

LASER **DISC REVIEW**

SEPTEMBER 1985

ISSUE 4 **£1**

The magazine about LASERVISION

**Surround Sound
on your LV Discs**

PIONEER LD 700 update



News & Reviews

Discs from Europe



PHILIPS VLP 830 reviewed

FROM THE EDITOR

It may be best to start this off with an apology as there were a few items scheduled for this issue which, at the last moment, were squeezed out due to pressure of space. Although each issue starts out with an approximate table of contents, there comes a time during production when these space limitations take priority, and it is not always the least topical contributions that are forced out. Ideally one would just expand the size of the magazine (or increase the frequency), but these options are limited by other factors. As it is, issue 5 is likely to cost more - the exact price has not yet been decided, but LDR is now finding its way into more retail outlets and there arises the need to increase margins to cover these new distribution costs - they all gotta make a crust! Hopefully, the additional cost to subscribers should be minimal. Putting LDR on better quality paper does cost more and the increased weight pushes the magazine into a higher postal charge band. Regardless, LDR is still likely to be something of a bargain for what it offers - but then I would say that, wouldn't I!

What it offers is, in some ways, dependent on what readers want. Much of the initial motivation in establishing the magazine was to give people involved in producing both the hardware and software an idea of what moves us to buy LV discs. The whole concept of video-fidelity is little understood, as is the desire to own videos. LV fans are somewhat at the front-line as far as the future of home entertainment is concerned. The trade generally still considers anything related to TV as being little more than 'electronic wallpaper'. But while we are attempting to fight this battle we do not want to become so obscure as to exclude potential LV buyers who may come across this magazine for the first time. If you fall into this category and find some of the detail contained within these

pages a little mystifying do let us know.

One article that was brought forward due to reader response was the one on Surround Sound. This topic seems to be of paramount interest to many LV owners and, having done the first piece, I can see there is plenty more that needs to be said on it. Originally the piece on 'Setting Up For NTSC' had been destined for this issue but will now be in the next. It was first thought that the advantages of acquiring an NTSC system would only be of interest to laser fans too impatient to wait for the disc situation in Europe to improve. But there is now the realisation that, no matter how speedily the UK catalogue improves, there will always be a significant percentage of NTSC titles that will never get issued here. Additionally, there are purely quality related advantages to collecting discs that are less likely to have suffered generation loss, as well as several aspects of fidelity that are only now becoming apparent. If you feel that you may be tempted along this path make sure that, if you are on the verge of buying a new TV/monitor, that it has an NTSC 3.58 video input. What else appears in the next issue will obviously depend on events but it would be hoped that some better software news would be in there somewhere.

Issue 5 (our first anniversary issue) will appear in October and this is mentioned for the benefit of people prone to ring up and ask! Other than that, communication from readers, in whatever form, is always welcome - your experiences and problems can often end up in helping others with their enjoyment of LV.

Guess that's about it, all the best

EDITOR

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LASER DISC REVIEW welcomes correspondence but if you require a personal reply, please include an SAE. Allowance should be made in the length of time taken to reply to letters as the production schedule of the magazine will always be the first priority.

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Letters

From: David Vickers, London

Regarding films made in wide-screen format. My view is that they should always be shown that way, whether on video or broadcast. It is most annoying to see the edges of films missing and thereby losing large areas of scenery, and often, even members of the cast.

What I believe should have happened years ago is that the directors of films etc. should have grouped together and refused to let their films be shown cut or reduced - and have these conditions written in to the contracts before the film is started. As it is, the best solution now would be to have wide-screen televisions designed for wide films.

From: Miss C. Day, Surrey

Can you explain two things -
1) Why do some of the discs have blue lines which shoot across the screen now and again?

2) Could you tell whether the scene in 'The Sound Of Music', side four/0.00, of a girl singing has been cut in any way as you can only see her nose and mouth? The top part of her head is missing and I can't remember if it was like this when I saw it in the cinema.

Line dropout - Recurrent blue lines can have two causes. First check the disc for any dirt that may have adhered to the surface. Remember that the side of the disc that is being played is always opposite to the one that carries the label (the disc is scanned from underneath), and that on CLV discs, guessing how far out from the centre of the disc the dirt may be located involves making allowance for the smaller circumference of the inner tracks of the disc - the thirty minute point of any programme will be nearer two thirds of the distance out from the start of the disc. Clear off anything that may be stuck to the surface in the suspect area - DO NOT use any solvent cleaners, just a soft, clean cloth.

If this does not solve the problem the blemish may be in the disc itself and there is nothing you can do about it. The player does incorporate a dropout compensator circuit (DOC) that detects missing information and repeats the preceeding line of the TV picture in order to mask the problem when it occurs but it will only work within certain limitations. If you suffer from rolling blue lines that persist on a particular disc it may be cause to request a replacement from the dealer. The occasional random line is not normally too troublesome, but you do get the odd disc where it can continue for several minutes with accompanying noise on the soundtrack. (If you have the problem on every disc it could be a player defect.)

Whether on or in the disc, the reason that a single blemish causes lines in different positions on successive TV frames (often the lines appear to roll up and down), is that CLV discs run at a constant linear speed and every revolution is slightly slower than the previous one. (The inner tracks of a CLV disc carry only one picture, the outer tracks squeeze three on.) So, by the time the disc revolves round to the same blemish again the picture has shifted very slightly in relation to it. With CAV discs, where the rotational speed of the disc is fixed and there is only one picture produced with each revolution, line dropouts tend to appear as white lines or dashes instead of blue ones because here the blemish is always reg-

istering in exactly the same point in the revolution of the disc and builds up to give the impression of a transparent or white dropout on the screen.

'My Fair Lady' - No doubt, in some future age, when film prints of many of the major features have decayed beyond hope and/or been lost and only the laser disc remains, film students and historians will be discussing the artistic significance of "the famous My Fair Lady nose scene". The logic of investing a small fortune in producing a wide-screen movie which is then promptly chopped off at the extremities to fill up the TV screens of the time will certainly elude them.... as it does many of our readers now.

From: Jack Haynes, Manchester

I had to write because of the situation about the future of films on LaserVision. It's a bit disturbing to say the least. If software companies want more money for their titles then PHILIPS will have to pay it and pass the increase on to us, the consumer. I was speaking to another owner the other day and we agreed that to get new CIC titles such as 'Trading Places' we would be prepared to pay £15, £18, or even £19 again for them. The few titles featuring music such as 'Blondie Live' would have to be cheaper than the films though - say £11.99. It would be interesting to find out how many LV owners would be prepared to pay the extra for new titles.

Some disc information. I have the German pressed copy of 'DuranDuran' and the sound is in phase. It sounds great through the TV and brilliant through the hi-fi. My copy of 'The Sword And The Sorcerer' is in stereo as is my copy of 'The Thing'. The catalogue states that 'Dio Live' is mono, but my copy is stereo. For some reason the catalogue also omits the fact that 'Duran Duran' is in stereo too.

I am waiting for some new music titles and praying that U2, the Stones, and Blondie will be among them

From: Andre Corteil, Belgium

I was surprised and pleased to find that you and your readers are concerned about pan & scan on wide-screen films. It is understandable on tape because of the low resolution of both VHS and Beta - but on disc it's such a shame. Here in Belgium we have "the cable" and we receive at least 18 different TV stations - Belgium, France, Holland, Germany, Italy, and the BBC. Pan & scan is used only on the BBC and nowhere else!

By the way, my incomplete copy of '2001' is in stereo. After I read about the mistake with the incomplete master tape I sent word to Cambridge Video who I deal with and am presently awaiting delivery of the new copy. Next week I'll send in an order for '2010'.

It would be interesting to have films on disc with Teletext subtitles but once again there might be some problems. There are two different systems. Britain, Germany, Holland (even Italy) use CEEFAX but France (who else?) use ANTIOPE. And Belgium? We use both syst-

ems....Belgian TV's Dutch language channels use CEEFAX but the French language channels use ANTIOPE. A TV set with double Teletext decoder costs as much as a multi-standard TV set. On my TV I have a CEEFAX decoder because ANTIOPE costs twice the price of CEEFAX; vive le France! I do not understand why we are not using the famous SECAM too - mabe we will change in future....

Now that we have some subscribers in France we may have to cool it on these little quips at 'innovative' French technology. It would seem that, with the standard of TV choice available in Belgium, British TV may be a more appropriate target for ridicule in future. Cable TV appears to have started in Belgium in 1965 with 6 stations and soon 'Music Box' and 'Sky Channel' will be added to the roster.

From: Philip Mee, Derby

I first saw LaserVision demonstrated back around 1979 whilst attending a lecture on the future of broadcasting/TV/video etc. One of the items on display was a prototype VP 600 playing a CAV disc. Although amazed by the concept even then it was only in September 1982, and thanks to a little credit card madness while in my local Comet branch, that I became the owner of a VP 700. Indeed, at just under £200 it was impossible to resist although, even at that price, I was disappointed to find that there wasn't a demonstration disc supplied with it. It took 3 days to track down a supply of discs but on doing so I was rewarded with excellent pictures and sound, although it seemed strange that that the only way of starting and stopping play was by closing and opening the lid.

Playback quality from one disc to the next was variable but my library of discs continued to grow - much faster than anticipated. Numbers nine and ten were both warped and PHILIPS offered to change them. My first reaction was that the player was faulty but on taking the discs to the local LaserVision dealers (there are three in Derby) and asking if they wouldn't mind playing them, mixed results were obtained. Though the most warped disc refused to play on two of the machines, it played perfectly on the third. The conclusion from all this must be that some players are more warp-resistant than others. In the future, however, I will try flattening faulty discs as LDR suggested.

One tip to avoid the problem is to check that dealers are storing discs properly. Every disc purchased from one dealer who disappears in to the back of the shop to sort through his boxes has refused to play properly so far.

When searching through new discs either in a shop or just looking in the album list, I now favour stereo ones as this adds a certain something if recorded correctly and also adds an extra point in the repeatability stakes. Also musicals score quite well from a repeat point of view compared to the average film. With wide-screen films I would like to see an intermediate level

of cropping employed. I feel this would be a good compromise compared to the vast losses which occur with either of the other options.

Why is everyone going to so much trouble to remove the shrink wrap from new discs. I find that if the film is neatly cut with a sharp knife it affords extra protection to the sleeve without the need to buy additional protective outers, which in my case, then make them too big to fit in to the record storage box I have. Having the title printed on the top edge of the sleeve, like the BBC ones, is a help when discs are stored in these sort of boxes.

