appear with stereo marked on the sleeve there is every chance they could be. Cautious readers had best wait till definite confirmation is obtained, but the listed mono 'Yes Georgio' did, in fact, turn up with the stereo soundtrack it should have ####### The approach to Xmas in the USA saw a considerable number of tape titles reduced in price, in some instances lower than the LV disc price. How this is likely to affect future pricing of US laser discs will be interesting to observe. Traditionally disc prices have been less than 50% of the equivalent tape version ####### A few readers wanted to see a LaserVision player with SONY written on the front. Here, from a Japanese brochure, is the best we can manage.

Recent PIONEER Discs

AMERICA: Live In Central Park	- CAV STEREO CX	53 mins.	
	MP 154 - E		£19.95
THE KNACK: Live At Carnegie Hall	- CLV STEREO CX	50 mins.	
	MP 155 - E		£19.95
ORIENTAL DREAMS (Nude Mood Video)	- CAV STEREO CX	43 mins.	
	ME 003 - E		£18.95
BINGO MIKI (Japanese jazz)	- CAV STEREO CX	52 mins.	
	MJ 001 - E		£18.95
MAZE: Happy Feelins/Live in New Orleans	- CLV STEREO CX	57 mins.	
	MP 163 - E		£19.95
HAJIME SAWATARI: By The Sea (Mood)	- CAV STEREO CX	50 mins.	
	ME 004 - E		£18.95
DAVE MASON: Live At Perkins Palace	- CLV STEREO CX	58 mins.	
	MP 164 - E		£19.95
KINGSTON TRIO etc: Meetin' Here	- CLV STEREO CX	107 mins.	
	MP 165 - E		£24.95

[For classical releases, see page 20]

DIGITAL SOUND

What lurks around the corner often provokes curiosity because of its non availability, but in the three months since the last issue the initial novelty of the existence of this combined CD and LV player has subsided - to be replaced by an even greater enthusiasm for the promise it offers for us here, even though , at first glance, the situation might appear a trifle chaotic.

To recap briefly, the decision many years ago by PHILIPS to divorce the LV disc from its little brother, the digitally recorded CD sound disc, has meant that much of the resistance to LV has been not so much towards the system itself but the very concept of 'video-fidelity'. Within audio circles, there is already an acceptance of the need quality in reproduction. To this day, the supposed average man in the street appears to be well satisfied as long as there is a recognisable image visible on the TV screen. Readers of this magazine are not normal people. We have all had a taste of the increased depth brought to the audio-visual experience afforded by LaserVision and inspite of all its little problems and setbacks the arrival of a 'hot' new release, where everything has been got right, pushes all those doubts and criticisms to the further recesses of the mind.

So, if the reality has been that people in general are not interested in video quality, it must surely have been a questionable decision to force the video laser disc to stand alone and fight the battle for its own separate share of the market. This, as yet, NTSC only player available now in Japan and the USA is a reunion long overdue, though its achievement has not been without difficulty. For those readers unaware of the Compact Disc, this audio only laser-read disc shares many similarities with the LV disc but for the significant fact that the information stored on it is in digital code (numbers rather than a fluctuating electrical signal). This type of encoding offers the prospect of audio unblemished by noise, distortion, wow and flutter, and all manner of annoyances encountered in the traditional black-wax record. Recording 'by numbers' means that as long as the number 'gets through' the replay system, there will be no added noise or deterioration in the sound. The comparison with morse code is convenient here - it does not matter how badly you hear the morse code signal the meaning is the same, whereas a bad telephone line ultimately becomes unintelligible. What held back digital audio up to now has been the difficulty of handling the vast quantity of information needed to make it function. The continuing advance of electronics has made digital audio a reality now.

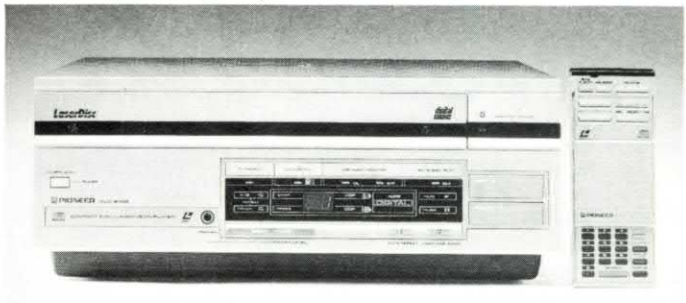
The information density necessary for recording a colour TV signal is yet a step further forward again and we are unlikely to see digital recording of video signals for some time. So we are stuck with analogue video at present. However, the encoding of analogue and digital signals on a laser disc is remarkably similar in principle and though it would have been wrong to restrict the small size and portability of the 12cm CD disc by lumbering it with a cumbersome machine to play it on, there was still no reason not to have a single combined, home player. This is what PIONEER have gone back and done with the CLD 900, but not without considerable difficulties.

Though the same laser is shared to read each disc, LV discs are thicker than CD discs, bigger than CD discs, run at different speeds, weigh different amounts, require more precise tracking control etc.,etc. To achieve a successful marriage of the technologies has involved some ingenious engineering which PIONEER make significant mention in their very informative 8 page US sales leaflet. Normally such brochures gloss over technicalities but PIONEER, who must be justifiably proud of their achievement, have made an excellent job of getting the technicalities involved over in an understandable manner. Here are a few of the more interesting aspects of the machine.

LV discs weigh in at 200 gm, CDs a mere 20gm, and their relative rotational speeds are LV / 1800 - 600 rpm (for NTSC, 60 Hz standard), and CD / 500 - 200 rpm. Thus the loads involved were too different to be accomodated by a single drive motor, and two are used. For the LV disc PIONEER use a high torque brushless motor able to maintain speed accuracy and overcome the effects of air compression at the higher disc speeds. The CD motor is coreless to avoid problems with torque ripples, cogging, and friction. These motors are mounted on what PIONEER refer to as the 'swing mechanism', a geared tracking system able to move the different size and thickness discs the optimum distance from the laser pick-up assembly.

Now CD and LV discs have different size centre holes and in order to clamp each type of disc securely during play, PIONEER deemed it necessary to use two different size clamps, each with its own motor, to do the job properly. Apparently, the small clamp suitable for a CD is not able to cope with the larger and heavier disc.

All these extra motors and mechanisms are obviously what makes the CLD 900 considerably higher than the LD 700 with which it shares a similar overall appearance. In contrast to the mechanical complexities, the electronics of this machine, as far as the user is concerned, are comparitively straightforward and the front panel and remote controls do not appear overtly complicated - many of the buttons serving dual functions. (The remote appears almost identical to the LD 700 remote.) The machine automatically senses the type of disc fed into it and adjusts for type and size (LV only) of disc, and sets the appropriate circuitry into operation. In CD operation the TV screen can display - Track in play/Index number/Elapsed time/Time remaining/Total number of tracks/Total playing time. There is no mention in the leaflet of how the machine may be equipped to deal with graphic CDs which are promised in the near future.



(Silver colour option available in Japan)

All this is interesting enough but the really new thing about this combination player is the ability to play a new type of LV disc - one with a digital soundtrack encoded into it in addition to the usual analogue one. This is really exciting stuff! It would appear that no forethought was given to this expansion of LV when the electronic parameters for CD and LV were set, but by an apparent stroke of good

fortune, there is a convenient gap in the NTSC standard that allows the CD signal to be slotted in. This all sounds a bit too much like PR hype but, regardless, our Americans and Japanese cousins now have a new logo to admire on the front of this combination player.

What would appear to be the very first disc also to carry this logo is (typically) the work of a UK group - King Crimson (yes, well they are now part American but we've got to try and grab some of the glory, eh?). This 90 + minute LaserVision disc 'Three Of A Perfect Pair - Live In Japan' is, as evident in the title, a live concert performance which, apart from a beautifully clear and dynamic CX analogue soundtrack, also contains a 'Digital Sound' CD soundtrack as well . (I have heard the former, but not the latter.) Other discs released in this format so far include two Windham Hill discs (US audiophile label) and there would appear to be the possibility of 'Star Trek 3' being issued this way as well. Adding Digital Sound to LV discs loses about five minutes playing time per side but this film could still be fitted on one disc even with this restriction.

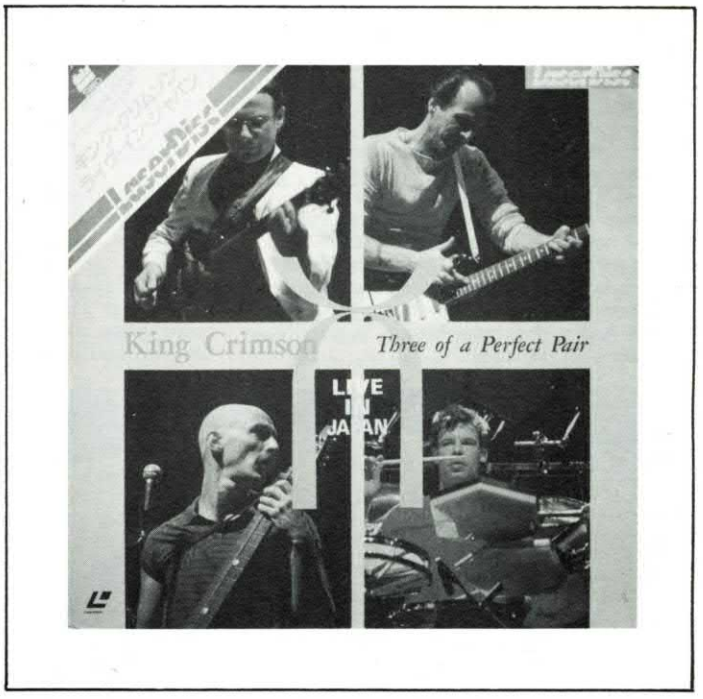
Inspite of its £1000+ price tag the CLD 900 is reported to be selling well in Japan and the USA - the fact that it costs more than the sum of its constituent parts seems to no disincentive to buyers.

Digital Sound here ?

By now you must be wondering when we are going to see this expansion of the LV system here but, sadly, the news is not so good. (This is the "chaotic" bit.) That convenient gap in the NTSC system is not available for exploitation in the European PAL standard, and to get Digital Sound on PAL LV discs would, at first glance, only seem to be attainable by discarding the analogue soundtrack. This would mean that this new type of disc would not play back on an older machine although, conversely, a new player could easily play both types of disc, switching between the two types of soundtrack.

If we leave this obstacle for a moment, there is another interesting possibility afforded by the re-unification of these two laser systems yet to be realised. If you have a machine capable of playing back 30cm discs with digital coding, what is stopping the production of sound-only 30cm 'CDs' able to play back nearly a day's audio? This has been mooted in the past, and what better opportunity than now to bring the LV disc player into every home than to exploit an expansion of the medium such as this. Imagine what a boon such a disc would be for storing long classical pieces and operas. And in the popular field, wouldn't the possibility of having every Beatles LP, or any number of such re-issues of old pop and jazz music on one disc be an irresistible incentive to invest in an LV player? Such discs would exist in unison with CDs which are more suited to portable applications and for topical releases. One is reminded of the story that PHILIP's original specification for CD was for an 11cm and 1 hour disc, but the price of SONY's collaboration in the error-correction aspect of the circuitry was the insistence by boss Akio Morita that the size of the disc be enlarged to 12cm in order to accomodate Beethoven's 9th in its entirety.

And having Digital Sound on LV discs also suggests the possibilty of ignoring the abilty to play CDs. From the description of the CLD 900 it is obvious that a lot of expensive engineering was necessary to achieve disc unity, but you do not need any extra mechanics to incorporate just the new sound on future LV discs - just the extra circuitry, rather in the way that this magazine is plugging away for a dual-standard NTSC/PAL LV player. One could even envisage the ability to use an LV player in tandem with a CD machine, but just using the latter's D/A circuitry. The possibilities are quite intriguing.



It would seem an opportune time for PHILIPS to come up with something new in LaserVision as we now seem to be reaching a point where developments on the horizon for domestic videotape (now in the case of VHS/BETA Hi-Fi) where the quality of LV is going to be challenged and only the price and convenience of the discs will remain. As things stand at present, LaserVision is still out in front as far as quality and permanence is concerned, but the future in electronics has a habit of becoming a reality faster than can often be comfortably predicted.

WARP FACTOR

Quite a few letters received have mentioned excessive player noise when playing certain discs and also some discs refusing to play all the way through - the picture might start breaking up as well as the sound deteriorating before ceasing altogether. This may very well be nothing to do with the player malfunctioning but evidence of a warped disc.

If you have encountered a 'difficult' disc in your machine, try this test. Place the disc on a clean flat surface and see whether both the centre hole inner edge and the outer edge of the disc are all equally in contact at the same time. If you find that you have to press the label area of the disc downwards in order to make contact and conversly, on turning the disc over, you then find the label area makes contact but you have to press the outer edge down to make contact - then the disc is warped.

To remedy this, give the disc a clean (see instruction book), being especially careful to remove any grit, and replace it in the inner sleeve. Leave the disc under a weight of books on a flat surface for a few days, making sure that the books at the bottom the pile cover the entire disc area, the ones further up the pile don't matter so much. Left for a few days, the disc should return to its correct flatness.

In order to avoid a recurrence, ensure that discs are stored vertically, preferably between dividers every 20 or 30 discs, and if your discs do not fill up a compartment - put some packing in to fill the void and do not let them lie diagonally. A choice of storage location away from heat and fluctuations of temperature is also adviseable. Also, do not leave discs lying in the machine for prolonged periods when you have finished playing them. Always return them to their sleeves at the earliest opportunity.

Letter From America

Dwight R. Decker

The 8" music discs have finally begun trickling on to the market proper. PIONEER had been promising at least 50 titles by the end of 1984, but by the end of January no more than a dozen have actually shown up. So far, not all the retailers carry them and the ones that do seem to have severely limited stocks. Perhaps I am too used to LP records but I am finding the 8" discs three and four songs and fifteen minute playing time irritatingly short. Incidentally, most of them are pressed CAV which means the special effects work. It was thanks to the magic of freeze-frame that I accidentally discovered Sheena Easton can open her mouth far wider than should be humanly possible (when she turns to accuse Dracula in the 'Long Distance Love Affair' video). However, the Kim Carnes 8-incher ran 16 minutes, and is pressed CLV. So far, my views on the 8" disc are mixed: they are cheap enough but inconveniently short - not to mention an odd size. There isn't even a good name for them (although I have heard the Japanese call them "Juniors"). My guess is that PIONEER had video juke-boxes in mind for them all the time.

The history of X-rated discs in the US is spotty, to say the least. I don't know about Britain, but pornography was the mainstay of pre-recorded videotapes in the early days of home video here and there seems to be some logic in the argument that porno could help laser discs get established in the same way. After all, if there's anything that demands the clearest possible picture, it would be this stuff. In practice, it hasn't worked out that way. Following the collapse of DISCOVISION in the United States, when PIONEER took over the market, all of PIONEER's discs were pressed in Japan, and local Japanese laws as well as American customs restrictions, precluded X-rated material. The only other major American pressing plant, 3M, wouldn't touch it. So adult discs had to wait until PIONEER established it's own American plant.

The first three X-rated discs were around $70, and subsequent ones settled in around $55 and $60, at a time when most other single-disc movies were $30 and $35. How they are selling. I have no idea, but no new titles have appeared in months. Several new titles have been announced, but they are already overdue and I have heard they will be delayed at least another two months. The rumour is that PIONEER keeps the X-rated discs at bottom priority and bumps them from the schedule when other material comes in for pressing, but I canot vouch for that. Certainly PIONEER makes no official mention of the X-rated discs in any of its own catalogues, and even the discs' jackets themselves do not include the otherwise standard statement of who manufactured them.