It would certainly appear to be the case that players do vary in their ability to play warped discs. Someone has also commented that slightly warped discs can sometimes produce a shimmering, wobbly picture without reaching the stage of actual picture/sound break up.

As long as the shrinkwrap remains intact it can afford that extra bit of protection but in time it does tend to deteriorate and need removing completely. As you suggest, keeping discs in a top loading record carrying case might get round this problem. It is only the oldest discs where the shrinkwrap tends to weld itself to the sleeve lamination. This habit of removing the shrink wrap may have come about as a result of American experience. There, early shrink-wrapped sleeves would almost fold in half as soon as they were slit and the disc taken out.

From: V. Williams, Cheshire

When do you expect PHILIPS to introduce 8" LV discs as I received a letter from PMI that said "There will be a selection of new 8" titles out before Christmas" (1984)?

Also, I wonder if you have seen the 'Superted' disc. On the sleeve it lists just six titles but there are in fact twelve episodes on the disc.

The impression was given that some of the shorter duration titles in the September '84 list would be on 20cm discs - but it did not prove to be the case. PHILIPS can press the smaller size disc but there seems to be nothing in the works at the moment. Maybe any enterprising pop star or

management company reading this might realise that there is an opportunity here to be first on the market with a new format if they act quick enough!

Other readers have been told of some interesting 8"ers due from PMI, but it would seem that these are titles contracted to PIONEER for release in NTSC territories and not for PAL issue here. There are suggestions that it may even be possible to get a video track on the outer grooves of a CD disc and so another possibility presents itself, but whether this video track would be as good quality as is currently obtainable from an LV disc remains open to question.

Thanks for the 'Superted' info. It has also been reported that 'Top Cat' also contains more than is listed on the sleeve.

From: P. Matijas, Worcestershire

I require a lead that can be connected from the video output socket of my VLP 600 to the video input (6 pin DIN radial) of a stereo TV set. Can you advise of a source.

Competent dealers should be able to provide leads to connect up the equipment they have sold you. It is always best to pursue this route initially as manufacturers do not always produce equipment wired to a common standard. Though a connector might fit, the internal wiring may be different. Most mainland European TV sets manufactured over the last 18 months should be compatible though some sets from Scandinavian manufacturers (sold under their own name, not ones made under other brand-names) and elsewhere will not have pins of connecting plugs dedicated to the same signal function. Readers have complained of difficulty with apparently simple connection problems and this is why the dealer should be the first course of action.

The second alternative would be to approach the Spares & Service department of the manufacturer of the TV concerned. The BNC end is pretty simple - it's the TV with the multi-pin socket that needs attention paid to it. Make sure you know the model number of your TV (see label on back of set). In the case of PHILIPS, their service department is at 604 Purley Way, Waddon, Croydon, CR9 4DR. Tel: 01-686 0505. They can supply leads for PHILIPS TVs direct.

Most ready-made leads are not available in anything other than the shortest lengths and you may need to have a lead made up specially. Again, this is where a good dealer can come to the fore.

Alternatively, LEKTROPAKS - 17 Turnham Green Terrace, London W4. Tel: 01-994 2784 will make up leads to specification at reasonable cost and will supply mail-order.

While on the subject of leads, readers who find that the standard BNC plugs stick so far out the back of the player as to make it difficult to fit the machine on a shelf or in a cabinet may be interested in some right-angle BNC plugs that you may be able to persuade your dealer to acquire for you from RS COMPONENTS. Ask for part no: 456-194, Elbow BNC Plug, 75 ohm.

From: Graeme Ireson, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

On reading that 'Inferno' was to be deleted I went out to buy a copy thinking that I wasn't going to be dictated to as to what I was entitled to watch or not. It was the principle of it.

Well, I honestly cannot see what all the fuss was about. Alright, it was a bit gory here and there - but it is an X certificate horror movie, so what do you expect. Now, if they were withdrawing it because of the storyline, or because of the standard of the acting, or especially, because of the lighting and the piano work throughout the film - then I would wholeheartedly endorse the action taken by this all-knowing body of people that see fit to keep us on the right tracks.

Anyway, I don't wish to blame myself for this little faux-pas, so I'm blaming you. Now I hope you have learnt your lesson and let's hope this sort of thing doesn't happen again.

Sorry.

**LASER
DISC REVIEW**

IF YOUR VIEWS ON LASERVISION
ARE NOT REPRESENTED ON THESE
PAGES OR YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES
THAT NEED ANSWERING LET US
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S HAPPENING....WHAT'S HAPPENING....WHAT'S HAPPE

RADIO ON

D.J.: "We now have a call from Paul in Camberwell."

Paul: "I have a question for Stuart Till (Director of Sales & Marketing at CBS/FOX Video). It's about the fact that CBS/FOX used to be quite active in releasing titles on LV but we don't seem to have seen anything from them recently"

S.T.: "Well, I've got good news for you. We will be, along with several other companies, releasing discs over the next few months bringing the catalogue up-to-date, so probably, within the next four or five weeks you should be seeing some of the new titles in the stores. There certainly has been a lull in the last twelve months as the major companies liased with PHILIPS in sorting out the various distribution rights with disc. But it should improve for you."

Paul: "Can you give us some clues as to titles?"

S.T.: "I would hope that some of the recent video releases such as 'Romancing The Stone', 'Empire Strikes Back', 'Rhinestone', 'Unfaithfully Yours', 'The

Natural' - titles of that calibre should be out on disc soon."

Paul: "That's tremendous. Thanks very much indeed. Is this now going to be a sustained effort as the LaserVision disc has suffered a bit in the past?"

S.T.: "It has, it's been a minority format. It will be sustained inasmuch as this programme of releases should go in to '86. I think a lot of people have been frustrated, PHILIPS themselves especially, people who've bought the machines, and companies like CBS/FOX, that the market has not taken off - particularly, as I'm sure you'll agree, it's such a great format in terms of picture and sound quality."

Paul: "I would like to say though that I wish CBS/FOX would use some better masters."

S.T.: "....I'll speak to the person in charge of that."

Paul: "I find that the picture quality is a bit more diffused than some of the other companies....but I'm sure that'll be looked in to."

S.T.: "It will now, yes."

D.J.: "OK, Paul - it was definitely worth switching over for you see."

Paul: "Great!"

If you switched over to RADIO LONDON on the May 27th Bank Holiday Monday as reader Paul did you will have heard the above conversation in the ensuing phone-in. The stated "four or five weeks" for the first releases would seem to be a bit optimistic but after waiting this long, a few weeks this way or that won't be too much of a problem.

STEREO

Certain discs in the last STEREO column are still in doubt. 'The Thing' is still not decided one way or the other. More than likely it is MONO. 'Grease 2' is MONO, but 'THE SWORD & THE SORCERER' is now confirmed as STEREO. If this title is anything like 'STARFLIGHT ONE', which came out in the same batch of releases, the stereo effect is not obvious throughout. This 'marginal' stereo would appear to be present on several titles. This must beg the question - what constitutes 'true' stereo?

'CAPRICORN ONE's' appearance in the MONO list prompted three responses: "It is in stereo", "Only side two is in stereo", "Only the end of side two is in

HAPPENING....WHAT'S HAPPENING...WHAT'S HAPPENING

stereo" - Take your pick!....

'YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN' appears to be another marginal STEREO disc. "Nearly in stereo" was the exact comment. 'KELLY'S HEROES' would appear to be STEREO as well as most of the new releases that should have been - see Surround Sound page.

'THOMPSON TWINS' is a CAV disc though the catalogue does not make this apparent.

A correction - the first version of '2001' with the bit missing was in stereo but apparently the channels were reversed.

Do let us know of any corrections and additions to the list.

MOTOR MOTOR

In order to extoll the virtues of their car stereo components, including the latest CDX-1 and CDP-1 CD players, PIONEER have produced a CAV LaserVision disc as a sales/demonstration aid. Although the programme only runs for 30 minutes or so, it is in fact a two sided disc as side two contains an alternative German language version. For those of you are already wondering why the dual-language potential of the LV disc was not utilised, two reasons spring to mind. First off, the disc is in stereo (CX encoded too), seemingly the logical thing to do when you are selling car stereo. Second, there are some charts and graphic explanations of digital audio and various combinations of components that require German captions. That last aspect means the disc has slightly different video content too.



It would appear the production of the video was done in southern Germany judging by the scenic backgrounds, but it confused the issue to see the automobile travelling on the left-hand side of the road. Speculating that this was just an example of teutonic thoroughness, it was something of a disappointment on turning the disc over to find that the car hadn't changed over to the right-hand lane.

Providing it hasn't been worn out by being on continuous demonstration (just put that in to keep you on your toes!), you can see this disc for yourself at STEREO REGENT STREET - 245 Regent Street, London W1, or may be your local PIONEER dealer might have it if they sell car equipment as well as LV.

DIGITAL SOUND

Digital Sound releases to fulfill the potential of the NTSC PIONEER CLD 900 are increasing in number. Apart from those illustrated on page 9,



the best news is the expansion of the concept to include feature films in the schedule. 'Wings', 'The Cotton Club' and 'Star Trek 3 - The Search



For Spock' being the first examples. New music titles announced or already available include 'Kool & The Gang - Tonight', and discs from Al Jarreau, Chaka Khan, Buddy Rich, Keith Jarrett, and Madonna (mini-disc). Also a 'mood' disc on Australia's Ayers Rock and a ballet - 'Giselle'.

JAPAN

A recent survey of the Japanese market carried out by the US record trade publication, Billboard, quoted some interesting statistics. JVC, who sell VHD discs in Japan, estimate the total videodisc market (VHD & Laser) to reach 900,000 players by the end of 1985 - an effective doubling up over the previous year. A different Japanese industry report stated that PIONEER has revised its own estimate for the size of the laser market to 600,000 players, up 100,000 from initial calculations. PIONEER appear to be able to sell every CLD 900 LV/CD player they can produce and in the US, sales of the player would seem to have put strains on the disc supply situation as many new owners come into the market. The CLD 900 now accounts for half the US LV player sales - this being achieved without too much apparent promotion of the model.

This shortage of software has already hit the CD market where a recent upturn in player sales has meant many record labels unable to get new titles pressed before Xmas. Much of the new CD activity is in the US where the original prediction was that the consumer would be slow to accept the higher priced CD as audio disc prices have traditionally always been low. Record companies there believing that forecast have much catching up to do. While on the subject of CDs; the Japanese NIPPON COLUMBIA released five CDs last Xmas in ordinary cardboard sleeves though, apparently, the idea was poorly received. If you think that the plastic boxes CDs presently come in are really necessary for disc protection, may be you could explain why LV discs with Digital Sound require no such 'precious' protection. Will

the plastic CD case disappear when CDs ultimately fall in price and margins are squeezed?

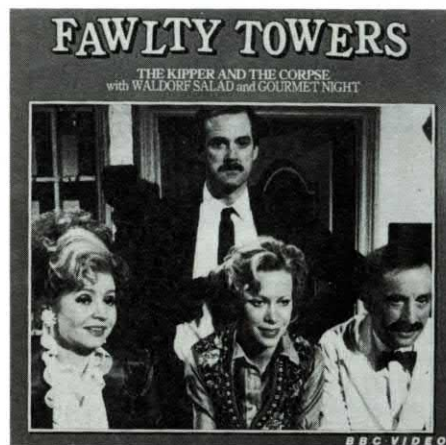
Returning to the Japanese LV scene, the estimate for the number of titles by the year end is 2000. The current US total is around 1300 - 1400.

LV DIVIDENDS

At the UNITED CO-OPERATIVE, Talke hypermarket (near Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire) you can catch a glimpse of PHILIPS' first major retail interactive touch-screen LV systems. Presented as the 'Homemaker Microwave Advice Centre', customers are faced with a touch-screen display where they can access information on the product range of SANYO (!) microwave ovens and the various aspects of use and care. A staff sales and training programme is also incorporated into the one disc and the CWS Group see the concept as having selection and speed advantages over linear video tape systems that require end to end viewing.

59 mins 50 secs

When the 'Fawlty Towers' discs were first being talked about the plan was two shows per disc - with the programmes being a little on the long side it was reckoned not feasible to get two on a single side. Well, on this one they managed it and the elapsed time counter clicks off just 10 seconds short of 60 minutes. What makes this especially interesting is that the early PAL discs (all of three years ago!) had a hard time managing 55 minutes without exhibiting a weak picture - hence the many sub two hour discs that need three sides. This 'Fawlty Towers' disc even appears to have a bit of space left on the outer edges so maybe, one day, we could see that inert zero on the counter actually do something.



NEWS

At the beginning of June PHILIPS announced a new licensing arrangement for future LV releases and talked of a 100 title package being prepared for later in the year. This would seem to be very much a repeat of a similar deal done for V2000 pre-recorded software that so far appears to have given that format quite a shot in the arm as many of the best releases now get issued on V2000. Looks promising!

VP 935

April saw PHILIPS announce a new LV player for the professional/industrial market - the VP935. Available only in

NG...WHAT'S HAPPENING...WHAT'S HAPPENING...WHAT

NTSC so far, it offers instant access within 100 frames without screen blanking. In most instances a 1 second access time is possible and a worst case time of 3 seconds is quoted. The machine is offered with a choice of in/outputs, depending on user requirement.

EUROLASER

Following the article on European LaserVision, several readers have asked about where they can obtain some of the titles mentioned. We don't yet have a supplier for all titles, but certain individual labels have indicated they would be willing to supply their own product direct. News of other sources will be published as we receive it.

German discs are marginally more expensive than those in the UK but most of the film titles have dubbed German soundtracks. Most discs are 59 DM (a little over £15).

VPS VIDEO's discs mostly seem to come in thick, glossy boxes - at least 'King Kong' did. When you open the box the laser disc is there, lying in a simulated velvet-lined tray. Very exotic. Same packaging for 'The Story Of O'. VPS discs are 59 DM each plus 10 DM per order for postage.



VPS VIDEO PROGRAMM SERVICE GmbH

Saarstrasse 7,
8000 München 40,
West Germany.

There are eight titles in the VPS list:
405.4052 KING KONG - Re-make with Jeff Bridges & Jessica Lange. 116 mins.



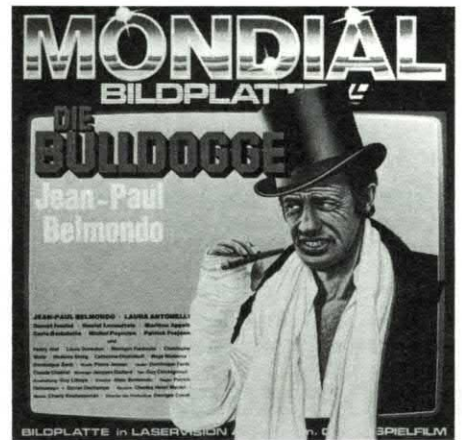
405.4054 DER LETZE COUNTDOWN (The Final Countdown) - w. Kirk Douglas, Martin Sheen, Katherine Ross.
405.4036 ROAR - w. Noel Marshall, Tippi Hedren, Melanie Griffith.
405.4055 FREIBEUTER DER MEERE - Pirate film w. Terence Hill and Bud Spencer.
405.4057 STEINER 1 - DAS EISERNE KREUZ (Cross Of Iron) - w. James Coburn, James Mason, Maximilian Schell.
? GESCHICHTE DER O (The Story Of O) - Just Jaekin production w. Udo Kier, Corinne Clery, Anthony Steel.
405.4053 DJANGO - Spaghetti Western w. Franco Nero.
? EIN MANN SIEHT ROT - Charles Bronson.

MIKE HUNTER VIDEO have a two-tiered pricing structure. Every one of their discs seen so far has the empty part of side two filled up with trailers for other titles in their catalogue. What a smart idea. All discs come in regular sleeves but often they are labelled dual-language when they are not. Assume that all titles are dubbed into German though at least a couple of the adult titles are definitely bi-lingual (see list). Again, add 10 DM to total towards postage.



MIKE HUNTER VIDEO GmbH
Hohe Pforte 4-6,
5000 Köln 1,
West Germany.

Discs come in two prices. These are all 49 DM. All dubbed German language.
MH140-B COUNTDOWN ZUR HOLLE War film w. Gregory Ford, Chris Kennedy, Harry Randall.
MH146-B HOLLE VON TOKIO Japanese earthquake movie.
MH150-B THE NESTING Horror.
MH151-B THE BOOGY MAN More horror.
MO233-B RAUMPATROUILLE Childrens cartoon, possibly of Japanese origin.
MO240-B IM BLAUTAUSCH DES SATANS Even more horror w. Claudine Auger, Luigi Pistilli, Brigitte Skay. Dir: Mario Bava.
MO249-B KILLER SIND IMMER UNTERWEGS War-time thriller w. Alain Delon, Curd Jurgens, Georges Geret, Jess Hahn. Also known as 'Teheran 43'.
MO255-B DIE BULLDOGGE Black comedy about womanising doctor w. Jean-Paul Belmondo, Mia Farrow. (aka. 'Dr. Popoul')
MO257-B PACIFIC INFERNO Attempt to recover treasure dumped in sea to avoid capture by Japanese invaders w. Jim Brown, Richard Jaeckel, Wilma Reading.
MO262-B POWER PLAY Loyal colonel gets involved in government overthrow attempt w. David Hemmings, Peter O'Toole, Donald Pleasence, Barry Morse.



These are all 59 DM. Some titles in dual sound German/English. All eight discs are adult sex material. SEE NOTE ON p30 - 'OTHER BITS'

LB1-B SENSATIONS (Dual)
MH1-B SEX MANIACS
MH39-B OLYMPIC SEX FEVER
MH45-B SEX BOAT Currently out of stock.
MH51-B SWEET PARADISE
MH52-B MANHATTEN CALL GIRLS
MH59-B GIRLS USA w. Vanessa Del Rio, Samantha Fox. (German Language)
MH41-B LAS VEGAS MANIACS (Dual)

In Holland many of the discs are in English with Dutch sub-titles but they are unfortunately a bit more expensive. The average price is fls-79 (slightly over £18) and double-discs a bit more still. VIDEOSCREEN have offered to supply titles to UK readers for £22-50 including postage. They will even take English currency (this seems quite normal in Holland) and sending cash via insured post is quite a cheap way of making payment. They also have a GIRO A/C no. 368 7527. In their letter they imply that they can also obtain other Dutch film titles at the same price. Refer to issue 3 for a list of these.



VIDEOSCREEN
Postbus 426,
3430 AK NIEUWEGEIN,
Holland.

VLP2037E THE SAVAGE HUNT - Thriller set in the period of the Greek Junta in 1974.
VLP2043E CALIGULA - Reviewed this issue.
VLP2058E BOBBIE JO & THE OUTLAW.
VLP2060E VIRUS - w. Chuck Connors, Glenn Ford, George Kennedy.
VLP2061E TITLE SHOT - w. Tony Curtis, Richard Gabourie. Crime/Drama set around boxing.

(continued on page 30)

Dealer News

On the suggestion of PIONEER rep Ron Brown, a visit to Burgess Hill was arranged to see how things were done at MID-SUSSEX ELECTRONICS where, so the story went, owner Roy Mackey was a real enthusiast for LaserVision. The chosen Friday proved to be bright and sunny and it didn't take much persuasion to don the old shorts and set off on the trusty bicycle.

To an outsider, Burgess Hill appears to exist somewhat in the shadow of nearby Haywards Heath, both towns serving a really pleasant part of Sussex and as a location for selling LaserVision, a very different prospect to a capital city like London. So, the sight of every model of LV player on display (yes, even an 830!) was something of an unexpected surprise. After preliminary introductions and a brief stroll round the double-fronted shop we all repaired to a local restaurant for sustenance. (Be reasonable. What else do you really think would induce me to take on a 90 mile bike ride!)

MSE have been selling LaserVision from the start and Roy can claim the ultimate in dealer one-upmanship by pointing out that he was born in the LV pressing plant in Blackburn (or the MULLARD valve factory as it then was) during the last war. I think I believe him... After the initial LV launch he reckons things went through a bad patch, but the last year has seen something of a turnaround and he is especially keen on the shift in emphasis towards music related discs in the catalogue though he still sees substantial demand for good film titles. The conversation touched on the unfortunate deletion of 'Apocalypse Now' and 'The Blues Brothers', and Roy has been pushing to get some copies of the Tina Turner VCL disc into the country. This sort of attention to the software is obviously what makes the difference in LaserVision as sales in the shop demonstrate. MSE is also a V2000 stockist - 'We are a V2000 area here' says Roy casually. [Readers in other parts of the world who may not be aware of V2000 might be interested to know that this flip-over cassette VCR system (4+4=8 hours total) produces the best picture quality and special effects of the three ½" tape systems although it has fared rather badly in the market place. There is even a half-speed, 16 hour model, the V2840, available.]