The interesting thing about the naughtydiscs is, of course, the fact that side one is generally pressed CLV and side two CAV. Since most of the adult films are less than 90 minutes long, that little trick is feasible, a compromise to the dedicated porno fancier who would probably prefer the entire movie be CAV. Your columnist suggested that someone might select material for CLV and CAV "depending on where most of the 'action' is!". Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. The discs are mastered by filling up side 1 with CLV, and whatever is left over goes on side 2 for CAV, without any real rhyme or reason. Incidentally, at least one non-adult disc has been released with CLV/CAV sides - a new company called DISC FACTORY just came out with an unbelievably bad 'Hercules' movie, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger (apparently made in 1969 on a non-existant budget and unreleased until now, when Schwarzenegger has become something of a star), and since it runs less than 90 minutes, DISC FACTORY has side 2 mastered in CAV. Freeze-frame does have its uses for the prurient here since the movie was so ineptly edited that a frame or two in which the heroine's dress rides high and exposes what you Brits would call her "knickers" was left in, and the frames may be inspected at one's liesure. DISC FACTORY has announced that any of its forthcoming titles that ring in at less than 90 minutes will be done the same way so all those wonderful features on one's disc player might get some use after all. It does raise the question of why more studios don't do the same thing with their longer movies that run to three or four sides. That's assuming they would remember to master the short side/s correctly. I have heard complaints that the X-rated title 'Inside Desiree Cousteau' was inadvertently pressed CLV both sides, even though the jacket and label said different. On the other hand, 'Deep Throat' and 'The Devil In Miss Jones' are both less than an hour, so both sides of the disc are CAV. Really galling to those of us who would like to see the CX noise reduction process used more widely on American discs than it is, both movies have CX as well!

To sum it up, it looks to me that the X-rated discs have not been the sales smash that the releasing companies hoped, nor did they seem to drive very many adult-movie buffs to their video shops to buy disc players. The average porno fan and the average disc buyer are apparently entirely different people.

Early Pressing Problems

One of your readers spoke of problems he had been having with defective discs. I can only hope that PHILIPS have better quality control than PIONEER because disc defects here have been a most vexing problem. First of all, bad discs were in part the reason why the original DISCOVISION floundered. When PIONEER took over and began pressing discs in Japan, the discs were much better, but the defect rate was still far higher than for almost any other consumer product I can think of. Typical problems included a picture washed out by randomn colour speckles and a rhythmic swishing noise on the soundtrack (sometimes called "helicoptering"). Strangely, not all discs in a given press run would be identically defective; if one copy had speckles, the next might not. So customers took their defective discs back to the shops and exchanged them for other copies - retailers sometimes accepted the returns cheerfully, sometimes grudgingly, and had their own troubles getting PIONEER to take the returns for credit. One mail-order dealer told me he was convinced his business survived only because many of his customers either did not realise a speckle-ridden disc was defective or just decided they would rather live with it than go to the effort of sending it back.

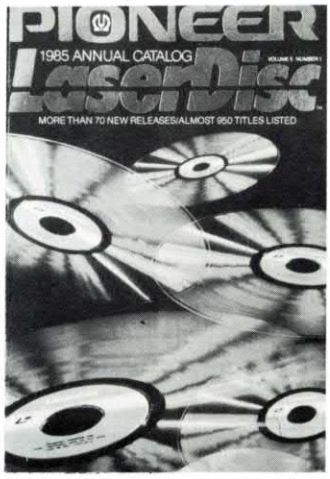
Myself, I had endless problems with defective discs and fighting with retailers over exchanges, and a number of my friends and relatives, who might

have bought disc players of their own after seeing the splendid picture on mine, were scared off by my bad experience. Occasionally I would be tempted to give up LaserVision altogether and settle for the lousy but more consistent quality of tape. For example, when PIONEER established its American operation, taking over the old DISCOVISION plant the defect rate of the first titles to come off the presses went through the roof. 'Never Say Never Again' was one of the most notorious, with at least a third of the discs that reached consumers reportedly defective, but others were not far behind. I went through four copies of 'The Parent Trap' without finding a single good one (it being a two-disc set, I finally had to assemble a good copy from the discs in two different sets), and a friend of mine is currently on his fifth copy of 'War Games' with no success. Overall, I have had to replace close to a third of the 126 discs I've bought in the last two years. Recently though, things have taken a turn for the better and I have been pleasantly surprised to find that the last dozen discs I have bought have all been perfectly acceptable and I haven't had to exchange any. If, at last, PIONEER has learned how to do it right, it could mean that one of the last barriers against wider consumer acceptance of laser discs in this country has been removed. More dealers will stock them and now that they don't have to spend half their time on returns, tape and record clubs might carry them.. ...oh, it is devoutly to be wished!

That brings up another point. Player population in the United States is still quite low (maybe a quarter-million by now, if even that high), while VCRs are selling in the millions. Many people seem unaware that laser discs even exist; those who have heard of video discs seem to be convinced the idea died when RCA pulled the plug on CED discs. Not too long ago, the Wall Street Journal ran an article about PIONEER that was noticeable for its tone of wonder that video discs are still alive somewhere. Articles in the trade press have indicated PIONEER's strategy is something like this: RCA went wrong by trying to make the video disc into a cheap mass system because mass demand isn't there to support economies of scale. Reasoning that laser discs will be appealing mainly to a relative few enthusiasts while everybody else is perfectly happy with VCRs and tape, PIONEER has set up its pricing structure to make money on the discs and players it does sell. Now that rock videos are so popular, perhaps PIONEER is hoping that the $10.99 pricetag of its 8" discs will sell a few more players, particularly to parents of insistent teenagers who can afford the discs if not the hardware, but that remains to be seen. For right now, VCRs are all the rage because they can record, and surprisingly, many people apparently can't even distinguish the difference between tape and disc picture quality. So disc enthusiasts remain a tiny minority. (If I hear somebody say, " But it doesn't record!" just one more time.....)

Greener Grass

Looking through the PHILIPS catalogue I can see that the American disc market has a much larger selection of titles. Most of the titles Keith Arnold listed in his letter he would like to see are already available here or soon will be (with the exception of 'The Music Man', which I am told is embroiled in a copyright suit). That being as it may, I do see some titles in the PHILIPS list that make me ready to run out and buy a PAL player. For instance, 'MGM Cartoon Magic Volume 1', which includes some classic cartoons directed by the legendary Tex Avery. That title has been available here for some time on tape and CED



disc, but has yet to appear on laser. Ridiculous as it may sound, the only example of Avery's unmatched animation work at MGM currently on laser are some very brief clips from the cartoon 'Bad Luck Blackie' glimpsed in the Stray Cats' 'Stray Cat Strut' video on their 8" disc! What marketing decision causes MGM to withhold the title from the American market but release in the UK? 'Superted' is just now showing up here on tape, distributed by DISNEY, with no sign of a disc version (just as well, from what I have seen); DISNEY has also picked up some of the French animation features like 'Asterix' and 'Lucky Luke' for distribution here, but again, only on tape. Wierdly, since HANNA-BARBERA produced it here the 'Top Cat' disc has not been released in this country either. The list includes a number of American movies that aren't on disc here, like 'Goldengirl' and 'Fantastic Voyage'. And the music discs....! I have a friend who would kill for that Stranglers disc if it were only available in NTSC! Myself, I'd love to see the Benny Hill and Kenny Everett discs.

Of course, some titles we don't have are available in Japan, which also uses NTSC. Which is why my copy of 'Fantastic Voyage' has Japanese sub-titles at the bottom of the screen, which can be distracting. Some Japanese editions of American movies are dubbed, but with two audio tracks, the Japanese is put on one track and the original English on the other. Thus 'Dr. Dolittle' doesn't have annoying little squiggles at the bottom of the screen. So far, the only American disc to make use of the bilingual feature is Bergman's 'Fanny & Alexander', with Swedish on one track and English on the other. Unfortunately, it's also subtitled in English and you can't turn the sub-titles off. Worse yet, the phrasing in the sub-titles and the actual spoken dialogue doesn't match! Getting back to Japanese editions, the music discs are hardly affected: the Japanese version of 'Ready, Steady, Go' only uses subtitles for a few brief interviews and the songs are presented uncluttered.

I may eventually invest in a PAL system, and not for just the sake of being able to watch 'David Attenborough Presents British Garden Birds', 'The Queen's Birthday Parade', or 'The Story Of English Furniture'. One of my fields of interests is foreign languages and I have discovered that foreign movies are a wonderful (and painless) way of comprehension of a tongue as she is really spoke. But so far, original-language foreign movies are next too non-existent in this country. At the moment, the only foreign-language discs available here are two in Swedish (both Bergmans) and one in French ('Pardon Mon Affaire' - a terrific movie!). I had to send for the subtitled Japanese version of 'Das Boot' because the American edition is dubbed! In the meantime, I look for German where I can find it, mainly a few lines here and there, as in 'Bednobs and Broomsticks' or in '1941' (although somehow I suspect Christopher Lee isn't a native speaker). One of the latest releases here is 'Mein Kampf', narrated in English, but spoken in German in the archival footage.

Nonetheless, I'm getting awfully tired of Third Reich retreads. What I'd really like would be modern German movies (and I don't mean the Fassbinder stuff - I want light entertainment), or even American movies dubbed into German. Like, say, 'Star Wars'. That's why my heart skipped a beat or two when I saw your reproduction of the German 'M.A.S.H.' sleeve. One of these days I'll have something to play it on.....

NEW USA RELEASES

March looks like having been something of a wallet-buster for space fans. Scheduled for release were 'Star Trek 3' and the VIDEOVISION 'Mars' disc. CAV re-releases of 'The Empire Strikes Back' and 'Star Wars' were promised and, if that's not bad enough, April was the promised start date for the release of the 'Star Trek' TV series - all 79 episodes! The first five discs, two shows per disc, represent the first 10 instalments of the original series. (Episodes 11 & 12 - 'The Menagerie' Parts 1 & 2 already appeared as a one off release last year.) Whether the response to this massive planned reissue will hold out to the very end remains to be seen, but the enterprise shown is admirable.....hold on, may be I should rephrase that. There was an earlier plan to organise a sort of "Trek-of-the-month" staged release, but this now appears to have been dropped in favour of random batches.

Those still in funds might want to buy the disc version of 'Gone With The Wind', taken from a newly found master print and supposedly further enhanced with the addition of a simulated stereo soundtrack. Other recent releases have included 'Top Secret', 'Robin Hood' (DISNEY), 'Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman Vol 2'!, 'The Bounty', 'Once Upon A Time In The West', 'The Natural', and episodes of the 'Victory At Sea' documentary series.

LASER DISC REVIEW

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Lasers Across EUROPE

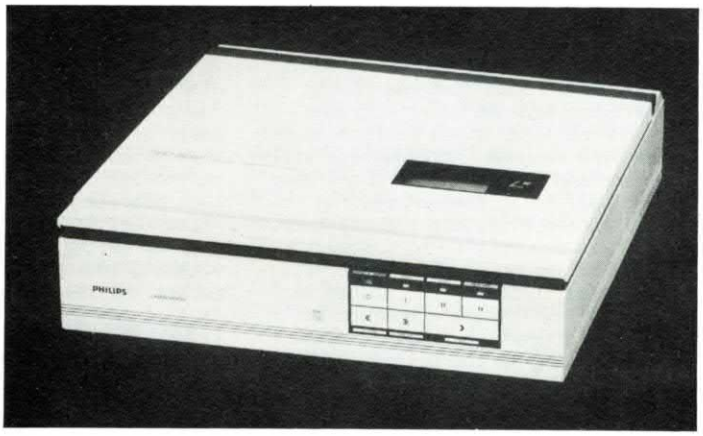
Up to now, most of the overseas news printed in the magazine has dealt with developments in the USA and Japan, countries that have either had LV before us or, more significantly, where LV has taken more of a hold in the market place. Although the benefits of developments in these countries ultimately filter through to us here, the difference in TV systems will always prevent us sharing the latest LV products and discs - that is unless one wants to invest in a separate NTSC player and multi-standard TV monitor. This is something we hope to look at in a future issue, but in the meantime, almost on our own doorstep, LV has been spreading across Europe, and although broadcasting standards in the various European countries are often annoyingly different - when you are dealing with laser discs and pure video and audio signals, all PAL laser discs are interchangeable, even being compatible with the French SECAM system. This means that "the European Catalogue" is theoretically open to us, and vice versa.

So far the success of LaserVision in Europe has been unspectacular. At present it is available in Germany, Switzerland, and Holland. Officially that is. A few words here from Andre Corteil, a LaserVision enthusiast and subscriber to the magazine in a, so far, laserless country - Belgium.

"In Belgium we have three different languages - French, Dutch, and German, so we are dependent on France for software and, as yet, there is no LV there. It should have been launched in France and Belgium in February of this year but a recent announcement in France said that it had been cancelled. There are supposed to be 240 titles ready pressed waiting for release, but there is no news of when they will be available."

"As for my own set-up, I went to Germany two years ago and bought a PHILIPS player - a VLP 720, manufactured in Belgium (laugh here!). I have to import my discs, mainly from the UK but sometimes Holland and Germany, though as I don't understand German their discs are not much use, being nearly all dubbed. The Dutch ones mostly have sub-titles and an English soundtrack, and Holland is only a fifteen minute drive away. I go there twice a month to purchase Compact Discs (and get petrol for the car). Availability of LV discs in Holland is worse than England (Yes, it is possible!). The Dutch discs are manufactured in Germany (at the BERTLEMANS or SONOPRESS plants), England, and Holland (PHILIPS, Eindhoven)."

Now the VLP 720 Andre talks of is a later equivalent of the VLP 700 but with the cosmetic finish, and presumably similar mechanics, of the VLP 830. It lacks the programmability of the 830 and has a rather striking appearance in as much as the lid portion is quite unique to this machine - it is round, rather similar to the lid of a top-loading spin-dryer, and 50% transparent - you can see the disc all the time, only the part of the lid over the laser tracking path is made of solid material. Because LV was launched in the other European countries later than the UK, they have never had the VLP 600/700 models which, again, are manufactured in Belgium. A recent addition to the range is the VP 500, a stripped-down CLV only machine - it doesn't even have an index facility, although it does have pause. If you put a CAV disc in this machine it treats it as a CLV one. The player is very small, just big enough to accomodate the disc - imagine the VLP 830 without the right hand portion (the controls on the VP 500 are on the front). At a guess, looking at these three players (500, 720, 830), they look as though they are based on the same basic internal mechanical arrangement. These players are on sale in all the mainland European laser countries.



In Germany and Switzerland, PIONEER's LD 1100 is available too. As Andre stated, any excitement of finding interesting titles in the German catalogue is somewhat diminished by the prospect of them having dubbed German soundtracks. Why this is done is a mystery. Most people really interested in films tend to prefer sub-titling or even the original language. Dual language would seem the ideal compromise on mono titles, but in reality there are just a few of these. 'American Werewolf In London' is one, but possibly of more interest to us is Charlie Chaplin's 'The Great Dictator'. Again dual-language, but this time French/German is 'Les Enfants Du Paradis', a black and white classic of all 190 minutes duration. Also in the classic mould is a 4-disc Jacques Tati set, priced at a very reasonable 99 DM. (less than £30), and contains 'Playtime', 'Jour De Fete', 'Mon Oncle', and 'Mr. Hulot's Holiday'. Total playing time of this package, unfortunately listed as German only, runs to 377mins. Another, this time understandably, German only release is a collction of 30s comedy shorts by Karl Valentin, a two-disc set running to 240mins, again at 99DM. Our German translator got quite excited about this one.