All this support of LaserVision and V2000 would no doubt appear financial lunacy to many



("Look, an 830" proclaims Roy)

other dealers but MSE must be doing something right as by the time you read this the shop will have undergone some extensive alterations and benefitted by the installation of a new shop front. No doubt putting a bit of effort into the job helps sell LV. Roy has demonstrated the system at the local Glyndebourne Opera, and at the time of the visit, was finalising details of running a



LaserVision tent at the forthcoming Ardingly Agricultural Show where over 100,000 visitors could be expected. (Hope it's a big tent!)

The impact of the PIONEER side of the operation was somewhat diminished on the return journey from the restaurant when we passed a PHILIPS delivery lorry that had just dropped off a batch of players that very nearly filled up half the shop - but I was assured that there were plenty of PIONEER machines elsewhere in the building! Roy confirmed that purchasers of the LD700 had found the definition superior, to the extent that previously unseen spots on certain discs were now plainly visible. Any fears of this player's solid-state laser being lacking can undoubtedly be set aside. His biggest complaint seemed to be that he now has two 700s to deal with and one does wonder why PIONEER didn't use the Japanese 7000 designation for the new machine to save this confusion with PHILIPS' VLP700.

A few snaps were taken. Roy stands on the right clutching the LD700 remote while partner Derek shows off his LaserVision tie. You could do no better than go visit them if you are in the area. MID-SUSSEX ELECTRONICS, 163-165 Church Road, Burgess Hill, Sussex RH15 9AA. Telephone: 04446-42336.

First off, PHILIPS have announced new arrangements for LV disc distribution. About a year ago they had a big push to expand the number of disc outlets under the LaserVision Centre scheme. Though well intentioned, as readers will no doubt need no reminding, the scheme did not succeed in practice and supplies of discs to these outlets tended to be painfully slow and erratic. Many of these outlets still have discs at the old prices and many have not received any of the newer titles (from end '84 onwards). Coupled with the fact that many of these stockists were indeed just that, "stockists", and not doing anything positive to sell LV, the general conclusion must be that not a lot was being achieved by the LaserVision Centre scheme being spread over so many outlets.

What LV needs at this stage is committed dealers. There is no room for the type of dealer who expects goods off-loaded by the supplier at the back of the shop to be immediately carried out through the front door pausing only briefly for a credit card number to be shouted across to the cash desk as they wend their way. Rather in manner of the early days of hi-fi and stereo, it is an enthusiast market that needs to be built up to a mass market, not from the bulk market downwards.

What all this will mean in practice is that

many readers will find themselves losing local retail suppliers. This has already happened to subscriber Peter Jeffrey in Northampton but he has managed to obtain LV discs to order through a local record dealer (SPIN-A-DISC, 19A Abington Sq.) and this may be a sensible route for others to pursue in their own areas. More than likely it will take a bit of effort to set the wheels in motion, but once you've got your record dealer in to the habit it should prove a reliable source. Failing that it may be necessary to deal with a mail-order supplier.

RELIABLE VIDEOS are such a supplier and will mail discs anywhere, as well as offering a normal shop service for those in the area. Just to show what a bit of enthusiasm on the part of the dealer can achieve, RELIABLE VIDEOS recently got hold of a box of the deleted 'Blues Brothers' disc from seemingly out of nowhere which (here comes the bad news) were all sold within days! If you want to be in the know next time you'd best get in touch with Peter at RELIABLE VIDEOS, 820 Pershore Road, Selly Park, Birmingham B29. Telephone 021-471-2428.

THE LASER LIBRARY, Richmond House, Richmond Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 4DL operate an approval scheme for LV discs before purchase. Because of the shortage of software specific to their tastes it is more than apparent that many LV owners have experimented with titles outside their normal fields of interest. This can be very rewarding when you stumble across something genuinely enjoyable that you would have otherwise not investigated, but of course, some 'chance' purchases are bound to disappoint. THE LASER LIBRARY may be a good way of tipping the odds.

Although primarily a retail shop outlet, the long established HAROLD MOORES RECORDS is a classical music record dealer who has recently taken to selling LV. This is the sort of stockist that one would have always hoped would take LaserVision on board where the contents of the disc become the main concern. HAROLD MOORES RECORDS obviously tend to restrict themselves to the classical music, opera and ballet repertoire, but they do keep a few few films and musicals as well as stocking CDs and those old blackwax discs that we really don't like talking about anymore, but until the contents get re-issued on laser they have to be tolerated one supposes. HAROLD MOORES RECORDS, 2 GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET, LONDON W1. Telephone 01-437 1576. (Open Sundays too 12.00 - 18.00.)

Last mention this issue goes to THE LONDON WIRELESS CO., 78 Station Road, Burton-On-Trent, Staffordshire. Tel: BURTON 68835. They have been an active LV dealership the past two years and you are recommended to search them out if you live in the area. They reckon to stock 200-300 discs at any one time.

SHOW TIME

A Look at the London Trade Show

Maytime sees many of the video and hi-fi manufacturers showing off next seasons goodies to the trade. LDR went along to see how LaserVision fared. Now, we knew beforehand that PIONEER were going to have an NTSC version of the combined LV/CD player - the CLD 900 there, but it was especially pleasing to be greeted on the way in by a display of the LD 700 and both car and component CD players side by side. This sort of laser connection needs emphasising more often.

The CLD 900 was being demonstrated with CDs and the 20cm Laser 45s (They had a whole wad of them! Several Bowies and also the Tina Turner 'Private Dancer' disc), and the concept of such a unit seemed to be making an impact with dealers. This would appear to duplicate the reaction in Japan and the USA where the convenience and hi-tech appeal of the machine has produced significant sales action. Nothing was made of the hybrid LV disc with Digital Sound, none were in evidence. As to when we are going to get a PAL version of the CLD 900, no-one was making any definite promises. There is still this problem of finding room to fit the digital audio within the PAL bandwidth, but the impression was that it will happen, it is just a matter of time.



(Some Japanese Laser 45s seen at the show)

The PX-7 Video Control Computer made a showing and it would appear that this will be in black finish when it is introduced, probably during the period of this issue. Future supplies of the LD 700 will also only be in black and the silver colour option will no longer be available when existing stocks are exhausted. Apparently, the LD 700 has done substantially better saleswise than its predecessor and it was nice to see so many on display amongst the other PIONEER video and hi-fi components.



(Right is the PX-7 computer and above, one of the games we may be getting in PAL format.)

Over at the PHILIPS show, the laser connection was not being made although, in a piece of the promotional blurb under the heading 'The Way Ahead', Dr. Wisse Dekker, the main PHILIPS chairman, commented on the Company's integration of the Audio and Video divisions into a single Consumer Electronics department, and there followed several references to the fact that hi-fi, video, and computers will all become part of the future 'Electronic Home'. This concept is all likely to be pretty much accepted by readers of this magazine, but it is reassuring to see that the company that brought us LaserVision is still thinking ahead to future mass-market developments, and that reference to 'mass-market' is the significant part of the statement. Other industry leaders have suggested that future expenditure on home electronics will be second only, in value terms, to the main house purchase and will relegate the family car to third position.

As to LaserVision itself, there was nothing new on show but PHILIPS did not give the impression of being at all threatened by the recent Oriental LV developments. Even if they are not PHILIPS machines, the near half-million players estimated to be in Japanese homes by the end of this year must vindicate their original faith in the concept. Here, the industrial market has suddenly come alive now that people are starting to realise the disc's potential and one can only hope that some of this will spill over on to the consumer side of things. Not for the first time, the Ed made his usual plea for some more software activity and it would seem that something may be stirring at last.

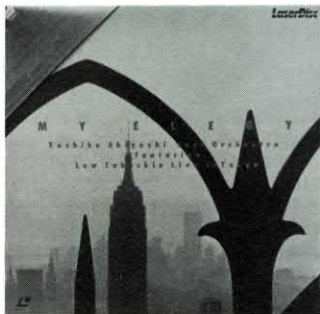
This year it would seem that the hardware push is in the CD side of things however, and they displayed a novel portable music centre incorporating a CD player - all for £399. Actually, only a mock-up was shown but supplies are promised for the Autumn. At the top of the range, PHILIPS first full 16-bit player, the CD850, was announced but again not shown. It is promised for October delivery at £550 and aside from the spec advances the machine also features a 'Favourite Track Selection' facility whereby discs can be programmed to play selected tracks (missing out the duds!) and the sequence be committed to memory for future use - and the memory will hold the details of fifty discs, retrievable on a single command. A pitch control will be incorporated, a really useful device if you are wont to play along with your records. It is a lot easier to adjust the pitch of the disc than to re-tune the piano each time! Also there are applications for this in fitting musical accompaniment to slide presentations, home video recordings etc. Finally, this machine should also arrive



with a rear socket catering for a video display output. Coming across well-conceived products like this makes one wish there was more space available to cover many of the other products being offered to compete for our Xmas pennies. As it is we can only manage a mention of PHILIPS new TVs with 'FSQ Vision' - flatter, squarer tubes and some normal and medium resolution computer monitors, but there was nothing in evidence that really combined the two concepts into the form of a high quality modular TV system. Next year may be!

Before wandering away from the PHILIPS exhibition one should possibly make mention of the usually dreaded '200 disc sleeves in a revolving rack' display. Now, if they were all like this one - ie. with all the good titles and the latest releases (then 'Fawlty Towers' etc.) one could be more enthusiastic about 'em! Seeing a different sleeve for 'The Seduction' from the one featured in the EMBASSY advert in issue 2 prompted the comment 'How can you have two different sleeves for a disc that has never appeared? (it's been about two years a'comin'!). A hand thrust into a pile of demo discs produced a test pressing of the thing. Out at last!!!

At the PHILIPS show there was talk of the MARANTZ people running a demo of the LV/CD player with Surround Sound and Digital Sound. A hotel a few blocks away was the stated location, but the real action was up on the top floor in an isolated bedroom. I was ushered into a darkened room only to see playing on an impressive monitor display the Milt Jackson/Ray Brown 'Midnight Session' Digital Sound disc. The MARANTZ



people had, in fact, brought their version of the CLD 900 over in order to demonstrate a new Surround Sound decoder, supposedly with the correct rear decoding for 'Dolby Stereo' films, and promised to sell at only £129 (August). The favoured demo piece for this was, wait for it, an excerpt from a disc of 'Empire Strikes Back' (Japanese, subtitled) with a whole lot of on-screen explosions and spaceship sequences. Interestingly, the two rear speakers were positioned facing into the corners of the room so all the sound from these would have been reflected rather than direct.