The bulk of the "Hollywood" material available is from the CBS/FOX stable. Remember, these are all dubbed! 'Anastasia','Battle For The Planet Of The Apes','Butch And Sundance/The Early Years','The Chairman','Demetrius And The Gladiators','The Desert Fox','Escape From The Planet Of The Apes','Escape To Athena','Eyewitness','Firepower','Flight Of The Pheonix','Flim-Flam Man','Gentlemen Prefer Blondes','The Hot Rock','How To Marry A Millionaire','Last Train From Gunhill','Madame Sin','The Magus','The Man In The Iron Mask','My Bodyguard','Our Man Flint','Piranhas 2','Quintet','Russian Roulette','The Sandpebbles','The Seven Year Itch','The Sicilian Clan','The Stuntman' (listed at 120 mins),'The Tamarind Seed','Turning Point','Valley Of The Dolls','Von Ryans Express','Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea','Willie & Phil', and 'Zorba The Greek'. In addition there are titles listed that are also available in the UK. The majority of these discs sell at 59DM.

Feature films on other labels, including what appear to be Euro-productions, include - 'Children Of Sanchez','Raiding Party','Galaxina','Lifespan','Hells Angels','Mean Streets','A Change Of Seasons','Kalter Schweiss' (Bronson),'Teheran 43','Iwo Jima','King Kong (remake, listed at 120mins though)','Who Is Killing The Great Chefs Of Europe','The Final Countdown',

'The Nightporter','Pacific Inferno','Powerplay','Red Sun'(listed at 114mins)','Pontius Pilate','Roar','Drunken Master'(Kung Fu), 'Bermuda Triangle','Cross Of Iron','Cyclone','Yesterday','Earthquake'(Japanese film).

French films dubbed into German - 'Docteur Popoul','La Grande Vadrouille','La Boum','Plein Soleil','Le Choc','Et La Tendresse?...Bordel!','Le Gitan'. Italian films into German - 'L'Ira Di Achille','Django','Gente Di Rispetto','Ulisse','Il Corsaro Nero','Gruppo Di Familia In Un Inferno','La Pelle'.

What's left, mostly German indiginous product - 'Ach Du Lieber Harry','Alles Im Eimer'(both by comedian Dieter Hallervorden),'Als Die Frauen Noch Schwanze Hatten'(Senta Berger),'Die Brucke'(The Bridge),'Car Napping','Die Ehe Der Maria Braun'(Marriage Of .. - Fassbinder),'Der Kongresstanzt','Theo Gegen Den Rest Der Welt'.

In the music category we have the following to ponder - VCL label: 'An Evening With Charles Aznavour', 'Meeting Of The Spirits' (reviewed this issue), 'Tina Turner - Queen Of Rock'n Roll', 'Sunsplash Reggae Part 2'. All CAV. VIDEOFORM: 'Kid Creole - Live Boat Party', 'Meatloaf Live At Wembley'. AR-TEL: 'Sammy Davis - The Golden Years', 'Osmond Bros Special No. 2 / Tom Jones At Knotts' (this latter disc features Ann-Margret, Tim Conway, Rita Coolidge, Kris Kristofferson, Tanya Tucker, Wil Shriner, and Evelyn King). EMI: 'David Gilmour', 'Duran Duran - Live','Howard Carpendale' (local artiste). ATLAS: 'Grace Jones - One Man Show', 'Rolling Stones - Gimme Shelter', 'Hermann Van Veen - Heute Abend', 'Maja Maja'(Maja Plissetskaja, ballet). POLYGRAM: 'James Last Live In London', and 'Peter Maffey - Live '82'. LOFT: 'The Meeting - Chick Corea & Fredrich Gulda', 'Solo Flight - Fredrich Gulda', 'Mozart For The People Vol 1' and 'Vol 2'(both with pianist Gulda again), 'Opus Anders' (described as "a psychodrama, with music by Ursula Anders and, yes, Friedrich Gulda!). UFA: 'Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Concert At Zurich Town Hall' (one of the featured soloists on this being Helmut Schmidt), 'Mozart Requiem' (Bayerischen Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor Sir Colin Davis), and 'Jane Parker-Smith - Spielt Orgelwerke' (Franck, Widour, Vierne organ pieces).

A look at the Special Interest section reveals some more dual-language discs. On the KLETT label are five discs priced at no less than 252DM. (£70) each, but this sort of price is not unusual in the industrial/educational sector where the appeal of these items would mainly lie. Three of these CAV discs comprise a series under the heading ' The Human Being' (Der Mensch) - Vols 1, 2, and 3. Topics such as brain function, memory and learning processes are dealt with. Volume three pays particular attention to environmental aspects using Kalahari tribal living as a model.Hans Hass is listed as producer of this last disc, but no mention of Lotte. In German only are 'Parungs - Und Brutpflegeverhalten Bei Tieren' (genealogical aspects of different species), and 'Aus Dem Leben Der Tiere' (Animal adaptation to the environment). Anothe KLETT disc at, for them, a bargain price (148DM.) is the dual-language 'Hund and Mensch' (human/animal relationships).

In a more popular vein is Erwin Leiser's 'Mein Kampf' documentary (ATLAS), and on POLYGRAM, 'Berlin - Stunde 0', a CAV documentary disc on the last battles for Berlin in 1945. AR-TEL has the 90min documentary on the famous Leningrad museum - the Eremitage (Die Eremitage) with Peter Ustinov and Natalie Wood. This disc is listed as in German only and in CAV, but no mention of it being a two-disc set so something would appear not quite right here. UFA have a Sydne Rome 'Aerobic - Fitness Dancing' disc and there are some instructional sports discs of which 'Windsurfing', VIDEAL, demands attention, being another CAV dual-language item. On LANGENSCHEIDT is 'Switch On', an English learning course. For some odd reason the Philip Glass accompanied 'Koyaanisqatsi' disc is in the special interest section. This is another disc that would be equally of interest to non German speakers as the film is a music only piece.

In the children's field, the SELECT dual-language cartoons we have here are predictably out in Germany. 'Animal Farm' (Halas-Batchelor) is listed and a couple of 'Tintins'. Also 'Watership Down' which I know somebody was interested in for the Garfunkel musical contribution it carries.

No doubt some other interesting items have slipped through the net this time, indeed, I have just realised the omission of photographer David Hamilton's 'Bilitis' film and Euro-western 'Beichtet Freunde Halleluja Kommt' but condensing a 100 page catalogue into half a page inevitably tempts such oversights. The information all comes from a 1984 edition of the catalogue which proclaims "over 300 titles" and I believe there are now more, so we will no doubt return to this country's laser disc releases in a future issue.

Holland offers far more of interest to us English speakers providing you do not take exception to the presence of Dutch sub-titles at the foot of your screen. Most of the CBS/FOX titles, of which again there is a substantial proportion, are not all the ones in the German catalogue that you would like to see out here. They are all virtually duplicates of the UK catalogue. As the Dutch list makes no reference to an issuing label we have not made any assumptions in this respect. Sometimes, for contractual reasons, issuing rights for films vary from country to country.

'Alcatraz 1', 'Alcatraz 2', 'Aligator', 'The Big Boss', 'Bobby Jo & The Outlaw', 'Carney' , 'Daybreakers', 'Desperate Voyage', 'Diernewereld In Noord Amerika', 'Enter The Devil', 'Escape To Athena', 'Firepower', 'Fist Of Fury', 'Game Of Death', 'The Glove', 'A Gun In The House', 'Hombre', 'Julius Caesar', 'Killerfist', 'Lucky Touch', 'Murder In Texas - 1', 'Murder In Texas - 2', 'Planet of Dinosaurs', 'Promise Of Love', 'Red Neck', 'Rivkin: Bountyhunter', 'Savage Hunt', 'Shogun Assassin', 'Suicides Wife', 'Tamarind Seed', 'Taste Of Hell', 'Title Shot', 'Tourist Trap','Valley Of The Dolls', 'Virus', 'Way Of The Dragon', 'World War 3 - Pt.1', 'World War 3 - Pt. 2 ', 'Zorba The Greek', 'Caligula' (158 mins), and 'Tiroler Slippertjes'.

French films with Dutch sub-titles are - 'Een Bataljon Malle Meiden', 'Bilitis', 'Borsalino', 'Deux Hommes Dans La Ville', and 'Toubib'

In Dutch only are - 'Bakken Aan De Bar', 'Het Beest', 'Het Debuut', 'Een Vrouw Als Eva', 'Ik Ben Joep Meloen', 'Mysteries', 'Sabine', 'Elckerlyc', 'Lieve Jongens', 'Mariken Van Nieumeghen'.

The Childrens section also contains ten or so Dutch language only discs plus a few dual language Dutch/German items. In English but with Dutch sub-titles is 'Clowns Magic Sensations' which would appear to feature Russian circus clowns.(60 mins, CLV). In a separate section, in a list of titles on the VIDEO MEDIA label, are no less than 100 CAV cartoon discs - all under 30 minutes duration and selling for fl. 49-.These are all English language with Dutch subtitles and include such as 'Lone Ranger', 'Groovie Ghoulies', 'Archie TV Funnies', 'Fat Albert', 'Jason Of The Star Command', 'Lassie', 'Shazam', 'Space Academy', 'Zorro', etc, etc.

When we put the photograph of one of the 'Playboy Collector's Series' discs on the back of the last issue we had to use an American NTSC disc but, in fact, the first volume of this series is apparently available in Holland too, again in English with sub-titles.

The Music department is very much a combination of what's available in Germany and the UK and one can appreciate the mastering economies involved in issuing music titles and as well as the pop titles the complete range of the Arts International discs is available (as in Germany too). Special Interest is the smallest section of the Dutch list and only Golfers (Allis), Tennis players (Horwood), and Windsurfers (the German disc) are catered for. However, a late arrival at Laser HQ was a brochure from the VIDEO GARANT people who would appear to be about to issue 'The World At War' THAMES TV series on 13 discs - two shows per disc. This is a simultaneous release with the tape issue and both versions carry the same price - fl 79-. It is not possible to tell whether these will carry an English language soundtrack but hopefully news of this will follow in a future issue.

Indeed, we shall certainly return to both German and Dutch Catalogues as new discs appear.

Classical Music On LV

by Stan Eastwood

PHILIPS will be highly delighted at the way in which their Compact Disc system has blossomed - and more than likely a little dispirited by the apparent sloth of the LaserVision take-off. That LV is struggling to gain an adequate foothold is hardly surprising as there appears to have been little foresight employed by anyone in the earlier developmental stages of both systems. Persons with vision might have judged that the best results could have been achieved by concentrating on the superlative reproduction in sound and pictures of all kinds of music. There seems to be no earthly reason why the two systems could not have been developed in harness, thus offering prospective customers just one player capable of reproducing both LV and sound only discs.

In my view PHILIPS should have poured their creative and promotional effort into getting LV initially established as a music disc. With stereophonic sound in their corner they would have been well armed and able to take on the videotape competition - and win! Later movie reproduction on disc would have been seen as an added bonus - but always with the benefit of stereosound. What is the point of merely duplicating the tape market? Why advertise superior sound and then fail to provide any?

To come to the specific subject of classical music on LV it is at once obvious that the 'serious music' enthusiast is very poorly served. And in view of the potential of the LV disc this neglect is astonishing. One has to be grateful for the recent release of much opera & ballet, but my preference is for symphonic repertoire and there are only five discs of this type in the current catalogue. The reason for this remiss state of affairs must have to do with the powers that be not readily accepting the capabilities of the medium. I am quite certain that music fans would much prefer their stereo discs to have the added dimension of being able to watch the performers as well. And any audio only buffs there might be would simply refrain from turning on the telly!

It cannot be that there is a shortage of product. 'Popular' artistes go to enormous expense to produce imaginative filmlets they call 'videos' - these being pictures to promote and accompany their 45 rpm single releases. The availability of a LaserVision pop single would widen their market and expand the sales of the laser disc generally. Coming back to symphonic music, anyone believing that one would not care to watch a symphony orchestra performing repeatedly simply does not know the concert hall. Watching enhances the pleasure, increases concentration and appreciation and provides a greater sense of occasion.

Any music enthusiast who watched and enjoyed Bernard Haitink conducting Mahler's Third Symphony, Simon Rattle's riveting interpretation of the same composer's Tenth, Celibadache's recent helming of Bruckner's Fourth, and the many masterworks conducted by Andre Previn in last year (all these on BBC TV) would be happy to buy and live with these fine performances and would readily repeat the thoroughly engrossing artistic experiences at suitable intervals thereafter. I have asked the BBC about putting some of this material on LV. They say no. In some instances there may be contractual reasons, but where no obstacle exists the opportunities should be grasped. After all, a growth market cannot have a hope in hell if the substance with which to nurture it is not made available. If they could be convinced, a worthwhile beginning might be accomplished. And then THE GRAMOPHONE and other important hi-fi magazines would almost certainly be enthusiastically behind them.

Of the five available discs (as of February 1985) I have purchased two, and these are reviewed below.

Back Numbers

Issues 1 & 2 are still available from the back-number department @ £1.00 each, including postage (only 90p for subscribers).

ISSUE 1 has a brief history of LaserVision in the USA and the UK, plus disc reviews.

ISSUE 2 contains a feature on the PHILIPS VLP 600/700 players and the PIONEER LD 1100, recent developments in the USA & Japan, and, more disc reviews.

new releases

BEETHOVEN 9th SYMPHONY D minor Opus 125

Wolfgang Sawallisch

CLV STEREO CX 70min. MC 035 - E £ 24.95

DVORAK'S SLAVONIC DANCES Opus 46/72

Zdenek Kosler

CLV STEREO CX 80 min. MC 037 - E £ 24.95

DVORAK CELLO CONCERTO B minor Opus 104

Vaclav Neumann

CAV STEREO CX 41 min. MC 038 - E £ 18.95

BEETHOVEN VIOLIN CONCERTO in D Opus 61

This is beautifully performed by Itzhak Perlman and The Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Carlo Maria Guilini and ranks as the best of the two. I have no CD experience as yet so am unable to compare the sound, but it rests agreeably on mine ear, seemingly perfectly acceptable and of high quality. The camera stays with the soloist, the orchestra and individual members of it, much as it does when symphonic works are broadcast on television. This affords greater presence and some of the feeling of involvment one might expect to gain from sitting in a concert hall. Perlman's performance is an absolute sizzler, especially so when he gets into the Fritz Kreisler cadenzas. There is little, if any, discernible stereophonic split, and though one might expect to hear the violins on the left and the double basses on the right this does not appear to be evident. Perhaps the mobile camera is the reason. Whatever, one's enjoyment is not impaired. The photography is a little fuzzy as though soft-focus had been employed, but this is no detriment either. The overall presentation (by PMI) is suitably dignified and impressive, and at £9.99 I feel there can be little cause for complaint, especially as one might expect to pay the same price for the same performance on CD and not be able to watch the marvellous artistes. A bargain!

PMI 90 0493 1

DVORAK'S SYMPHONY C 9e Moll

This very popular work is played by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under Vaclav Neumann who, most of the time, looks a little bored with the proceedings. It was recorded in the Dvorak Hall in the House of Artists, Prague, itself a slightly dismal seeming venue. Perhaps a live audience would have helped. The music is, of course, very beautiful and exciting and the performance spirited, but there is a discernible tape hiss. I actually played my old-fashioned (!) black LP at the same time, and in flipping between one sound and the other, it has to be confessed, the sound of my Eugene Ormandy/London Symphony Orchestra version is infinitely brighter. There is not the sense of audience participation here as the cameramen display little flair. Inside the hall the director does not readily single out solo performers and tends to keep us back from the orchestra. Also different is the fact that that we keep leaving the hall entirely to take brief glimpses of the Czech countryside, Dvorak's birthplace and his beloved cottage (and presumably his cradle of creativity) at Vysoka. Some of the imagery is without explanation on the film or on the disc sleeve. One is therefore left to guess at any supposed symbolism. Why does the camera swoop around what looks like a plate of apfel strudel? What is the old grey car the cameraman seems to favour? Another more serious minus is the fact that the 42 minute work is split over the two sides of this CAV disc. After the first two movements we are told we have reached the end of side one and when the disc is flipped we are again informed that this is side two - to the accompaniment of music - in the middle of a symphony! This is just as much an annoyance as it would be if a voice announced the beginnings and endings of LP records. People are intelligent enough as to distinguish between sides - as indicated by the label. Also there would seem little reason for issuing this as a CAV disc for I cannot imagine anyone wanting to halt symphonic music in full spate. It looks like the PIONEER people have much to learn as this disc also offers poor value for money, it being twice as much as the Beethoven.

PIONEER MC 036-E

REVIEWS

First off a note for new readers and possibly non-owners of LaserVision machines. Normal video reviews deal with the content of the programme and little else. As LaserVision is the first domestic replay system to offer the prospect of a standard of video fidelity comparable to broadcast pictures, something more substantial seemed in order. With tape one cannot be too choosy. Even if you start off with a reasonable tape it will not match an LV disc, and repeated playing will gradually erode tape quality. LV discs are in a different league, and indeed, many of the film discs so far released have been below expectations due to the use of master tapes that, though considered good enough for tape duplication, fall down badly when pressed on to a laser disc. The shortfall in master quality is there for all to see, something that is masked by the inherent restricted range of domestic videotape.

So, the reviews in this magazine place technical merit first. Plot considerations, in the case of feature films, are secondary. We don't want to spoil any surprise for you on the first viewing of your disc, even though you will probably end up seeing it many times, and this aspect is given some special thought in the reviews. Opinions on content are expressed in the reviews (this is inevitable), and should be remembered as such. We have sufficient respect for our readers to believe that they know their own tastes and it is not our aim to impose our opinions.

A grading system is currently in use which, though not ideally satisfactory, short term seems the best means of getting a representation of quality across via the printed page. The grading letters are split into two pairs. The first pair relate to master quality of the film print/video master in use and is not meant to be an assessment of the original production (though there is an inevitable blurring of such boundaries). The second pair of grades relate to what happens in the pressing plant and deal with disc pressing quality (video/audio). Sometimes disc defects are easily identifiable but there is always bound to be a tendency for the pressing grades to be affected by the level of master quality. It is very hard to give an 'A' audio pressing grade if the master is a 'B' or a 'C', even if the pressing is without fault. One can only make intelligent guesses in these matters.

What the letters mean: 'B' grades are to be regarded as average and, though open to improvement, should be acceptable to most people. When something seems that little bit special 'A' grades are in order. 'C' grades indicate a level of dissatisfaction, although this will very much depend on personal taste. Many 'C' grade discs are found to be quite satisfactory by some readers. 'D' is a reject grade and applies, in practice, only to master quality. A 'D' grade pressing should be returned for replacement and we have not yet come across a 'D' grade pressing that could not be improved upon. There are some 'D' grade masters that could definitely be improved upon. Remember - these discs are designed for extended viewing and minor defects acceptable on a once only viewing can become totally unacceptable on repeated watching and listening.

As all this attention to video fidelity is a bit of a novelty, it will no doubt take a short time for everyone to reach a common level of assessment, but present experience would indicate that most discs so far reviewed have been accurate within a grade, so we must be getting somewhere. One complication is the continuing improvement in the world of electronics. Now that people have realised the potential quality of the audio aspect of video recordings (both disc and tape) when combining their hi-fi and video systems, there can occur an unrealistic expectancy of hi-fi in many film soundtracks. Many quite recent films have not really catered for this higher standard of home reproduction equipment (often better than a lot of cinemas!), and it must be borne in mind that film soundtracks are not generally up to the standard of music masters. When grading discs the judgement is more severe on music discs than on films.

Readers report varying levels of satisfaction with the pressings they have received. As previously stated, defective pressings can invariably be replaced for satisfactory ones. This option is not available for master defects and, unfortunately, there are some film titles on LV that cannot be considered of acceptable quality. Readers whose tastes are for music discs report a far higher level of acceptance than film fans, and it would seem reasonable to believe that the lesser quality of the film masters is a significant factor in this. Perversly, many of the 'bigger' film titles often provoke the greatest dissatisfaction whereas many of the too many B-features in the LV Catalogue justify their existence for the excellent technical quality some of them possess. Now, if we could only change things the other way around.....

Early pressings commonly produced line dropout and blue flecking but last year the Blackburn pressing plant (where most of the UK discs are pressed) changed over to an injection moulding process that appears to have alleviated many of these characteristics - the newer discs seem crisper too. (The older pressings are visibly 'gold' in colour, the newer ones more 'silver'.) However, this new process does seem to have introduced another set of defects - small white spots being the most significant. These have been around before but they now appear to be all that is holding back the generally improved nature of the new process. These spots can vary significantly from disc to disc and depending on the nature of the programme (dark scenes are obviously troublesome) can provoke a request for replacement.

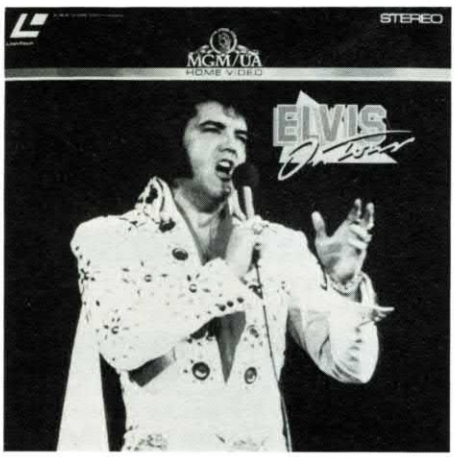
Indeed, if you find that your copy of a disc is markedly different from the reviewed copy it would be adviseable to consult your dealer and possibly seek replacement. Streaking of various descriptions can also be a sample defect and not indicative of an entire batch. Two of the best discs so far reviewed ('48 Hrs.' & 'Fleetwood Mac') have produced incredulous responses from two readers who have had sample defects of these titles. We are dealing with a new technology here and it is one of the aims of this magazine to isolate sample defects from batch defects. Everyone stands to benefit from a progressive improvement in disc quality.

Coincidental with the change in pressing process a few titles produced last year have broken out in multi-coloured flecks - 'Poltergeist' being the prime example. This problem appears now to have been eliminated (this was another reason for the disruption in supplies last year) but owners are recommended to check copies of 'The Thing', 'Charlie Brown', 'Flight Of The Dragon', 'VideoHits', and 'Ready, Steady, Go' for signs. The problem normally occurs at the top of the picture and the flecks are red and green as well as blue. Return any defective disc to your dealer. Interestingly, this problem also seems to have cropped up in the USA too last year, and it would appear that an adhesive used for bonding the two sides of the discs together was the culprit.

One aspect of reviewing discs currently upsetting the grading system is the incompatability often encountered between the audio and video of certain music discs - see this month's review of Dire Straits 'Alchemy'. The Barclay James Harvest 'Berlin' disc previously reviewed had , to all intents and purposes, a definite 'A' grade soundtrack but synchronised badly and sounded 'unrelated' to the video. Likewise the Rush 'Exit Stage Left' disc which has so far defied an attempt to review for a similar reason - studio quality 'A' grade audio but you think you are looking at a different group on the screen! Do readers have any views on this , it would be interesting to know?

In conclusion, if any of the terminology resorted to in these reviews causes confusion do let us know. And, as we have had some requests for this, in the next issue we will try and include the BBFC ratings in the reviews. It will not be 100% as many sleeves do not carry the information , but we will print the details of the ones that do.

ELVIS ON TOUR



MGM / UA UMLV 10153			£ 9.99
CLV			
COLOUR	STEREO	89 mins	1972

Produced & Directed by: Pierre Adidge & Robert Abel.

Side 1: CC Rider/Polk-Salad Annie/Separate Ways/ Proud Mary/Never Been To Spain/Burnin' Love/+ off-stage gospel medley.

Side 2: Bridge Over Troubled Water/Funny How Time Slips Away/American Trilogy/I Got A Woman/ Big Hunk Of Love/You Gave Me A Mountain/ Lawdy Miss Clawdy/Can't Help Falling In Love.

(Only complete songs are listed)

Should you be one of those who take the view that Elvis' artistic development ended when he joined the army, or worse still, that his only contribution to changing the face of popular culture was achieved in the SUN studios in Memphis - then viewing his indifferent film output can be a frustrating experience. If only.....

But we have to deal with reality, and this 1972 documentary type feature film was part of a refreshing, if tardy, change of direction in his latter period, produced concurrently with a return to 'live' performing and the recording of new songs that did not rely on a thinly scripted film to justify their existence.

A follow-up to 'That's The Way It Is' , here we follow Elvis on a USA tour (where else!) - it's the whole works: a large orchestra, male and female backing singers, and, the hub of the experience, a small electric instrumental group headed by lead guitarist James Burton. Most of the concert performances are pretty good. There is not much trading on former glories as far as the choice of songs goes - it's mostly modern material. There are some oldies - like 'Big Hunk Of Love' which gets a new arrangement (let down a little by the heavyhandidness of the orchestra) - but you get the impression that Elvis wanted to do something new here.

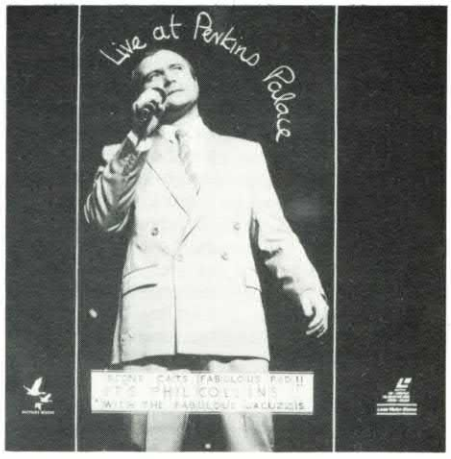
There are odd moments of indulgence in the documentary aspect but providing you can cope with the inevitable and oft' heard "Ooh, Elvis, Elvis" shouts of the adoring fans this is all quite watchable. Most of the time the screen is split into three separate pictures running simultaneously (so the disc is good for three plays, at least!) which means you get a black strip top and bottom and the resulting picture is relatively small but the detail afforded by the laser disc shows everything adequately. Sometimes, mainly in the first part of the film, individual frames of the split screen are are blown up to full screen and they are pretty grainy, but these are mostly the documentary portions and perfectly acceptable for the 'cinema-verite' style of production.

You do not need to be an Elvis fan to watch this and enjoy it. For me, the price of this disc is justified by the inclusion of a B&W excerpt from a 1956 Ed Sullivan show where we see Elvis, Scotty, Bill, D.J., and the Jordinaires blasting through a rendition of 'Reddy Teddy'. Everything of the Elvis/ Rock'n Roll phenomenon is encapsulated in these two minutes and it is interesting to compare the obvious enjoyment on the faces of the Jordanaires with those of the contemporary shots of the backing artistes. You get the feeling that they would be on this tour whether they were going to get paid for it or not. There are some off-stage gospel sing-a-longs that press this point further and might offer you a new perspective on the man. In the closing moments of the film the MC announces to the audience "Elvis has left the building". Sadly, he has.

Picture quality of the master is good though maybe could have been a little better still. Sound is generally good too bar a little hiss now and then, possibly just the faders being pushed up and down on individual mikes - you only notice it on certain points in some of the songs. The end of side one comes on you a bit abruptly. Pressing is good and I would only really make an issue of a rather noticeable dose of white speckling throughout and in this respect I would hope your copy is a little cleaner!

[B- / B] [B- / B]

PHIL COLLINS Live At Perkins Palace



PMI 90 1963 1			£ 9.99
CLV		Chapter Search	
COLOUR	STEREO	57 mins	1983

Side 1: I Don't Care Anymore / I Cannot Believe It's True / Thru These Walls / I Missed Again / Behind The Lines / The Roof Is Leaking / The West Side / In The Air Tonight / You Can't Hurry Love / It Don't Matter To Me / People Get Ready

If I was Phil Collins I would have walked off the stage after 'I Don't Care Anymore'. You'd be pushing your luck to maintain this level of performance another sixty minutes. Phil Collins does. This live concert from Pasadena, California shows Phil with a hot US backing group and the whole thing is about as good a compromise between studio fidelity and the live situation as one could hope for. Whatever your views on Phil Collins (I'm no fan myself), this disc is a winner on content and, save for the pressing having a good few more speckles and spots than it should (Again! - I tried two copies but the second was only marginally better) on technical merit too.

The show was originated on tape rather than film (presumably NTSC though the quality seems too good - have we been misled?), and there is a hint of video lag on the transfer when any movement occurs, but after the opening couple of songs it didn't seem to intrude too much. There are times when you will need to adjust the brightness control on the TV to compensate for changes in light level in the master-tape. Hiss is audible on the soundtrack but is mostly lost in the music; it could have been a little less prominent all the same. Video/audio sync is perfect. The overall presentation and staging is wonderfully immediate.

This disc was recommended by subscriber Jason Deane who has been with LV from the start and should know better than get excited about a new release by now, but having seen and enjoyed this disc myself I can see how this one would compensate for a lot of the lesser issues. Fan or not, you should get to see this disc too.

The grading is of the disc as seen. If you get a copy without the speckling it might even qualify for an A grading on video/pressing. These speckles do seem to be sample faults rather than in the master so you might be luckier than me.

[B+ / A-] [C / A-]

ROD STEWART Tonight He's Yours

EMBASSY ELV 1211			£ 9.99
CLV			
COLOUR	STEREO	90 mins	1982

Side 1: Gi' Me Wings / Sweet Little Rock & Roller / Tear It Up / Passion / She Won't Dance With Me / You're In My Heart / Rock My Plimsole / Get Back / Hot Legs

Side 2: Young Turks / If Loving You Is Wrong / Tora Tora Tora / Maggie May / D'ya Think I'm Sexy? / I Was Only Joking / You Wear It Well / The Wild Side Of Life

Of the two recent (thinking on we must be talking about five years, I suppose. Time flies!) US Rod Stewart concerts broadcast here, this EMBASSY disc taken from a December,1981 Los Angeles Forum show, is the latter. There is something of a lack of urgency in the performance and halfway through side one you get to wonder if the group are going to make it through side two. (As a little aside, on the first copy of this disc I had they didn't! On the other side was half of Brian de Palma's 'The Fury', made somewhat more interest-

ing than usual inasmuch as it was a Dutch sub-titled version with the Dutch translation at the foot of the screen cotained in a neat little black box.)

Anyway, back to Rod. If not inspired, the camera work is adequate. Most of the shooting is done from a distance with long-focus lenses so it appears very much as you would experience the concert in real-life. You do get close-ups but the image is a bit two-dimensional. The end of side one livens up with some Tina Turner duets on 'Get Back' and 'Hot Legs', but over on side two that lethargy creeps back. Rod adds a little humour to the proceedings with various between song comments - "Let's do this one and see if it's any good... if it's not we'll go 'ome" /"Oi! You're late mate....You're bleedin' late"/ "On harmonica, Jim Zavala, in unfortunate

braces and trousers, and does the group's ironing". That apart, it would appear everyone is just a little short on that extra bit of energy called for by the occasion.