According to MARANTZ's Japanese representative who was running the demo, the motivation to get into Surround Sound was, to a large extent, to combat the problem with the hard and unforgiving nature of a lot of recordings that had been revealed by the transparency of the CD medium. A little delayed rear acoustic can help create that ambience that is normally destroyed by the close-mike, multi-track techniques that were hitherto masked by the mushiness of analogue discs. Japanese fans are reported to be taking the concept a stage further by inserting even another pair of speakers and a decoder midway between the front and the rear pair - six speakers in total! A different time delay is set for the midway pair in order to draw the sound out in a controlled and progressive manner, just in the way sound waves decay and reverberate in real-life.

I could have spent all day in this bedroom (and how many hotel bedrooms could you say that of), but as these were the closing hours of the show the components were soon being dismantled around me and I had to scurry round and try and capture something of all this on film. I didn't get a picture of a neat little £99 video switcher that MARANTZ are also introducing in August, but will get the gen on this for next time.

..... Tony Cook reports on the June CES, Chicago

PIONEER had no new LaserDisc players at the Chicago show but did have some interesting software on display. Among the not yet available titles PIONEER displayed in a mock store were 'The River', Alfred Hitchcock's 'Rope', '2010', CAV versions of 'Star Wars' and 'The Empire Strikes Back', and 'Dune'. 'Dune' was being played on PIONEER's Foresight television system and also one of their Bodysonic chairs. Although they weren't getting any push by PIONEER, an 8mm camera/recorder was laid out for conventioners to view.

Many new companies had a CLD 900 under their own name, SANSUI's SV-L1000 player named the 'Lasertron'. TEAC had an LD 700 and 900 called 'LaserMates'. SONY was not on the floor so I could not get an official word on their current laser plans. A PIONEER rep did tell me that SONY may be manufacturing their own player for the consumer market. LUXMAN was not on display but a silver version of the CLD 900 was found in one of the trade publications at the show. LUXMAN calls their CLD 900 the D-408 and have given it a \$1300 suggested retail. LV is certainly getting the hardware people behind it now!



(Above - MARANTZ's version of the CLD 900 LV/CD player and, in the foreground, the RV 353 Surround Sound processor. Left - A selection of Japanese Digital Sound LV discs brought over for the MARANTZ demo.)

PHILIPS MSX ?

With the current Domesday project allied to the BBC ACORN computer and PIONEER's MSX based games machine it was hoped PHILIPS might make a show of computer hardware. Nothing was in evidence but compatibility problems were shrugged off as regards future LV developments. Obviously news on this topic will be relayed as it happens. PHILIPS do currently sell MSX computers in Holland and Italy at least (VG 8010 & VG 8020) and have been licencees of the format since the start though it appears to be the near saturation of computer hardware in the various markets, significantly the UK with its strong home manufacturers, that has postponed a showing of PHILIPS MSX product here.

PHILIPS

VLP 830

In order to complete the set, LDR takes a look at the PHILIPS VLP830. Although nearly two years old, many readers have not seen one of these machines as only the more committed dealers would seem to carry them in stock. The VLP 830 is only one of a range of similar PHILIPS models that cater for the industrial/institutional sector and you are quite likely to see machines with a similar external appearance featuring in photographs of commercial LV applications.

The VLP830 we get is reasonably up to date in style and rather reminiscent of the original series of PHILIPS' CD players, though obviously bigger. It is marginally smaller than the VLP600/700 models (127H, 532W, 412D) but like all LV players, the depth measurement should be increased by about 50mm to allow for the projection of the rear connecting plugs. The base of the machine is dark grey in colour but most of the plastic casing that is visible is silver. The player is supplied with a infra-red remote.

Most of the basic functions are controlled from a 14 switch panel on the top of the player but, apart from the CX noise reduction, these are all duplicated on the remote control which contains the only means of operating the machine's programmable facilities. This approach means that the VLP830 can function adequately as a stand-alone player - or you can locate it wherever is most convenient as long as it remains within the 6-12 metre range of the remote (the range being dependent on battery conditions).

Rear connections are fairly straightforward - UHF Aerial Input / UHF Output / Audio L & R / 21-pin Euroconnector. The absence of a separate BNC Video Output did present a few initial problems in getting the review sample hooked up, but on a permanent installation the Euroconnector does enable a convenient single lead video/audio connection though you would be advised to ensure your dealer can produce the correct lead that will mate with your TV & HiFi before you hand over your money for this or any other machine with a similar Euro socket. Though these connectors are an admirable concept, readers have complained of difficulties matching these sockets with existing pieces of equipment. Provide your dealer with full details of your intended hook-up. Seeing as the audio signals are also carried in the Euroconnector, it does seem regrettable that that PHILIPS did not also duplicate the video signal output in BNC form as well.



Assuming that you are all powered up (there is no transit screw on this machine - you just plug it in straight out the box), a push on the ON button causes an initial whirring and after a couple of seconds the lid springs open. The scanning lens is visible as usual, but on this player it runs from the centre towards the rear, not sideways like the VLP600/700 models. The spindle and lid clamp are very similar to before and pushing the disc firmly on the spindle is recommended. Closing the lid sets play into operation and the lid interlock is very soft and easy in operation. There is a small illuminated panel on the front that establishes disc status - Power On / Audio 1 / Audio 2 / CX / Active Play / Long Play / Pause. These are not likely to be much help at more than the closest of viewing distances, and certainly not much help when you are employing the remote from across the room. (This was very much how the function lights on the LD1100 proved of minimal help in use, though in that case there were even more of them to try and interpret!)

There is a little window in the player lid that allows you to see the disc whizzing round but there is really not much to look at. Seeing how pretty a LaserVision disc is when held in the hand, there is the expectation of the thing bursting into some sort of multicoloured display as soon as it is subjected to the laser beam, but this is not the case. The control buttons on the machine are nice and big and require minimum pressure to initiate a command. There is a bit of an associated mechanical clunk that confirms a function has been engaged.

Remote

Seen in profile, the 830 remote looks like it has been conceived with sort of interplanetary travel in mind but the top view is quite plain. Some TV remotes use the same shell which is what accounts for the redundant indentation on the left-hand side (not visible in photo) that normally controls a VCR. Also on the underside there is a clear plastic window that is intended for the teletext information card. Most of the controls are fairly straightforward, but some of the less obvious ones conceal some of the 830's more sophisticated facilities.

Of the more familiar functions, the slow-motion control is spread over three buttons. The right-hand one sets the mode and the + and - buttons alter the rate. As there is no slider and the rate does not show up on the TV screen it is hard to re-set a sequence at the same rate as previously - you have no reference point. You can only guess. Also the slow-motion only operates in forward and it is not possible to rock a selected sequence back and forth.

Fast play (> 3) works only in forward too and when you release the button the machine reverts to still mode. Still frame controls are again fairly straightforward and one should revert to the slow motion buttons to automatically still-frame through a disc, but again it is not possible to do this in reverse. Reverse still frame needs to be done manually. The PAUSE control, as seems to be typical of all play-



ers with this function, does move the disc on a few frames when used.

The top controls are less obvious. Under the numerical buttons there is a convenient CORREction key that allows you to delete wrongly programmed commands. This may seem unnecessary at first sight but it is possible to set up sequences of instructions on this machine and it does save you having to delete the whole lot when making an error on the very last digit (it's always the last digit, isn't it!).

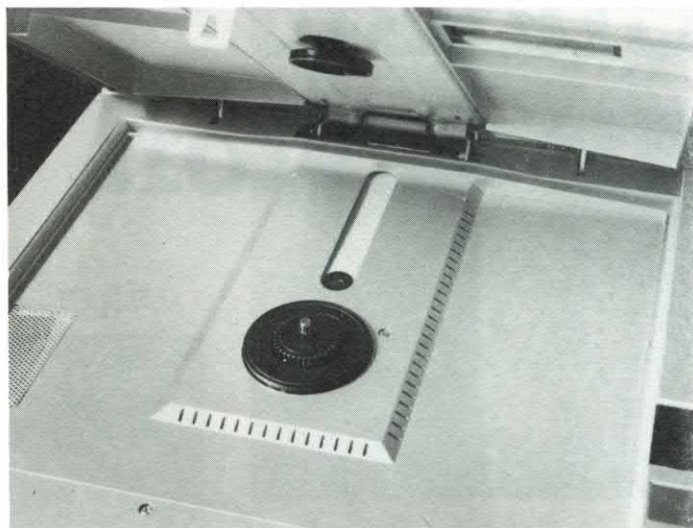
CNR calls up Chapter NumberS on the screen, PNR/TM does likewise for frame numbers (Picture Number) on CAV discs, and elapsed Time display on CLVs. The instruction booklet is rather confusing inasmuch as it implies that search and programming is only operable on CAV discs which is not the case. Although it is not possible to access discs by keying in a time point, it is possible to use the search and programme function on CLV discs with chapter numbers - one of the most useful assets of the player. This is how it's done.

Pressing CNR reveals the chapter display and you then key in the chapter number you require. Pressing SEARCH initiates the command. Taking this operation a step further and setting up a programmed sequence is achieved thus. Press CNR, key in first required chapter, and then press ENTRY. Press next required chapter and press ENTRY again - and so on, up to a total of seven commands. Your instructions get displayed on the screen as you key them in. Chapters can be selected in any order you require and you do not have to adhere to the sequence dictated by the disc running order. Pressing SEARCH sets the programme into operation. With programmed sequences (not straight single chapter search commands) it is possible to press the REPEAT button and the player will return to the start of that particular chapter without destroying the overall programme.

With CAV discs the same search sequence is involved but in conjunction with the PNR/TM button. To set up a sequence of frames (only one sequence can be stored) the first frame is keyed in as usual with the ENTRY button and the last with the AUTOSTOP. When played, the disc will then stop at the last frame and slow and still commands can be superimposed without erasing the memory. However, if you return to the beginning of the selected sequence the player will overshoot the first number. If you initiate this memorised sequence with the REPEAT button (instead of PLAY etc.) the play-

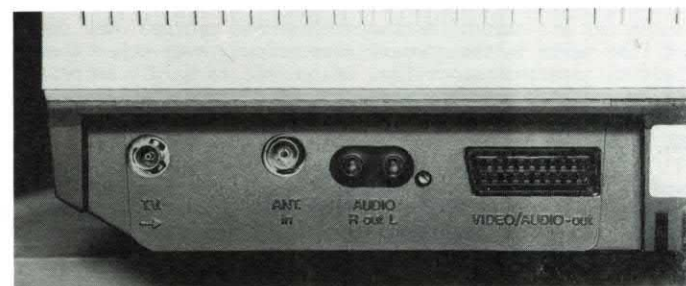
er will not overshoot and will stop at the first memorised frame but as soon as you slip into a mode other than normal play it will again overshoot.