Judging disc quality, everything would seem to be in order. The original master is OK though some may quibble with the sound balance but the show would seem to have been a live telecast and therefore the sound mixing could very likely have been done live too. The balance is a bit uninspired at times. All in all I was happy with the pressing - nothing special but what one might term a 'reliable' piece of work. My final comment would only be that I think I would have preferred the disc to contain the earlier concert.

[B / B] [B / B]

THE BEST OF BENNY HILL Vol 1

THAMES	90-6203-5		£11.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	111 mins	1982

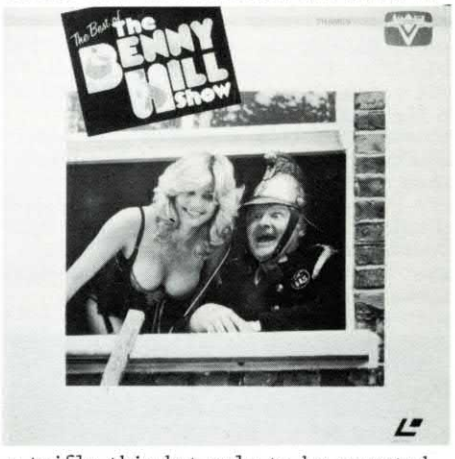
Risking a total loss of credibility amongst the readership I would admit to a distinct liking for Benny Hill. A while back it did seem that the re-use of old material was rather excessive in relation to his output, but he has been somewhat more prolific in the last ten years and the old jokes in new guise get lost in the crowd.

On this Thames compilation disc I found I much preferred the studio pieces - Fred Scuttle still works for me, and I always love the American family sketches he does. There is not enough of either here. The unintelligible Chinaman is here, though I can recall better sketches. The sped-up film sequences wear thin pretty quickly I find, and I could have done with a lot less of these as well as the rather over prominent audience response which one might argue is bearable on a once-off viewing through TV speakers (I do not accept that stance even) but the vividness of the laser disc is obviously a lot more than the original production team bargained on. I could drone on endlessly on my dislike for canned laughter but, suffice it to say, the only justification I can see for it here is to cope with the occasional need for Benny to play several costume parts in the same sketch.

This is all sounding terribly critical but the disc was a bit of a disappointment to me as it really is just a two hour Benny Hill Show, and not the "Best Of..." edition it purports to be. It would be nice to see more TV comedy on disc but the selection and editing must be tighter than this if one is going to end up with something that will stand repeated viewing. To this end, a clown sketch on side two that didn't really register on broadcast worked far better as part of this compilation. Predictably, there is the normal quota of scantily-clad suggestive dance routines - most of them performed by Benny and the male members of the cast!

There are other volumes of this series out on tape but compiled like this I would not rate them for disc issue - let's have something more thoughtfully compiled for the laser.

Certainly not short (*) on playing time (though side two finishes at 0 - 54 yet the disc continues to play for another 2½ minutes with a blank screen - the correct playing time is closer to 111 mins overall) the pressing is only very slightly grainy with little else to criticise. The sound is



a trifle thin but only to be expected from this type of large set TV production. The original video master is very good (the filmed segments are of lesser quality) and the disc is pressed to such a standard that, in this instance, you really would think you were watching a good broadcast signal.

* The tape version of this disc is listed at 120 minutes.

[A- / A-] [B+ / A-]

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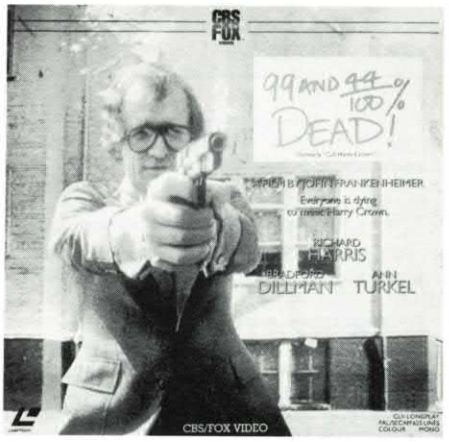

CBS - FOX	1158 - 70		£13.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	98 mins	1974

Featuring: Richard Harris, Edmund O'Brien, Bradford Dillman, Chuck Connors, Ann Turkel

Director: John Frankenheimer

One might understandably be a liitle suspicious as to why anyone would want to change a film's title after it had been released. The previous one 'Call Harry Crown' would seem to be no impediment to success. Anyway, it was the sight of Edmund O'Brien 's name on the cast list that drew me to this gangster movie send-up. He plays Frank, a mob boss, out to defend his empire against rival Big Eddie, Bradford Dillman, and Harry Crown, Richard Harris, is the hired gun Frank calls on for help.

The casting of Richard Harris in this saga of everyday American gangster life must be open to question. He performs adequately but often doesn't seem to be appearing in the same film as the rest of the cast. Edmund O'Brien puts in his usual standard of performance but it is really only Bradford Dillman who sparkles and, towards the end of the film especially, you realise that this is probably how the mood of the whole film should have been pitched.

At the risk of spoiling anyone's enjoyment of the film, I can't help but comment on Chuck Connor's character - Claw. Supposedly an amputee, in one scene you get to see him in shirt sleeves and yet his 'bad' arm is decidedly longer than the other!

Originally shot in wide-screen format, there are the usual number of instances where the definition of the video transfer varies and you do get some rather strangely composed close-ups. Colour is a bit weak and overall definition unremarkable. Sound is OK, if a little hissy, and the sync is a bit off. Nothing too special here, I'm afraid. Maybe I can see why they changed the title.

[C+ / B-] [B- / B]

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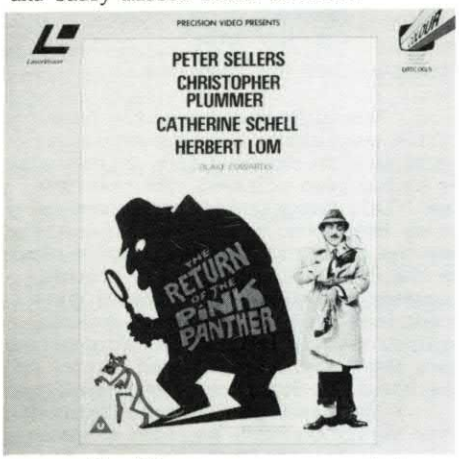
RETURN OF THE PINK PANTHER

PRECISION	LVITC 0015		£13.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	108 mins	1975

Featuring: Peter Sellers, Christopher Plummer, Catherine Schell, Herbert Lom.

Produced & Directed by: Blake Edwards.

The second film in this successful series, and in my opinion the funniest. 'The Pink Panther', which started it all, established Peter Sellers as the bungling Inspector Clouseau and one would hope that this, along with the third, 'The Pink Panther Strikes Again', will appear on LV in the future. (Warners hold the rights to these.) After '...Strikes Again' the series went stale and the last film 'The Curse Of The Pink Panther' was not as successful. I suspect due to the absence of the late and sadly missed Peter Sellers.



The film opens as we are being taken on a guided tour of the museum where the Pink Panther diamond is held. We are then treated to that superb animated title sequence (also the famous Pink Panther theme!). One night the impregnable security systems are breached by a black hooded figure, the Pink Panther is stolen, and the thief leaves his 'glove' calling card. Is the famous Sir Charles Linden up to his tricks again?

Meanwhile, Inspector Clouseau aids a bank robbery, drives the Police Chief to shoot off his nose, and gets himself dismissed from the Police force - all in one afternoon! On his return home he is ambushed by Cato, his Chinese housekeeper (watch out for the obvious stunt double). The Shah of Lugash himself demands Clouseau be put on the case and a bomb is promptly delivered to Clouseau's home - watch out for the wires attached to the old lady's chair as the bomb goes off! (You would think something would be done to remedy this giveaway.) In his own clumsy style, Clouseau then proceeds to unravel the mystery.

I must admit to always enjoying this film and if you are a Sellers' fan it is a must for your LV collection. I was a liitle disappointed in the picture quality of this disc. On the darker scenes light leaks creep in at the top and bottom of the frame, and the original master is a little grainy (the film is scanned, rather clumsily in parts). The contrast is a little low and I would suggest the colour grading needs a little attention. The disc pressing is fairly clean with few flecks and no interference lines. The soundtrack is average for a film of this type, although it is a little bland in places.

Overall though, I would recommend this film if you enjoy Sellers' antics and would class it as a good LV release.

[C / B] [B+/ B]

[STEVE FIELDING]

THE FURY

CBS / FOX	1097 - 70		£13.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	114 mins	1978

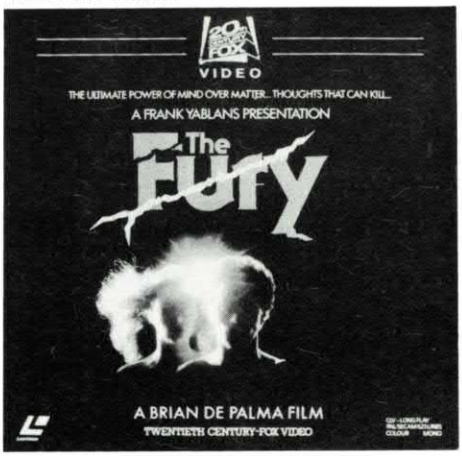
Featuring: Kirk Douglas, John Cassevettes, Carrie Snodgrass, Charles Durning, Amy Irving, Andrew Stevens.

Directed by: Brian De Palma.

This Brian De Palma horror flick originally caught my attention for the John Williams ('Star Wars', 'Superman', 'ET', etc.) music score, and being an avid fan I bought it. The verdict? A nicely put together horror/thriller in the telekinesis genre. The plot is quite intelligent and much better than the usual 'blood & guts' job - those into the stronger stuff might be disapointed in this one.

Kirk Douglas (Peter) heads the cast and seems quite settled in the part of the father seeking his son (Robin), supposedly kidnapped in an Arab terrorist raid on an Israeli beach resort, but in reality the raid was a set-up by a mysterious American government department intent on getting hold of Robin for the psychic powers he posesses. Back in the USA, Peter seeks the help of Gillian (Amy Irving), a similarly psychic student, to find Robin and in the course of events it becomes apparent that this anonymous government department plans to exploit psychics as human weapons.

It is a good story and thoroughly enjoyable. There is also a good 'explosive' surprise ending! The film was never very successful in the commercial cinema, but it is certainly worth a watch at least.



My only criticism is the original film master used which shows signs of wear and colour fading. It is not that bad but I think a better print could have been obtained. Picture sharpness appears satisfactory on a first viewing but is wanting in this respect. On the other hand, the soundtrack is good - the music is crisp and clear, and although mono there is a reasonable dynamic range. The pressing is quite good, a few noisy specks towards the end of side one, but nothing to worry about.

[C+/ B+] [B / B+]

[STEVE FIELDING]

SHOWBOAT

MGM / UA	UMLV 10167		£9.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	104 mins	1951

Featuring: Kathryn Grayson, Ava Gardner, Howard Keel, Joe E. Brown, William Warfield, Marge & Gower Champion.

Directed by: George Sidney.

Musical Score: Jerome Kerne and Oscar Hammerstein.

Musical numbers include: Ol' Man River, Make Believe, Bill, Can't Help Lovin Dat Man, Why Do I Love You, You Are Love, Life Upon The Wicked Stage.

This year America is celebrating the centenary of the birth of Jerome Kern who wrote what is recognised as being the first modern American musical play - 'Showboat'. A brilliant show, it is based on Edna Ferber's novel of the same title and had it's world stage premier in Washington DC on November 15th, 1927. Here is a musical which contains many truly evergreen songs as well as faithfully capturing the essence of the book about life on a Mississippi river showboat - the 'Cotton Blossom'.

The first screen version appeared in 1929 when sound film was in its infancy. It contained a few spoken dialogue sequences and a prologue of five songs performed by singers from the original stage production. The first full sound remake was premiered in 1936 and featured Alan Jones, Helen Morgan, and Paul Robeson. This is usually regarded as the definitive version being very faithful to the original stage musical. The film was rescued from obscurity several years ago and was recently televised. Naturally being nearly 50 years old it shows its age with poor sound quality and monochrome photography, so let's be thankful that this colour remake appeared on the scene in 1951.

Now part of the MGM Classic Collection this lavish production is now available at a bargain price. The film opens at a cracking pace with the Cotton Blossom docking at Natchez and the townsfolk racing down to the quayside to watch the entire company make its introductory appearance. From then on the pace never slackens and the plot (spanning some forty years) unfolds before us.

The role of Gaylord Ravenal is usually sung by a tenor but here we have the rich manly baritone of Howard Keel at his magnificent best. His leading lady, Magnolia Hawks, is played by Kathryn Grayson and while I personally find her voice a little syrupy at times she certainly looks beatiful and I cannot think of a better Hollywood singer of the era for the role. Arguably the best known song in the show is 'Ol' Man River' sung here with great feeling (and almost in the dark!) by William Warfield as Joe. He is a somewhat dour character compared with Robeson's earlier and cheekier portrayal and unfortunately he does not have the benefit of Robeson's extra comedy duet number 'I still suits me' which helped develop the characterisation.

Judy Garland was originally planned to play Julie Laverne but was later replaced by Ava Gardner with her singing voice dubbed by Eileen Wilson. Julie turns to drink when her husband deserts her after they are dismissed from the Showboat. Later on, her silent and tearful distant farewell to Magnolia, as the Cotton Blossom steams away , makes a fitting ending to this bitter-sweet story. It is interesting that the sleeve features the wedding of Magnolia and Ravenal which does not appear in the film. Presumably this was cut for timing reasons during the film's cinema days. Who knows, perhaps there are several sequences languishing in a dusty vault which may sometime see the light of day (or a laser beam!) in an extended version.

I have watched this film on VHS tape as well as disc and have had identical sound quality problems on both formats. Twenty minutes into side 2 the sound takes on an intermittently muffled 'trebleless' quality that persists for the rest of the side. Tone and volume will partly compensate for this defect but its disappointing when such a lovely disc could have been perfect except for this one problem, presumably on the MGM master tape.

Despite the sound problem on side 2 it is still a disc that I personally would not want to be without. It is a bargain disc teeming with lovely melodies and should appeal to a wide audience. More of these musical features please , but without the niggling sound problems!

[KEITH ARNOLD]

Disc quality: Quite a good picture here, certainly better than the later 'Cat On A Hot Tin Roof' disc also in this series. Indeed, the master quality shows up a lot of recent film titles! But, of course, there has to be a catch and the sound fault, depending on your priorities, will certainly spoil some of the enjoyment of this disc. So, on an absolute scale a D grade applies, but some may find this acceptable.

[B+/ D] [B-/ B]

HIGH RISK

GUILD 955 9415 0			£ 11.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	88 mins	1981

Featuring: James Brolin, Anthony Quinn, Bruce Davison, Cleavon Little, Chick Vennera, and James Coburn & Ernest Borgnine

Directed by: Stewart Raffill

Four Americans set off southwards with apparently little organisation or preparation but armed to the hilt with a selection of hand-held artillery (from that description there is no need to tell you they were Americans, huh?) in order to relieve drug-dealer, James Coburn, living in lavish style in Mexico, of $5,000,000. Laying their hands on the money comes quite early on and most of this action film revolves around their attempts to keep it while making good their escape.