Should, at any time, you wish to discard any of the commands stored in the memory, a push on the CLEAR button will achieve this, as will the player itself when coming to the end of a disc side. At the end of side play the 830's lid springs up and turning the disc over is a fairly speedy operation. Out of curiosity a comparison was made with PIONEER's LD700 and it was possible to get the disc back in to side 2 play in twenty seconds on the 830. (From where the player disengages to the similar take up point on the second side.) The LD700, although a faster machine in most respects, took 25



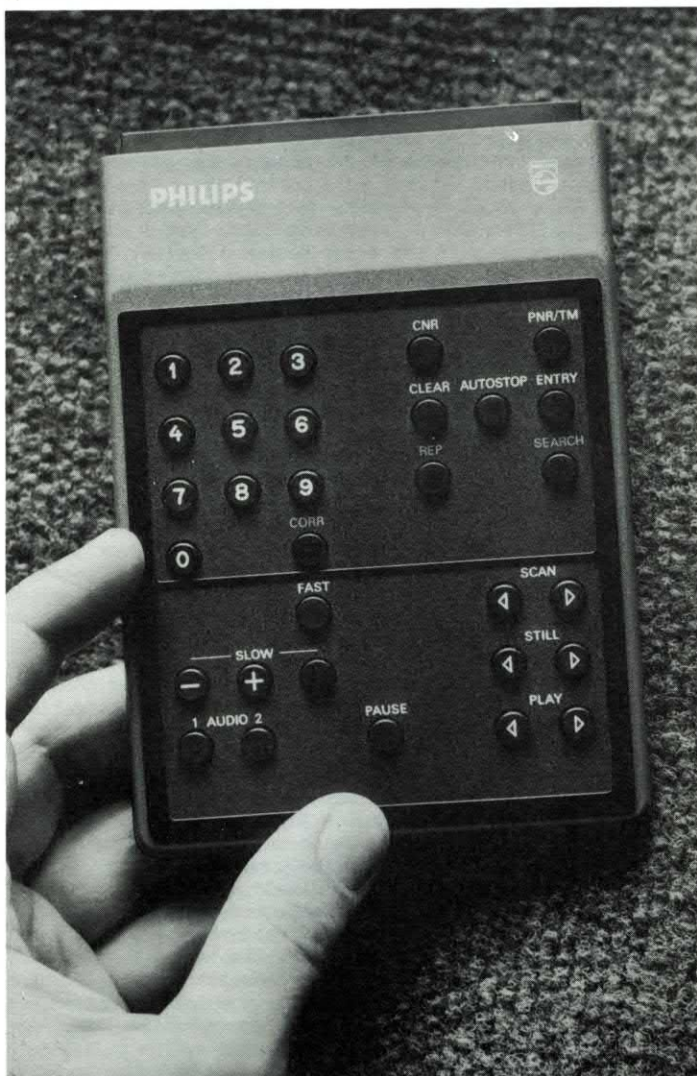
seconds to do the same operation. The speed at which the 830's lid springs up can be something of an inconvenience when you wish to repeat something. If you are not alert enough the player disengages before you have a chance to scan back. A reject control on the remote would have been a welcome addition to the 830's facilities.

The 830 is, of course, still a 'gas' laser machine and, though a bit quieter than the basic PHILIPS models, you still pick up the noise of the tracking mechanism (somewhat akin to the noise you might get out of a fan heater). Choosing a location for these type of players does seem to be quite crucial and even modest experimentation can be surprisingly beneficial.



Certain aspects of picture quality deserve comment. The ability to reproduce a smoother extended tonal range than the previous PHILIPS models was noted. That means detail can be maintained in shadow areas without highlights bleaching out and the player is likely to be more tolerant to differently mastered discs - you should experience less need to alter tone controls between discs. Definition did not seem markedly better than before although horizontal streaking on plain backgrounds was improved though still in evidence - it did vary from disc to disc in this latter characteristic. The 830 coped with the vertical 'wriggle' better than other players, including PIONEER's new machine, but oddly, on some long CLV discs, the 830 did exhibit a manifestation of this crosstalk on highlight areas of the picture. Instead of a single wriggle it produced more of a consistent pattern across the screen - it was not very pronounced but deserves comment.

Although the 830 has definite advantages over other machines it does now appear threatened by the more recent LD 700 from PIONEER. As far as the remote and programming facilities are concerned each machine has its own little quirks, and in an ideal world one would wish for the best of both machine's remote operations could be combined in future LV machines. Seeing what improvements PHILIPS have made in the operational controls of their existing and forthcoming CD players that have been announced during the currency of the VLP 830, one is inclined to be excited about what they could achieve in future models of LaserVision players. The VLP 830 presently lists at £ 549.



A Classic Situation

KEN BARNES

makes
a plea for the film collector

Video is still a young industry and over the last few years, since it took its first hesitant steps towards capturing potential customers, it has succeeded, in spite of the occasional mistakes, in achieving a healthy commercial climate for its wares. One factor that has emerged over the past five years is the commercial supremacy over other forms of visual entertainment. This, of course, is hardly surprising. Movies represent the most dedicated and disciplined use of the visual/audio medium. Movies tell stories - and everyone, no matter what their age, responds to a story when it is well told. A good movie, or better yet, a great movie can develop a reputation that extends its artistic and commercial life for years, decades even - 'The Adventures Of Robin Hood' (1938), 'Gone With The Wind' (1939), 'Casablanca' (1942), and 'Singin' In The Rain' (1952) are just four examples that are dear to the hearts of film-makers and film buffs alike.

While the video companies have been quick to pick up on the commercial advantages of releasing currently popular films as soon as possible to cash in on their theatrical success (the theory being that "NEW" is the greatest of all selling factors - and perhaps the only factor that can communicate with the average video dealer who is, after all, dealing with a basically indiscriminating rental clientele), they have been slow to appreciate the needs of the many thousands of film buffs with a passion for collecting the classics. Not so much the silent majority as more the untapped market.

And this brings me to the whole point of this piece; a point that carries with it a large number of questions. What kind of market is it? Large or small? Rental or purchase? Tape or disc? Perhaps the question of questions is - how do we reach that market? Well, being both a film buff and a film maker, I'll attempt to answer all those questions as well as putting forward a number of suggestions.

Potentially, the film buff market is quite huge. Consider the number of film books, all quite expensive, that are published each year. No self-respecting bookshop could afford to be without its cinema section. Most of these books deal with the golden age of cinema (the thirties and forties) - but it would be wrong to assume that they are bought only by old people. Just consider how many teenagers and university students are buying film posters and T-shirts featuring Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe, and Laurel & Hardy. Then take a look at the huge and ever-growing membership of the



(Errol Flynn in action)

National Film Theatre - not to mention the preponderance of film societies up and down the country. Add to this the various clubs dedicated to film stars such as Errol Flynn and Clint Eastwood. In some cases the memberships extend into the thousands.

When, about four years ago, WARNER HOME VIDEO announced that they would issue videos for rental only, a cry went up from members of the Clint Eastwood Society - most of whom would obviously wish to purchase videos of their hero. Since then, WARNERS have wisely reversed their decision. Of course, it was not just the Eastwood fans that led them to do this but their example indicates the potential of the sale market. However, with the sale price of tapes often as high as £50, it would seem to make perfect sense to approach the film buff market on disc rather than on tape.

The advantages of the laser disc are extremely attractive as far as the dedicated collector is concerned. The cost advantage would mean, for example, that the Eastwood fan could buy as many as three of his films for the price of one tape. Secondly, laser discs - like diamonds - are forever in that there is no wear. The thousandth play is just as clear as the first. Tape, on the other hand, is perishable. A third advantage of the disc is the possibility of greater presentation; intelligent and constructive sleeve information, photographs etc. When you purchase a disc you really feel that you have bought something of intrinsic value.

While PHILIPS are working hard to increase their machine population, which happily is increasing all the time, their task could be made much easier if they were supported by the better video companies. Or, more specifically, by those executives who are shrewd enough to spot the difference between rental and purchase - between casual buyer and dedicated collector. When I was in Los Angeles recently, I visited a video store in Century City which carried a mouth-watering selection of discs running into the hundreds. If just twenty or thirty of those titles could be made available to UK and/or European LV owners what a difference it would make to the market. [Editor's note: A number of readers have pointed out the higher calibre of film product available on LV in the US and do not understand why the film companies there appear to give substantial support to LV, often in complete contrast to their activity in the UK.] Practically every major catalogue was represented, with a selection of titles from just about every era of film making.

was represented, with a selection of titles from just about every era of film making. Sadly, none of the following titles have been made available to UK laser disc buyers:

'The Big Sleep', 'Casablanca', 'The Maltese Falcon', 'Caine Mutiny', 'Singin' In The Rain' (For many people this is the best musical ever made. Everything works to perfection - music, choreography, script and direction. Alright, it's a very familiar film but to own a pristine print on LV would be one of life's delights.), 'Ben Hur' (Must be in stereo. This is the Oscar record breaker of all time, no less than 11 Academy awards - not two as the tape release inaccurately states), 'Charge Of The Light Brigade' (Flynn), 'Adventures Of Robin

a national sold-out tour in 1983, hits include "Rag Mama" and many more.	24.95	Starline CX
In Concert Best shot on this powerful Pioneer even Veteran's Memorial Coliseum. "Hit Me With Your Best Breaker." "Love Is A Battlefield"	19.95	Starline CX
ves this video home with a whole lot nk, reggae, pop and rock to create a ms Hits include "She's Strange," "Be	16.95	Starline CX
In For Blue Jean leading role played by none other than "Blue Jean" video make this disc a must	34.95	Starline CX
produced by Viktor Fedotov and features klinky. Recorded from the stage of the his wonderful performance was written by Krastin	29.95	Starline CX
Jackpot ther the beginner or the advanced with two ther. Both include a warmup and then arms, waist, abdominals, legs and hips. njoy this popular workout in the comfort of e best instructor around	24.95	Starline CX
AM ps cranking them out. This one hour live es as "The Lucky One," "Gloria," "Solitaire," hout You" and more. Don't miss it	39.95	Starline CX
Ballad on classical literature and tells of the Thracian nd his followers from the slavery to which they us, leader of the Roman regions. Brilliantly rich and conducted by Alygis Zhyuraitis, Natalia k Moukhamedov, Mikhail Gabovich, Natalia a	34.98	Starline CX
BS/FOX ay, himself highlights from his 1981 performance at Toronto's rts Center. Bill relates tales of visiting the n children, and stories of his childhood. Everyone pects of each "story", and when delivered in the Bill yourself laughing until you cry. A very funny look at	39.98	Starline CX
r Gentry of a hypocritical evangelist and those around him , newspaper reporter, and former girl friend turned ancaster, Arthur Kennedy and Shirley Jones. 1960	34.98	Starline CX
ely City beat story of love, hope and friendship. Starring John sh Mostel. 1984	39.95	Starline CX
EMBASSY he Cotton Club the nation. The violence that started the world. Francis ece exposes the most violent and passionate era America e became more than a	39.95	Starline CX
caught up in a web of inter... assassination, and a hair-raising race against time... of Marrakesh to a breathtaking climax at London's Royal Albert Hall. This... introduced the Award-winning song "Que Sera Sera". A masterpiece of wit and... plot-twisting that will keep you on the edge of your seat up to the final... spellbinding seconds. 1954 (PG)	44.91	Starline CX
21129 40002 5/M Spartacus A bold gladiator leads a slave rebellion against the immense power of Imperi... Rome. This inspirational true story about one man's fight for freedom ar... personal dignity combines history with spectacle to create a moving, ar... memorable drama. Starring Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis and Laurence Olivier. 19... 33.4	33.4	Starline CX
21130 40125 5/M Under The Volcano An intense drama set in pre-WW II Mexico, this film is a saga of imperi... political and personal doom. Albert Finney is Geoffrey Firmin, an alcoh... dissolute Consul who longs for the return of his estranged wife (Jacqu... Bisset). In spite of his drunkenness, Firmin is very aware of the threat of N... that is about to explode. His wife re-appears, and, along with Firmin's... brother Hugh, tries to save Firmin. The three of them spend their last d... hours wandering around the small towns of Mexico on its eerie "Day of the f... Also starring Anthony Andrews. 1984 (R)	33.4	Starline CX
MGM/UA 21131 ML100533 5/M Dinner At Eight A "Park Avenue" snob is determined to hold a dinner party for a visiti... peer. Her guest list conceals a neat web of romantic intrigue, and the dial... have you roaring with delight. A bevy of stars in the cast include Jean... Marie Dressler, John Barrymore, Wallace Beery, Lionel Barrymore... Burke 1933 (B&W)	33.4	Starline CX
21132 ML100487 5/M Electric Dreams Music Video meets computer revolution in this fairy tale about a m... computer who falls in love with the same woman. An original n... performed by Jeff Lynne, Phil Oakey, Heaven 17 and Culture Club. A... light-hearted movie. 1984 (PG)	33.4	Starline CX
21133 ML100473 5/M Gaslight Ingrid Bergman won her first Academy Award for her perform... psychological thriller. She stars as a romantic-minded young wife w... the brink of insanity by a husband (Charles Boyer) whose suave ma... a lust for precious jewels—and a taste for murder! Also starring... and (in her film debut) Angela Lansbury. 1944 (B&W)	33.4	Starline CX
21134 ML100564 5/M Grand Hotel Winner of the 1932 Academy Award for Best Picture, "Grand Ho... Garbo and John Barrymore. This film is a melodrama of tragedy i... Berlin's high society. Lionel Barrymore turns in a very touching... the dying Otto Kringlein. Supporting cast also includes Wall... young Joan Crawford. 1932 (B&W)	33.4	Starline CX
21135 ML100115 5/M Ninotchka Greta Garbo stars as a dour Soviet official who travels to Pa... business only to find herself succumbing to its special ma... Melvyn Douglas. An enchanting edition to MGM/UA's... Collection of vintage movies. 1939 (B&W)	33.4	Starline CX
21136 ML100489 5/M Red Dawn The premise is that the first full-scale Soviet invasion of the... it turns into an adventure-fantasy for eight "down jacketed"... take on the Russian army. They become young renegades hi... Mountain wilderness and trekking through endless wheat... their chance to blow up some "Russkies". Starring some c... stars including C. Thomas Howell and Patrick Swayze. 1... 33.4	33.4	Starline CX
21137 ML100585 5/M Strike Up The Band A vintage movie full of great songs, hearty laughter i... sentiment. Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney star as v... to "make it big" in show business. They... "humors" along... 33.4	33.4	Starline CX

Hood' (Arguably the best film of its kind ever made. Photographed in the wonderful three-strip Technicolor process, too expensive to use today, and would look tremendous on LV. A winner of three Academy awards in 1938 and with Errol Flynn at his dashing best - this film has barely dated at all, except perhaps in a charming way, and it's a pleasure to repeat and repeat.), 'Dodge City', 'Treasure Of The Sierra Madre', 'Gone With The Wind', 'Brigadoon', 'An American In Paris', 'Dirty Harry', 'Greystoke', the 'Superman' series, 'Sudden Impact', 'Tightrope', 'The Sea Hawk' (Being a lover of swash-bucklers I couldn't resist this one. Originally from 1940 it was issued on CED in the abridged 1947 version with 18 minutes missing. Please let's have the full version which, I must admit, I have on tape but it hardly does justice to the magnificent score by Eric Wolfgang Korngold - a concert and a half in itself. If we can't have the full version, don't bother!), 'Rear Window', and 'Vertigo' (Two of Hitchcock's most revered films and both thought to have been lost until recently.), 'The Godfathers', 'True Grit', 'The Shootist', 'Shane', 'The Ten Commandments', 'Trading Places', 'Psycho', 'Close Encounters Of The Third Kind' (Special Edition), 'Blue Thunder', 'On The Waterfront', 'Tootsie', 'Bridge On The River Kwai', 'Lawrence Of Arabia'.

The above titles are all currently available in the USA, but there are many titles that could be considered for release here. Clearly, the advantages of having titles that have made millions of dollars in their time should be obvious to the people who programme releases. Less obvious, however, are the wants of movie buffs who need to have confidence in

the quality as well as the quantity of the laser disc catalogue and its future. If the right decisions are made now the future holds limitless possibilities. I can envisage a full scale marketing operation where laser discs can be presented as boxed sets - 'The Bogart Collection', 'The Best Of John Wayne', 'The Hitchcock Collection' etc. - much in the same way we have come to accept the READERS' DIGEST type of release with audio records. But first, we must increase the player population and the only way to do that is with a catalogue that appeals to the dedicated collector and not just the casual buyer.

For two consecutive years on BBC 2's 'Film Buff Of The Year' a LaserVision player was presented as one of the winning prizes. This in itself should have been a signal to issue the kind of material beloved of the large audiences that were watching this programme. And that brings us to the basic reason why most movie buffs have not yet invested in LV. Of the 300 or so film titles currently available in the UK, less than 10% is of any interest to the dedicated collector. Perhaps the problem is lack of communication between the interested parties in the hard/software groups. Whatever, one thing's for sure - future film releases on LV should be chosen with an eye to the collector's market and not just an excuse to off-load slow current product. PHILIPS, after all, have come up with a perfect system of reproduction and the film companies should be delighted to use it as a means of expanding their sales operations.

On any future releases I would suggest a more intense approach to marketing and packaging. Any amount of marketing would be an improvement on the present situation! Packaging and programming could be easily improved by commissioning better sleeve notes by writers who have a knowledge and love of the subject. A case in point would be to compare the excellent US sleeve notes to 'Guys & Dolls' with the limp and shallow effort on the UK release. (Incidentally, for those readers who, like myself, were hesitant about buying the disc because it was in mono - have no fear. The UK version is definitely in stereo and a terrific full-bodied sound it is too.)

Let us hope that all the interested parties will give some thought to the needs of the serious film collector in the future expansion of the LaserVision catalogue. One need look no further than the US equivalent to see the validity of this approach.

(Left - These are some of the titles that appeared in the US LV release sheet for the month of May. Shouldn't we be getting these titles too?)



(Humphrey Bogart - Maybe one day we'll be looking at you!)

PIONEER

LD 700

Performance report on the PAL model

Now that the PAL version of the LD 700 is out we have had the opportunity to give one a try. There was the fear that the move to solid-state lasers (all previous PIONEER and PHILIPS models have used a '63 μ wavelength helium-neon gas laser - essentially a valve) would result in a drop in performance due to the inability, currently, to make solid-state lasers with a wavelength any shorter than '78 μ . The longer the wavelength, the greater the tendency to read adjacent tracks on the disc - thereby producing double images or ghosting (Crosstalk). Although lasers of this longer wavelength have always been sufficient for the demands of the digitally encoded Compact Disc, the same is not true for the analogue LaserVision disc.

Faced with what would appear to be a laser unable to cope with the demands of LV, PIONEER must have obviously made significant advances in the mechanics of the tracking assembly to compensate. The picture obtained from the LD 700 is exceptional as far as definition goes. Presumably the vastly reduced bulk of the laser assembly allows it to follow the spiral of pits without wandering off the signal from side to side, while at the same time enabling it to maintain a more consistent distance between the objective and the disc. This latter aspect is probably the reason PIONEER claim the LD 700 is better suited to playing warped discs - previous more rigid tracking mechanisms would have been thrown off as soon as the disc deviated too far from a perfect plane.

Even though this might imply the tracking mechanism on the LD 700 is working 'harder' and therefore likely to make more noise than before, in practice, this is far from being the case. One end of the casing is given over to ventilation but the noise emitted is insignificant - it is effectively silent. As noticed before, there is an increased level of noise (again though, insignificant in relation to previous machines) when CAV discs are being played, and I suppose one of the reasons you are likely to notice this anyway is that the audio output is muted during the special play modes. Although the remote for the LD 700 does enable you to control the machine from a distance (and it was designed with rack mounting in mind), it would be perfectly practical to position this player close at hand if you are the sort that doesn't like getting up half way through a film to turn the disc over. (Hey, now we have a drawer loading machine, what about giving us a model that has a laser top and bottom and then we could play films all the way through without interruption?) This aspect of positioning the player close by will also be relevant if we ever get the Laser 45s that only run to twenty minutes at most. Already, I would expect, readers who like playing odd tracks off a bunch of discs have found that getting up and down every few minutes can be a bit tedious.