The words "gripping" and "edge of the seat suspense" do not spring to mind when assessing this Mexican-American co-production. Anthony Quinn stands out from the rest of the cast as the bandit leader - a role which I am sure you will have no trouble visualising him playing. Any added spice that might be suggested by the '18' certificate is certainly not in evidence. This film would comfortably fill an early evening TV slot, indeed that might be the best place for it, and seeing as the run time is only 88 minutes instead of the stated 93 mins, we are most likely watching such a cut version.

Picture quality is pleasantly crisp for the most part but the transfer to video is erratic. Scene changes often incur a washed out picture and if you compensate on your TV , more than likely, the next scene will come out dark. I imagine the telecine operator, unenthralled by the content of this film, slamming the machine into 'auto' and going off for coffee. It's a shame because when the picture is good, it is very good. Sound, in contrast, is a bit thin and hissy - should have been better. The reviewed copy was generally clean, save for a few none too significant spots at the start of side two.

[B-/ C] [B / B]

COOL CATS

MGM / UA UMLV 10317			£ 9.99
CLV			
COLOUR	STEREO	76 mins	1983

Do not get caught out by this release. The sub-title "Cool Cats - it's style, it's music...." tells all. In this documentary, based on the book of the same name by Tony Stewart, music clips are only used to illustrate the last twenty-five years of social change and fashion. Music is not its prime focus. There is no commentary as such, but Phil Everly, Malcolm Mclaren, Pete Townsend, and Roger Daltrey (among others) talk us through the passing years. How interesting this all would have

been without the musical clips is debateable though Pete Townsend's "What shall I be... a mod...no, no...Culture Club...no, no...a 'ippy...." reveals an unexpected gift for humour. Phil Everly, if anything, seems more enthusiastic about things now than a lifetime in the business would suggest. Malcolm Mclaren looks like he's been bored by it all from the start, Roger Daltrey looks like (and sounds like) he is going to turn into Tommy Steele.

So, there are no complete songs on this disc, and you might find what you do get is frustratingly brief. With each viewing you can only sit and say "Yes, let's have more of this music on LV", and you find yourself saying this many times. The clips are often of surprisingly good quality - from '50s TV shows to a full-face close-up of Joan Jett that impresses for its clarity. Rod Stewart and Gary Glitter on 'Top Of The Pops' look just like live broadcast images and show up the slightly soft documentary footage of the featured talkers.

I suppose, at the price, one should not complain too much about the content of this disc, but we must have some of the featured music out on disc proper! The Blondie videos, the Elvis TV shows for starters.

Assembling the material for this film from a variety of sources has been well done and the sound quality of a lot of what must be lo-fi clips is pleasingly easy on the ear at loudish volume. Save for a little graininess in the pressing, you do not feel that much has come between the film master and what comes off your disc player.

[A-/ A-] [B-/ A-]

MODERN PROBLEMS

CBS - FOX 1129 - 70			£ 13.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	93 mins	1981

Featuring: Chevy Chase, Patti D'Arbanville, Mary Kay Place, Dabney Coleman, Brian Doyle-Murray, Nell Carter

Directed by: Ken Shapiro

Chopped out last time round due to lack of space (hence the voided reference to "telekinesis"), former member of the 'Saturday Night Live' team, Chevy Chase, features here as Max, a harassed air-traffic controller whose

relationship with girlfriend Darcy (Patty D'Arbanville) is going through a rocky phase. On a drive home one night Max encounters a nuclear-waste lorry slopping liquid carelessly on to the freeway - and Max. (This, presumably, is nuclear fallout?) As a result Max becomes endowed with telekinetic powers and his initial motivation is to try and save his romance, but as the film develops the powers increase in strength and the result is more sinister altogether over on side two of the disc.

You get the impression that the director could not quite decide where to pitch this film - comedy or the supernatural. If he had chosen either, everything would have probably been OK, but the two together? - I don't think so. I recently saw 'Vacation' (on tape, what a confession!) and was not overly impressed with that either, so you should read these comments with that in mind. I suppose I have expectations of Chevy Chase from seeing him on live TV that are lost in the scale of a film production. Dabney Coleman, as the grotesquely vain author Mark Winslow, steals the film for me.

Unremarkable disc quality does nothing to help the enjoyment of this one. The master appears just so so on video and sound, and the pressing a little weak although it would be easy put the gradings the other way round.

[C+/ C+] [B-/ B]

VIDEO WAVES

POLYGRAM	040 248 1		£9.99
CLV	Chapter Search		
COLOUR	STEREO	93 mins	1983

Side 1: BLANCMANGE - That's Love That Is/STYLE COUNCIL - A Solid Bond In Your Heart/ELTON JOHN - I'm Still Standing/BIG COUNTRY - Chance/MEN WITHOUT HATS - Safety Dance/FREEZ - Pop Goes My Love/IMAGINATION - New Dimension/FRIENDS AGAIN - State Of Art/DIRE STRAITS - Twistin By The Pool/Roman Holliday - Motor Mania/ELTON JOHN - Kiss The Bride/THE CURE - The Love Cats/CARMEL - Bad Day

Side 2: NICK HEYWARD - Blue Hat For A Blue Day/DAVID ESSEX - You're In My Heart/STATUS QUO - Mess Of Blues/LEVEL 42 - Micro Kid/RYAN PARIS - Dolce Vita/LOTUS EATERS - You Don't Need Someone New/SHAKATAK - Out Of This World/ROBIN GIBB - How Old Are You?/GENESIS - Mama/TOM ROBINSON - Listen To The Radio/MARILYN - Calling Your Name/THOMPSON TWINS - Hold Me Now

The scale of these video compilations continues to amaze. The list of contents is possibly all that readers would need to know as to whether they would want this one or not.

Sound quality is excellent bar a couple of clumsy cross-fades. As on the previously reviewed compilation, you do get the impression that compromises have been made in the video master when assembling the clips. The grain on some

songs is quite noticeable, although on Roman Holliday 's track one is inclined to believe that the effect must have been exagerrated for artistic effect! The overall video quality is a bit washed out and the disc benefits from an increase in contrast on your TV controls.

All we need is to get these compilations out a bit quicker each time, as close to the tape release date as possible.

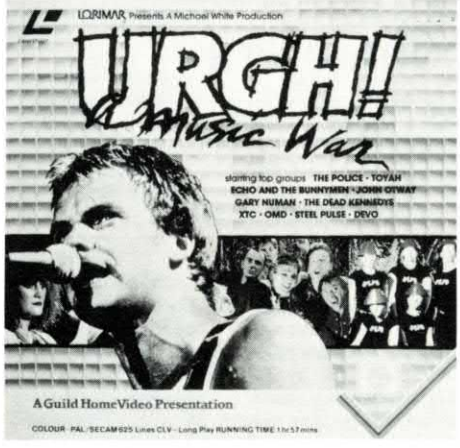
[B-/ A-] [B-/ A-]

URGH! - A MUSIC WAR

GUILD	888 8909 2		£11.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	112 mins	1981

Directed by: Derek Burbidge

Not the sort of sleeve to really grab your attention but hidden away on the reverse it makes claim to "34 bands live in your own home". Not until I got the disc home did I realise the front cover picture was of Sting, and indeed the Police feature on three tracks - they open and close the disc which is a compilation of live concert clips from 11 different locations in Europe and



the USA, all apparently filmed on large guage film stock. It's not a cheapo production most definitely. The Dolby Stereo logo crops up on the credits but it is not evident on the disc!

The artistes and song titles are not listed on the sleeve but these are the artistes, all 32 of them : Police/Toyah/John Cooper-Clarke/OMD/Chelsea/Oingo Boingo/Echo & The Bunnymen/Jools Holland/XTC/Klaus Nomi/Athletico Spizz 80/Go Go's/Dead Kennedys/Steel Pulse/Gary Numan/Joan Jett/Magazine/Surf Punks/Members/Cramps/Invisible Sex/Pere Ubu/Devo/Alley Cats/John Otway/Gang Of Four/999/Fleshtones/X/Skafish/Splodgeness Abounds/UB40....yes, the Au Pairs and Wall Of Voodoo, though on the film credits are missing. The tape version of this film is listed at 124 minutes - 12 minutes longer than this disc, so may be there is more footage than just these two songs missing. Anybody know?

The Police do three songs and there is an extra one over the credits so you do get 35 songs in all, but I would feel cheated if I had bought this disc expecting to see the version of the film I had seen at the cinema. If you are not in a position to to make that comparison the disc represents good value, though unfortunately it is one of the older music titles (even if it is a film if one is being precise) that lacks chapter search, and the music, being generally what one might call "abrasive" in nature could therefore benefit from it's inclusion. It's definitely 'uncommercial' as a package though that term will no doubt endear it some. The Police come out of this as almost a MOR group in comparison with the majority of the featured acts.

I was quite taken with Oingo Boingo who out-devoed Devo whose clip I was disappointed with. Klaus Nomi seems to have beaten our Malc to the opera thing by a good few years - in fact I found his number quite enjoyable in contrast to what I remember of his 'Whistle Test' appearance. Jools Holland and the Surf Punks were too short for me and the Cramps appealed more here than their records. One could go on. There is a lot here.

As previously mentioned, the standard of the original production is high and it made it to the master tape used here. If a little contrasty, it is certainly very sharp and the pressing is pretty good though, tediously, one has to mention the flecking which, being a darkish disc, shows up out of proportion to its quantity. Sound is good quality when judged as a film soundtrack but maybe lacking a little when judged as a music disc. The sound on the original master is a bit 'studio-perfect' for the nature of the production - you do not always get the impression of being there in the audience in the same way the picture comes across.

[A-/ B-] [B-/ B]

STARFLIGHT ONE

RANK VIDEO	D0175		£13.99
CLV			
COLOUR	STEREO	112 mins	1982

Featuring: Lee Majors, Hal Linden, Lauren Hutton, and Ray Milland

Directed by: Jerry Jameson

The telephone rings.

"I was phoning about the magazine. Am I interrupting anything?"

"It's O.K. I was just half-way through this disc - 'Starflight One' ".

"Oh yes, it's a TV movie isn't it?"

"I don't think so. It's quite long and it says 'Dolby Stereo' on the sleeve."

"Oh yes, maybe. I do seem to recall it did a week in Streatham." **

.....Starflight One, the world's first hypersonic airliner, is about to take off on its maiden passenger flight from California to Australia. Fears of the flight being premature are confirmed when, in an effort to avoid some rocket debris (good stereo effect here), the HST suffers damage to the hull and overshoots its trajectory, ending up in space orbit from which it cannot re-enter the atmosphere as it lacks the necessary heat-shield.

If a little implausible, all this would at least be enjoyable if one could work up the teeniest sympathy for the passengers and crew, but they are such a dull and/or unsavoury bunch of souls that, really, you do not care too much whether they get out of this predicament or not. If this was one of those interactive discs that you always hear tell of in the future development of LV, I wouldn't mind betting that most of us would choose the ending that rid humanity of the whole lot of them, especially that creep with his rocket.. ..., and his ground-controller who deserves it for such a crummy Australian accent. But, I digress. One imagines the intention was to have viewers on the edge of their seats twenty minutes or so into the film but it didn't work out that way for me. When the cargo unshipped and a box of precious metals broke open I searched vainly over the packing case, looking for the stencil-marking proclaiming 'Byzanium'....

Quite a good film master though it is not equally sharp in every scene or shot but I do not think the film has been re-formatted - still this is a minor observation, overall it's good, if a touch contrasty. All Rank films seem sharp and may be a bit too contrasty. Pressing is good too. The sound is a bit hissy and one wonders if the Dolby encoding has been done properly at every process stage and so it is difficult to know where to apportion blame on this aspect.

** Streatham, a London suburb, close to Balham.

[A-/ B-] [B / B-]

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JONI MITCHELL
Shadows & Light

PIONEER ARTISTS	MP 086-E		£ 19.95
CLV	Chapter Search		CX
COLOUR	STEREO	59 mins	1980

Side 1: In France They Kiss On Main Street/Coyote/ Free Man In Paris/Goodbye Pork Pie Hat/ Jaco's Solo/Dry Cleaner From Des Moines/ Amelia & Pat's Solo/Black Crow/Furry Sings The Blues/Raised On Robbery/Why Do Fools Fall In Love/Shadows And Light

Too long has passed since the TV broadcast of this 1980 Santa Barbara Bowl concert to be able to make comparison of the contents. Essentially a stage performance, there are occasional film and video inserts and other embellishments that add another dimension for repeat viewing. This is electric Joni, veering toward the jazzier side of things and the back-up band (Jaco Pastorius, Don Allas, Pat Metheny, Lyle Mays, Michael Brecker, and the Persuasions) are star performers. Maybe money doesn't buy you everything, but it'll certainly get you a good band. The extremes of the jazz foray are encountered in 'Goodbye Pork Pie Hat' and 'Dry

Cleaner From Des Moines' (predictably so), but for the most part this is easy on the ear stuff. That does not mean bland.

Disc quality is bizarre, to say the least. I would guess this is a very bad transfer from an NTSC videotape but no doubt there could be some purpose in the overall softness and blurring. What gives the intentioned away from the accidental are the end credits. No matter how 'creative' one might feel, it's a damn certainty that you would want the world to know about it and read your name clearly! I would dearly love to see an American version of this for comparison as I would guess the quality to be much better, but it is an odd quirk of fate that some of the songs are strangely enhanced by the effect. You would never get away with this on a film disc. I bet every time they have a bad day for rejects up at Blackburn they must pull this disc out during tea-break just to have a good laugh! That said, this really is a D grade for original master quality and you would barely notice the sync being very slightly off. The pressing, what one could judge of it, is, in fact, quite good - especially for a disc with 59+ minutes on the one side. Rarely do you get more than 58 on a UK disc (this one is a Japanese pressing).

The sound, for a live concert, is very pleasing to the ear - and this without the benefit of auditioning it with CX which, switched in, should improve things even further. This is another of those discs that, on musical content at least, has won me over, but at the price asked one is bound to expect better (the best?) master quality, and I would advise anyone interested in this disc to see it first.

[D / A-] [B / A-]

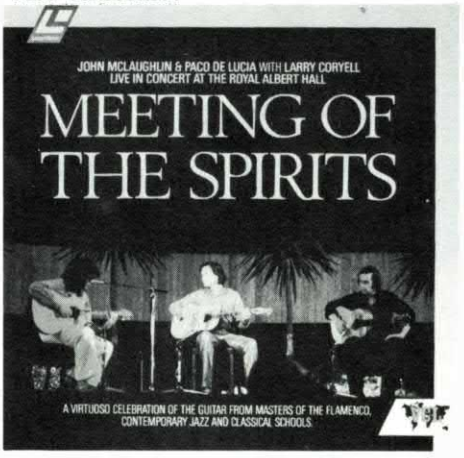
MEETING OF THE SPIRITS

VCL	405 3115 (Germany)		59 DM.
CAV	Chapter Search		
COLOUR	MONO	52 mins	1979

Side 1: Entres Dos Aguas/Lotus Feet/Morning Of The Carnival
Side 2: Meeting Of The Spirits/Guardian Angels

The day before returning to Germany for the Xmas festivities I thrust a list of laser disc numbers into a friend's hand with the instruction "Get me some of these". He did, apparently without too much searching around, though one has heard that LV is even more underground in Germany than the UK.

What might loosely be called a 'fusion' disc, at least that's what it would have been in 1979 but nobody worries about such terms these days, of the three guitarists Paco de Lucia must be the odd one out. He sticks to his gut-string Spanish guitar while Coryell and McLaughlin are on round-backed Ovations - Coryell going for slightly more electric tone throughout. The disc contains an edited selection from a Royal Albert Hall concert of February 14th. 1979, and it is simply photographed - the odd bit of superimposition thrown in here and there, but mostly it stands on its musical content. There are some closeups, though may be not as many as would justify the extra mastering cost of a CAV disc (plus the inconvenience of changing sides). It's a good performance and it's very much the sort of musical menu one would expect from the artstes concerned.



As things stand I could not offer a source of supply for this disc and have no idea whether it will ever see the light of day here. In this VCL series are also discs by Eddy Grant, Charles Aznavour, Tina Turner, and a 'Reggae Sunsplash' volume - all CAV. The only one to appear in the UK is the Elton John / Central Park disc. These are not

new releases and one can only assume that contractual reasons keep them from distribution here as I would imagine, if none other, the Tina Turner would do respectable sales. Remarkably, there is not one word of German on the disc or the sleeve, even though it is a German pressing. It's all written in English. Strange.

Back to the programme. The sound is very good, even if it is mono, but one wishes McLaughlin would not get so enthusiastic on side two as to bang his bass strings into the mike on a couple of occasions.

It came as a bit of a shock at the end, on what I had assumed to be a film originated master, to see video cameras weaving in and out of the palms. Although picture quality is quite good, there is that slight glazed, soft feel to the definition which, knowing what I do now, I can only put down to the characteristics of CAV mastering. Never have I seen a really sharp CAV disc - do they exist?

There is a slight recurrence of the pin-striping effect noticed on the Status Quo disc, but it is not as dominant. Pressing is OK - a little spotty and some little white dashes of line drop-out: nothing that would be too off-putting if you, like I, had to order this disc on spec.

[B+/ B+] [C+/ B+]

BIG COUNTRY

POLYGRAM	040 314 1		£9.99
CLV	Chapter Search		
COLOUR	STEREO	77 mins	1984

Side 1: A Thousand Stars/Angle Park/Close Action/Lost Patrol/Wonderland/The Storm/PIPE BAND SEQUENCE

Side 2: Porroh Man/Chance/Inwards/Fields Of Fire/Harvest Home/Tracks Of My Tears/In A Big Country/Auld Lang Syne

Big Country have a rather strange sound, a very thin guitar tone that is hard to accept if you expect mellowness in your music. This 1983 New Year's Eve concert is an accurate representation of their sound. The setting, Barrowland, Glasgow, appears fairly intimate, and apart from some horrendous fake stone walls included in the set (don't tell me, they slotted the show in between Xmas panto performances!) showcases the group well. The camera work has a nice immediate style to it without sacrificing technical quality. Well yes, they do miss focus a number of times but they do appear to be using only the existing stage lighting so presumably the cameras would have been working fairly wide open. Not much depth of field. The important thing is that the photography (it is originated on video) is in tune with the pace and style of the music.

At the end of side one we see an appearance by the Deysart and Dundonald Pipe Band for 'Highland Laddie' and 'Will Ye No Come Back Again' - Big Country do not feature on these tracks which is probably just as well as they look decidedly underdressed in comparison. One wonders, when there is so much criticism of the attire of the present younger generation, how the Establishment could justify the appearance of the Pipe Band who would blend, quite harmoniously, with your average Saturday afternoon King's Road Punk parade! Maybe we are all on the same side after all.

Sound quality is excellent as too is the production of the video although on the pressing you are aware of fine lines on plain areas of the picture. This, together with a few fine white spots, does detract a little from one's complete immersion in the contents. This disc does have Chapter Search even though the sleeve implies otherwise, and talking of the sleeve, Polygram have dropped the rather opressive TV screen border used on previous efforts and this example certainly looks the better for it. Most fans would be well pleased with this disc.

[A-/ A-] [B-/ A-]

DIRE STRAITS
Live Alchemy

POLYGRAM	040 269 1		£9.99
CLV	Chapter Search		
COLOUR	STEREO	92 mins	1983

Side 1: Once Upon A Time In The West/Expresso Love/Romeo & Juliet/Private Investigations/Sultans Of Swing

Side 2: Two Young Lovers/Tunnel Of Love/Telegraph Road/Solid Rock/Going Home

Scene in pub, five minutes before the show opens.

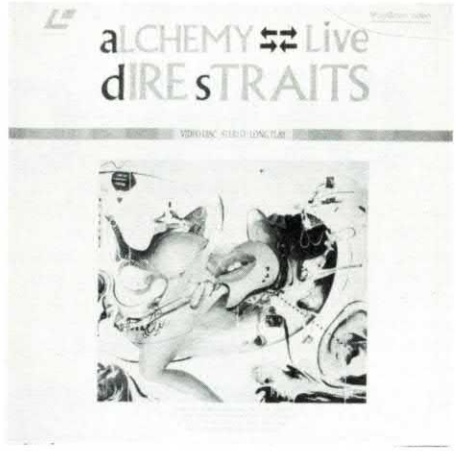
" 'Ere Mark, I found me dad's old home-movie camera in the attic. It's still got a reel of film in it. What say I film the show tonight?"

" Yeh, why not."

This imagined conversation, or something very much like it, must have preceeded the filming of this live 1983 Hammersmith Odeon Dire Straits concert, and like me, you may find it hard to adjust to the reality as printed on the sleeve credits!

You might already have this concert on a laser disc - a double CD in fact, at very nearly twice the price of the LV version, so although the sound will not match the CD, it is of good quality nonetheless , (there are a few odd buzzes and whistles at certain points but you must expect this sort of thing on a 'live' disc), and so this release justifies itself as a no wear audio-only disc , if nothing else. What a pity Dire Straits allowed themselves to be fobbed of with such a tacky visual recording job - unforgiveable for a band of their status.

To try and summarise the disc in one sentence - the picture is fuzzy, sync is poor, and one feels the film to video transfer has itself diminished what good there might have been in the first place. As a casual purchase this one is not recommended.



Someone wrote in (they thought video was OK , how's that for a balanced review?) and said he thought his disc was a bit spotty, The reviewed copy wasn't, and it is a pity that what would appear to be quite a reasonable LV pressing has been let down by inferior master material.

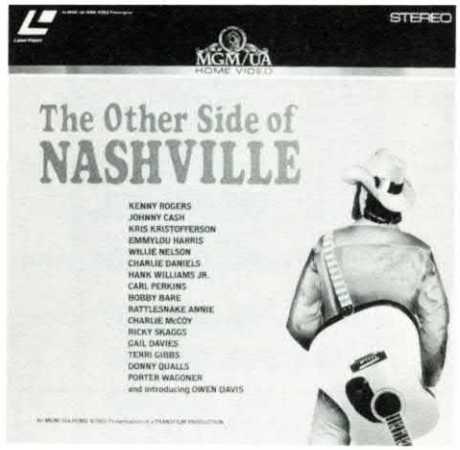
[C-/ B+] [B / A-]

THE OTHER SIDE OF NASHVILLE

MGM / UA	UMLV 10351		£9.99
CLV			
COLOUR	STEREO	112 mins	1984

Produced & Directed by Etienne Mirlesse

Country and Western music, like many 'minority' tastes in music, has come a long way in the last fifteen years. Too far in the eyes of some who fear that the success C & W artistes are now achieving in the straight pop market will destroy the music. Probably many of the people who have bought records by the likes of Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton, Crystal Gayle, and Don Williams in recent years would claim no knowledge of C & W even. This near two hour documentary sets out to show the artistes who are questioning the "decline" of Nashville into out and out commercialism, and though possibly many of these critics would not appear



averse to the temptations of cross-over success, the premise is good enough for the opportunity to see specialist music tastes catered for on LaserVision.

As already stated, this is a documentary, and although 37 song titles

are mentioned (and listed) on the sleeve you only get to see a few of them free of spoken interruption - Charlie Daniels 'Will The Circle Be Unbroken', Hank Williams 'Hey Good Lookin', a 1968 Carl Perkins' 'Blue Suede Shoes', 'Folsom Prison Blues' by Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan/Johnny Cash 'One Too Many Mornings', Kris Kristofferson 'To Beat The Devil', Willie Nelson 'Whisky River', Owen Davis 'The Other Side Of Nashville', and Carl Perkins again with a new version of 'Blue Suede Shoes' heard only over the credits.

Therefore this should be regarded as more of a film than a music title because it is not the sort of disc you would put on to hear a few songs - the complete ones are too few and far between to make that worthwhile (even if Chapter Search had been provided) and bearing in mind the nature of the production, the sound balance is not always up to the standard one would expect for musical appreciation.

Watching this disc makes you realise that some proper musical releases from some of the featured artistes would be a welcome addition to the laser disc catalogue. C & W music has international appeal and is poorly catered for on tape and so stands as one of the many fields of interest that LV could intelligently exploit to its advantage.

The term documentary serves a dual purpose as far as describing the sort of visual quality you might expect from this disc, and on that basis there is no cause for any major criticism. All round this is an acceptable disc, all the B's, though in this instance the copy reviewed must be marked down to a C+ for, again, an unacceptable level of spots/flecks.

[B / B] [C+/ B]

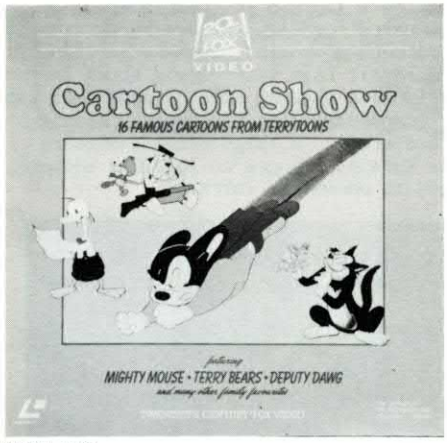
CARTOON SHOW FROM TERRYTOONS

CBS / FOX	2911 - 70		£9.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	90 mins	(1978)

Paul Terry cartoons from the years 1938 - 1964.

SIDE ONE

Swiss Cheese Family Robinson - a Mighty Mouse musical / The Glass Slipper - Cinderella is on the telephone to her friend Sadie, telling her about last night. Dejected because her sisters won't let her go to the ball she carries on scrubbing when suddenly a fairy godmother appears (Mae West with wings). Cinderella asks for "Sup'n cute in size 14" and her wish is granted with the warning "Turn in your togs by midnight, honey, or I'll have to charge you another day". At the ball she meets the Prince who looks very much like Harpo Marx but the next day when the Prince calls to find the owner of the slipper fairy Mae pops up again and points out that the slipper really belongs to her! So she grabs the Prince with the immortal words "I always get my man". / Law & Order - a Mighty Mouse cartoon / Mexican Baseball / Beauty On The Beach - another operatic Mighty Mouse with a maiden in distress / Tall Timber Tale- Terry Bears / Mother Goose's Birthday Party - Mighty Mouse and musical nursery rhymes / The Minute And A Half Man - the story of a man who never quite made it but became a hero .



SIDE TWO

Sunny Italy - Mighty Mouse, again with an operatic flavour / Peach Plucking Kangaroo - Deputy Dawg looses his peaches / Goons From the Moon - Mighty Mouse saves Terry Town from aliens / Brother From Outer Space - A strange little being comes down from space in his spaceship. He immediately gets a summons from a policeman which he eats. Not looking where he was going he flies in through the window of an office block and meets Miles, an employee. When the boss comes the little fellow transforms himself into an exact replica of Miles and the two of them go to lunch. At the restaurant Miles hands the spaceman the menu, which he eats. Not only that, he also eats the flowers, plates, and the tablecloth. As they leave the restaurant they bump into some bank robbers who the little spaceman quickly deals with but Miles gets the reward. Being the nice chap he is he gives half to the little spaceman. Yes, you've guessed it. He eats it! / Mouse Menace - features Little Roquefort / So Sorry Pussycat - cat and mouse Japanese style / Spare The Rod - Mighty Mouse / Gaston's Easel Life - Gaston Le Crayon is commisioned to paint a wealthy lady who only wants something to impress the neighbours. She doesn't know anything about art. Neither does Gaston! When the husband finds Gaston drinking his wine and smoking his cigars he decides to do a little painting himself.... with Gaston's head. The resulting piece of artwork is so admired by the lady that Gaston is kicked out..... through the wall.

[R.S. CHAMBERLIN]

Disc quality: Decidedly 'aged' appearance to some of these great cartoons, not necessarily the older ones either. Plenty of black dirt marks that intrude less than one would imagine. Sound often lo-fi but acceptable. The pressing seems quite good. Hopefully the grading is reasonably sympathetic.

[B-/ B-] [B+/ B+]

DIE FLEDERMAUS

ARTS INT.	04 AI 028		£23.99
CLV	Chapter Search	(Two discs - 4)	
COLOUR	STEREO	175 mins	1984

Featuring: Kiri te Kanawa, Hermann Prey, Hildegarde Heichele, Benjamin Luxon.

Conductor: Placido Domingo.

A live recording from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden - 31/12/1983.

If anyone bought a cartoon disc 'on spec' they would not be disappointed but I feel one could be with the operatic ones. I am not saying they are bad, far from it - they are extremely good quality and very well presented. They would certainly please any serious devotee. Personally, I can only enjoy opera if I can understand all the words. Let me start at the beginning.

On opening the sealed cover one finds that there is a book enclosed, the same size as the record cover and bearing the same cover picture. This is a recording of Johann Strauss' 'Die Fledermaus' - a performance at the Royal Opera House, Convent Garden recorded on 31st December, 1983. The book starts with a concise version of the story in English, German, French, and Italian. The second section is a word-for-word libretto. The only trouble is that it is mainly in German with some English, a little Italian, and the odd word or two in French. Sometimes all in the same sentence. All this doesn't help you to understand what is going on if you don't have a working knowledge of all these languages. Please may we have full English translations for all these operatic records. For example, I found it very frustrating when Rosalinda said something to her maid Adele. She burst into tears and the audience laughed.

As for the opera itself; the scene opens inside the Royal Opera House. The orchestra and audience are seated and awaiting the arrival of Placido Domingo, the conductor. There is great applause as he enters and acknowledges the audience. He turns to the orchestra and they begin the well-known overture which is played in its entirety. Most conductors put a great amount of effort into their work and this one is no exception. At the end of this lively work he looks as though he has just come out of the shower.

A full view of the stage now as the curtain opens. Rosalinde's maid, Adele, is the first to enter reading a letter from her sister. Prince Orlofsky is giving a party and Adele has to borrow a dress from Rosalinde and meet her sister there. When Rosalinde comes in she is too upset because her husband, Einstein has to go to prison for eight days and so can't allow her maid to leave her at this time. Alfred, an Italian tenor and one of Rosalinde's many admirers, has been singing to Rosalinde from the street and is finally allowed to enter. However, he has to leave when Einstein returns but extracts a promise to be allowed to return after Einstein has gone to prison. Rosalinde's ex-lover (Dr. Falke) also arrives. In a light-hearted sort of a way, he wants to get even with Einstein on two counts; for stealing his girl, and for leaving him on a park bench, drunk and dressed as a bat

after a fancy-dress party. Falke persuades Einstein to take the evening off from prison and go with him to Prince Orlofsky's party as a Marquis. He tricks Rosalinde into promising to go to the party disguised as a Hungarian Countess with her face masked. As they are all going out, Rosalinde gives Adele permission to visit her sick Aunt which, of course, is only an excuse. Falke and Einstein leave and Alfred comes in. He puts on Einstein's dressing gown and makes himself at home with a bottle of wine. Just then Frank, the prison governor, enters and naturally mistakes Alfred for Einstein. He has come to escort Einstein to prison on his way to Orlofsky's party. You can imagine the confusion that arises from all this. At the party Einstein is fascinated by the Countess (his own wife!) and tries to make love to her. He flirts with his maid Adele and gets drunk with Frank.

During the party there is a cabaret which is nothing whatever to do with Strauss. We are treated to some formation dancing, a sketch by Hinge & Bracket, and a song from Charles Aznavour. If anyone objects to this, they only have to skip through the first four chapters, 21 minutes, of side three and they can pick up where side two left off.

It all ends happily ever after in the best possible tradition. My only bone of contention is that I missed half the fun by not understanding German, and another quarter by not understanding Italian. There is enough English to be able to piece the story together with the aid of the synopsis in the book but would it not be possible to do away with the Chapter figures, for example, and put sub-titles in their place? The educated ones among us need not switch these in, and even those like myself could dispense with them at a later date.

[R.S. CHAMBERLIN]

LA CENERENTOLA

ARTS INT.	04 AI 014		£23.99
CLV	Chapter Search	(Two discs - 3)	
COLOUR	STEREO	155mins	1983

Featuring: Kathleen Kuhlmann, Marta Taddei, Laura Zannini, Laurence Dale, Claudio Desderi, Roderick Kennedy, Alberto Rinaldi.

Conductor: Donato Renzetti.

A live recording from the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Sussex.

The opera tells the well-known story of Cinderella with Act 1 taking up the first two sides of the set of the discs and Act 2 taking up side three.

There are some differences between the pantomime story and Rossini's version in that the fairy godmother character appears in the opera as the philiosopher Alidoro, and the panto Baron Hardup is Don Magnifico in the opera. The Prince gives one of a pair of gold bracelets to Cinderella at the ball and his later search for the unknown beauty finishes with the discovery of her wearing one of the gold bracelets instead on the traditional glass slipper.

Rossini wrote the part of Cinderella for a very agile (colortura) contralto voice but voices such as these are rare and in this staging the role is performed by the mezzo-soprano Kathleen Kuhlmann. In extreme cases Cinderella's part has been arranged so that it can be sung by a soprano at the higher pitch. The parts for each voice were written with much adornment of the vocal line the result is a very florid style in comparison to that of Puccini and other later composers. Also the great operatic arias are, to a large extent, missing for Rossini manages to lead his situations to ensembles instead.

The ensembles comprise rapid patter words with crisp encouragement from the orchestra until the voices and music race helter-skelter to the final crescendo, as they do in the finale of Act 1 where the crescendo from the overture is used. The singing of the cast is good and the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Donato Renzetti play in a spirited, well controlled manner.

The sets are lit with a warm overall "antiqued" atmosphere of golds and browns which tie in well with the costumes. In general, the colouful garments appear to be based on those of the late 17th or early 18th century; but there is a slight problem with the shoes because the hard cuban heels are very noisy on the bare boards of the stage and the footsteps are picked up on the soundtrack.

The two discs are presented in a full colour folder with a separate explanatory booklet containing production details with the full Italian libretto and synopses of the plot in German, English, French, and Italian. So, if you are Italian you get both synopsis and full text, but if you speak English, French, or German - tough luck - you make do with just the general synopsis which is generally quite tricky to link to the stage action. Personally, I find this annoying as the TV transmission of this opera was sub-titled in English by Gillian Widdicombe. Surely there is a way that subtitles can be either shown or suppressed on LaserVision?

However, the opera is well done with a pleasing period quality, good singing and crisp playing by the London Philharmonic. Also the acting is good except in one or two odd places. The overall colour and sound balance capture the bubbly lightheartedness of Rossini's writing. 'La Cenerentola' has never achieved the popularity of 'Il Barbiere di Seviglia' ('The Barber Of Seville'), for instance. The Gramophone Classical Catalogue for September '83 lists seven complete versions of 'The Barber..' compared with only two complete 'Cinderellas'. Both operas take up six sides of a stereo LP. The 'Cinderellas' were recorded in 1964 and 1972, and unless there has been something more recent, this laser version has all the benefits of modern stereo sound recording techniques with a full colour picture as well.

To summarise, this Glyndebourne version of 'Cinderella' achieves a good blend between the exacting embellishments in the vocal parts and the colourful spectacle of the "opera buffa". Great serious drama it is not, but lighthearted entertainment it certainly is and as such is a most welcome addition to the collection of operas on Laser Vision.

[ANTHONY P. WELLS]

LES CONTES D'HOFFMAN

ARTS INT.	04 AI 001		£23.99
CLV	Chapter Search	(Two discs - 4)	
COLOUR	STEREO	148mins	1981

Featuring: Placido Domingo, Luciana Serra, Agnes Baltsa, Ileana Cotrubas.

Conductor: Georges Pretre.

A live recording from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden - 2/1/1981.

Jacques Offenbach revived an earlier idea to compose 'Hoffman' during a visit to America in 1876. The work proceeded slowly (he was normally a prolific writer) and a private concert performance of completed excerpts was given in 1879. Sadly, he died of gout of the heart at the age of 61 some 18 months later, with the work incomplete. His family then invited Ernest Guitaud to undertake revisions and complete the orchestration and recitatives. It received a highly successful premiere at the Opera Comique in 1881 where it played for 101 performances in its first year.

The lack of a composer's definitive version has resulted in many different interpretations over the years. Some substitute spoken dialogue for recitative, whilst others reverse the running order of Acts 2 & 3, and I've even heard the septet with chorus transferred from the Venetian scene to the epilogue. The performing version used in this LV issue more or less follows the French/English translation libretto published by SCHIRMER and available at £2-50 from booksellers.

Several traditional short cuts are made in this libretto which are not made in the performance. You'll find yourself with about five very short blank spaces which will be self apparent after the first playing. ARTS INTERNATIONAL have put a great deal of thought into the production of these discs. Stereo seems to be the standard for the Opera & Ballet

series. Here they have avoided interrupting the Acts with side changes and 'Hoffman' stretches to four sides. Chapter Search enables speedy access to the highlights of each Act. My only quibble is the lack of sub-titles or a French to English, line by line translation - but more of this later.!

This production was first performed at "the Garden" in 1980 and was film-director John Schlesinger's first ever opera production. Schlesinger makes a good workmanlike job of things without achieving any true theatrical magic. I should have liked greater emphasis on the phantasmagorical side of the plots but unfortunately it is missing from this rather down to earth version. One of the more successful aspects are the chorus scenes where each chorister has his or her own individual characterisation which makes for a very lively picture. The orgy scene which opens Act 2 has the appearance of a Venetian Old Master painting melting into vibrant life and we even get just the tiniest bit of nudity to add spice to the occasion.

The hero of the piece is the magnificent Placido Domingo, whose portrait of the poet Hoffman is both credible and vocally exciting. The role is a tour de force for the tenor, who hardly ever leaves the stage during the opera and is called upon to contribute more than his fair share of vocal pyrotechnics, which Domingo does with consumate ease. In productions round the world the leading roles are sometimes sung by one soprano and similarly the villains sung by one baritone. This is not the case on the LV disc set and apart from resulting in a cast list resembling a modern-day operatic 'Who's Who', the Garden has been able to select the right voice for the part in a role almost impossible with single casting.

Hoffman's incarnations of his perfect woman are sung by Luciana Serra, Agnes Baltsa, and Ileana Cotrubas and all three divas beautifully achieve the right sort of vocal quality for these three very differing roles. Similarly the multi-casting of the villains is extremely successful with Robert Lloyd, Geraint Evans, Siegmund Nimsgern, and Nicolai Ghiuselev giving menacing and vocally pleasing performances. The role of Nicklaus is usually a "pants part" and I liked Claire Powell's portrayal which was everything it should be. Her spoken dialogue as the muse in the epilogue is a sympathetic and fitting lead in to Hoffman's final sad (and vocally taxing) reprise of his Act 2 aria. In smaller roles we have high quality performances from three Garden stalwarts - Gwyn Howell, Robert Tear, and Bernard Dickerson.

Maestro Georges Pretre musters his musical forces with precision for the majority of the time though there are some inevitable musical co-ordination faults. Remember, you only have one chance to get things right once the curtain rises. Typically I noted an off-stage chorus in the prologue which insisted on singing behind the beat. Another went briefly astray in Act 1 and also I began to fear that the barcarolle was going to sink into the Grand Canal through lack of momentum towards the end. Unlike Candide we do not live in " the best of all possible worlds". Possibly there is a case for an edited distillation of several performances where funds permit.

The stereo balance is fixed while the cameras have free range to select sections of the stage at will. It is therefore possible to hear a singer at the extremes of the sound-stage but visually centered. Would it not be possible to mix the voices in their correct visual position ? What do others think?

A printed synopsis of the plot is provided together with a French only libretto. The nicely presented double sleeve contains production colour photographs. The opera is sung in French. To the aspiring operatic viewer unfamiliar with 'The Tales Of Hoffman' I would recommend buying the bi-lingual libretto. The constant switching from page to TV screen is not going to make for easy viewing but until we are given optional (a la teletext) sub-titling there is no other way of fully appreciating such foreign language operas.

I find it difficult to wholeheartedly recommend this particular release to all and sundry. It will obviously appeal to the committed opera fan but to the disc buyer wanting to dip his toe into the operatic pool for the first time I would say this - You will find lots of tuneful numbers without too much recitative, together with many colourful characters and plots, but do please buy the French/English libretto.

[KEITH ARNOLD]

It is interesting to compare the similarities in the opinions expressed by the three reviewers, working independently of each other.

As the opera sets dealt with were remarkably similar in master quality as well as pressing it seemed expedient to deal with them as a whole. All are video originated and 'Die Fledermaus' & 'La Cenerentola' well illuminated, possibly producing a marginally crisper image than the moodier lit 'Hoffman'. Definition was good if not outstanding on the three.

Sound uniformally carried a certain ambient hiss, no doubt due to the relatively open miking employed. If anything 'La Cenerentola' had the slight edge over the others - the sound also being a bit more 'intimate' in character. The grading of the master sound quality has been marked down to a 'B' for the hiss though in all other respects the sound was impressive.

One of the sets was a German pressing, the rest UK ones, but there was no significant difference. They seem to have been pressed with a fair amount of contrast that gave a certain 'busyness' in plain areas of the backgrounds, but rolling off the contrast control removed the effect almost completely and yet still gave a tonally pleasing picture. The differences in readers own TV sets will probably mean that this comment will be of little relevance if your set normally gives a low contrast picture. There were a few spots at odd moments but generally the pressings were clean.

Overall, these discs live up to expectations.

[A- / B+] [B+ / A-]

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

SPECTRUM	791 562 1		£9.99
CLV			
COLOUR	MONO	91 mins	1983

An animated feature film based on the book by Kenneth Grahame, with the voices of Charles Nelson Reilly, Roddy McDowall, Jose Ferrer, and Eddie Bracken.

Produced and directed by Arthur J. Rankin Jnr and Jules Bass.
Music arranged and conducted by Maury Laws.
Animation by Cuckoo's Nest.

Kenneth Grahame (1859 - 1932) set his original story of the riverbank with Ratty, Toad and Mole on a slow-flowing, wide, meandering river. Since Grahame wrote the book at Pangbourne, Berkshire, it is more than likely that he had the Thames in mind. This American version of the story sets the scene on a river with waterfalls, and Toad's boat is a stern-wheel paddle steamer. This comes as a bit of a surprise to those people who have read the book, however, the cartoon treatment of the story is generally thoughtfully done with a genuine attempt to be true to the original story, but certain American turns of phrase can be a bit disconcerting at times. The incidental music sometimes intrudes in a rather raucus way but the songs are usually appropriate. There are a few clumsy edits near the beginning which seem to coincide with commercial breaks when the original was probably shown on American TV. The animation is well done and captures the atmosphere of the tale accurately.

If as an adult you remember the original book you may be disappointed that the film treatment does not coincide with your rosy recollections of what life for Ratty, Mole, Toad, and Badger was like. I suppose that this is always the danger when a well-known book that is affectionately remembered by adults is made into a film or any visual medium. There is a certain truth in the saying that when comparing TV and radio that "the pictures are better on the radio". The imagination paints more lasting and vivid memories than the cathode ray tube. To be fair though, my three year old daughter who has not read the original story enjoys the disc very much.

Perhaps Cosgrove Hall Productions may be persuaded to make a full length version for LaserVision, based on their TV series. [TONY WELLS]

Disc Quality: Definition fluctuates a bit on the master and there are some moments where the film seems to have got a little dirty. On occasions the illumination of the frame looks a bit uneven - the left-hand side of the screen goes a bit darker than it should. The image appeared a little flickery at times.

The pressing seems quite clean. The reviewed copy would appear to be a repressing. Sound is good. Providing you are sufficiently engrossed in the contents of this disc, the criticisms are likely to be of little significance.

[B- / B+] [B / B+]

LASER CALENDAR

Previously announced titles, now available

DONNA SUMMER, GRATEFUL DEAD, BRAINSTORM, CHAMPIONS, CODENAME: THE SOLDIER, THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT, FORBIDDEN WORLD, HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, HUMONGOUS, THE HUNGER, THE MANITOU, MEGAFORCE, MERLIN AND THE SWORD, PARADISE, PRIVATE POPSICLE, THE RATS, RETURN OF THE SOLDIER, REVENGE OF THE NINJA, RIDER ON THE RAIN, SAHARA, THE SIGN OF FOUR, WINTER KILLS, YOUNG WARRIORS, ZAPPED, YES GEORGIO (Stereo), COOL CATS, DIO LIVE, ELVIS ON TOUR, ELVIS - THAT'S THE WAY IT IS, EVERLY BROS - REUNION, GIRL GROUPS, BARRY MANILOW AT THE GREEK, THE OTHER SIDE OF NASHVILLE, LITTLE BROWN BURRO, MGM CARTOON MAGIC VOL 1, TOM & JERRY 2, TOM & JERRY 3, TOP CAT, and SHOW '84 (CAV).

Due late March / early April

CLASS, EDUCATING RITA, GORKY PARK, SILKWOOD, SPETTERS, THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY, SUPERTED.

Due mid - April

BREATHLESS, KILLING MACHINE, LIANNA, LONE WOLF McQUADE, MURDER BY DECREE, THE WICKED LADY, SATURDAY 14th.

Awaiting artwork - could arrive anytime

THE CHOSEN, CLASS REUNION, SPINAL TAP, UNDERFIRE, YELLOWBEARD.

Tapes received, being pressed, likely available late April / early May

THE FOURTH MAN, THE HIGHEST HONOUR, STRANGERS KISS, STREET OF THE DAMNED.

Tapes not yet received - unlikely to appear till May, earliest

THE KEY, NAIROBI, PLAYING FOR KEEPS, THE SEDUCTION (!!), RACOONS & THE LOST STAR, GWENDOLINE (tape fault discovered on this title).

Forthcoming releases - no scheduled date

FAWLTY TOWERS (all 12 episodes), GREEN GODDESS, LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE, ERIC CLAPTON - WHISTLE TEST, FALL AND RISE OF REGINALD PERRIN, RIPPING YARNS, GRANGE HILL, THREE OF A KIND, PLAY SCHOOL, DR. WHO (which?), SECRET GARDEN, ALL CREATURES GREAT & SMALL, BY THE SEA / PICNIC, TAKE HART, ANIMAL MAGIC, MORE RIPPING YARNS - all these are BBC titles.

Eight more OPERA / BALLET titles are scheduled - the first of which, JULIUS CAESAR, may be out by late April / early May.

+ more music discs - titles as yet unknown.