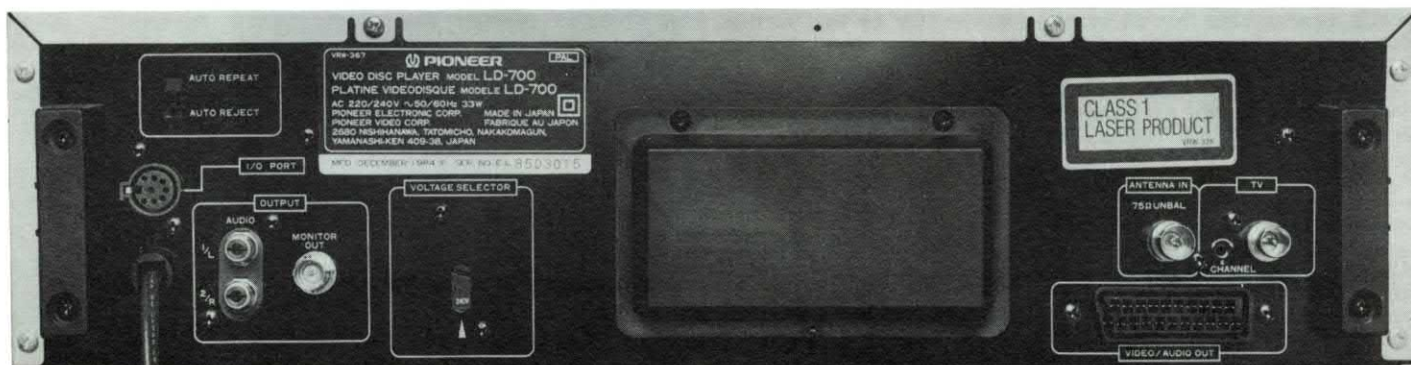
Our usual procedure for grading discs under review involves assessing the definition on a medium-resolution computer monitor which tends to be a bit more revealing on aspects of disc quality than the usual domestic TV receiver. Our investigation of the LV Catalogue so far has brought to light a few titles with quite impressive definition (mostly video originated music programmes) but, surprisingly, the LD 700 manages to squeeze that little bit extra out of these

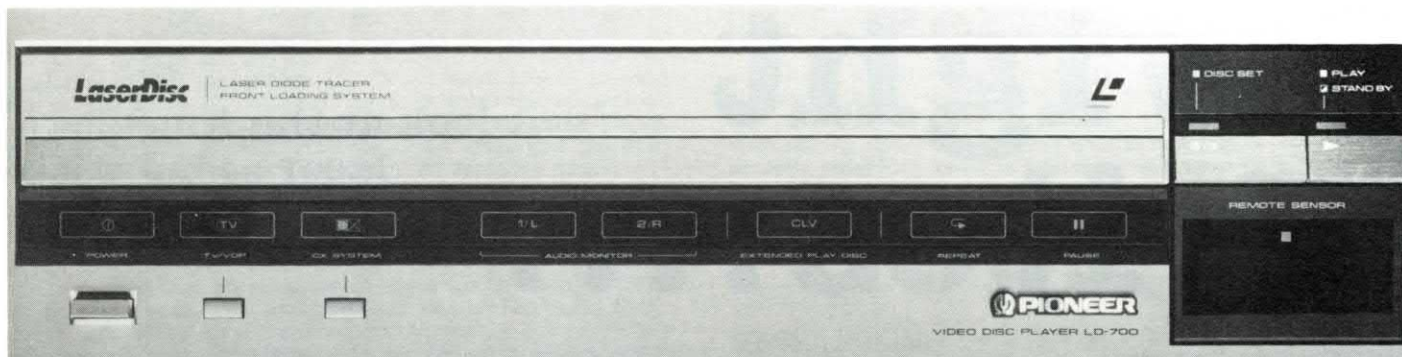
discs. You will see spots and pimples on people's faces that they would probably rather you didn't! An unfortunate side-effect of this is the LD 700's ability to show up spottily pressed discs, and in this respect it is probably a good thing that this machine did not arrive on these shores any sooner than it has. Fortunately, most of the PHILIPS pressings from about the time the first of the recent batch of EMBASSY titles appeared have been exceptionally clean as far as these annoying defects are concerned.

As to the crosstalk performance there again improvements were observed. If you have ever found that rapidly moving highlights set against a dark background produce a momentary trailed image, the LD 700 eliminates these. (Note: This is not always a player problem. Often this lagging of the video image can be in the original master where video cameras have been used in low-light conditions, or again when feature films have been badly transferred to video it can be picked up in the telecine machines.) Strangely, static highlights do sometimes produce a horizontal smearing across the screen ie. when you get a window or a striped T-shirt, but it is only minor. Another variation of crosstalk - a vertical wavy line moving slowly across the screen, usually from left to right ('the wriggle' as reader Jack Haynes vividly describes it) is only partially cured by the LD 700. Some readers have more trouble with the wriggle than others (maybe it is no more than a variation between different examples of the same model machine) but it is most likely to occur in dark scenes on CLV discs, especially those approaching maximum playing time for the format where the pit spacing is likely to be more critical. The LD 700 certainly improved the very long (59+ minutes) Joni Mitchell disc where the effect is even visible running across some snow scenes when this particular disc is played on other machines. The LD 700 copes with the wriggle better than many other machines but there is still a little room for improvement.

A further problem of dark scenes in discs, especially when there is minimal visible detail and you just have a broad area of uniform density, is the tendency for some previous machines to produce a rather streaky image, sometimes even alternating bands of lighter and darker density. The LD 700 seemed especially good in producing stable background tones on these dark discs and some titles that have previously been a bit distracting to watch for this reason were considerably more enjoyable when viewed on the LD 700. Another improvement of relevance to darker discs especially was the ability of the machine to retain greater detail in both shadow and highlight areas simultaneously. You don't find yourself wanting to tweak the controls so much on your TV trying to stop losing detail at either end of the grey-scale. In practice this means you can achieve a brighter, more colourful picture without sacrificing fine detail. There is no denying that these improvements in overall picture quality made many discs far more enjoyable to watch - all bar the spotty ones!

Now, there are some criticisms, and the previously queried significance of the remote control's sliding cover would have to be one. It does work OK without it and it is certainly easier to control the machine. (You do not need to





use any tools to get it off - just pushing one side and inserting a strong fingernail under the cover on the other side enables you to coax it off.) When removed, you realise that the layout of the buttons could have been improved ie. moving the SCAN next to PLAY, and bringing the bottom controls up to the middle of the unit. PIONEER do not seem to employ this sliding cover approach to their industrial machine remotes and one is inclined to think that the styling department got a bit carried away on this one.

The PAUSE function is not totally precise, but then I do not believe that it is any better on any other machine. As a point of information to someone who comes to this player never having had a PAUSE facility, when you revert to PLAY the picture tends to move ahead a few frames.

It would have been nice for the A-B REPEAT function to have allowed comparison of two still frames, but one imagines that this requires that extra bit of memory that exceeds the capability of the unit. For this, and more involved programmed instructions, you will no doubt have to go on to the computer, the PX-7.

One would have preferred the on-screen search displays to appear closer to the top of the picture area as, even though the figures are not excessively large, they can,

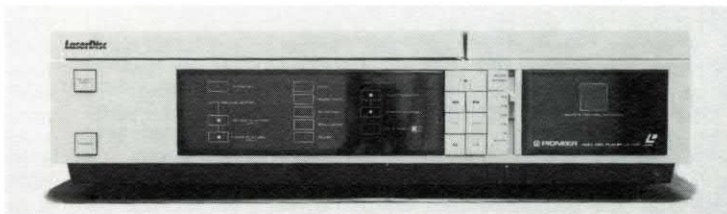
at times, obscure rather a lot of what is going on behind.

As previously noted, there are significant improvements in picture quality on this machine. There are the few occasions when the LD700 gets shown at a slight disadvantage. On some discs the player appears to struggle a bit with scenes dominated by certain shades of red. Occasional dropout occurs, but it does vary from disc to disc. Red is always a difficult colour to reproduce on video and no LV machine really copes 100%. Also, some captions that were yellowy coloured suffered similar disturbance. Beyond that the machine proved difficult to put under any pressure. Elsewhere there will be a little summary of all the LV players where some comparisons are drawn which may be of further interest, but the overall conclusion on the LD700 must be that it has undoubtedly conquered the solid-state barrier and achieves quite an impressive level of performance.

[Note: We had a little trouble initially getting output from the BNC video socket on this machine. There would appear to be something of a variation in the design and dimensions of BNC connectors. The socket on the LD 700 has a sort of splayed centre signal core that needs a correspondingly longer pin in the BNC plug to make good contact.]

PIONEER LD 1100

A modification
by CHRIS MURDEN



Concerning the lack of sound on CAV discs, the modifications to the LD1100 mentioned in the last issue do give sound in all modes.

This was OK except in PAUSE when the sound output was a continuous 'tone'/silence, depending on the sound content of the frame being viewed (as only two fields worth of sound are being replayed continuously). This was very annoying obviously and, you guessed it, another diode cured the problem.

I now have sound in SLOW MOTION, 3X FAST, SCAN etc. The reason that PIONEER chose to mute it in these functions is, I believe, because it could annoy or worry people. It should also be noted that the sound in SLOW MOTION is useable down to about one-third normal speed. After that the sound becomes too "digital" (for want of a better word); it is not like a tape recording being run at the wrong speed - presumably this is due to the method of recording sound on an LV, rather than having a linear analogue sound track. Having said that, it is still much better than having none at all!

I should say at this stage that I have deliberately kept the modifications simple (4 diodes, 3 resistors). However, when PIONEER bring out their MSX computer I hope to interface it with the LD1100, and perhaps alter the SLOW MOTION control to allow the computer to alter the speed.

Incidentally, PIONEER could easily have made the player a lot more versatile, but seem to have kept the logic very simple. (The AUDIO on/off is simply controlled by the PLAY command - ie any other mode than PLAY mutes the sound!) Not all variations are possible to obtain as some of the functions are generated by the software (disc) and not available separately, unfortunately.

		SOUND		VISION		COMMENTS
		ORIG	MOD	ORIG	MOD	
PLAY	CLV	+	+	+	+	
PAUSE	CLV				+	See vision while answering phone etc.
SCAN	CLV		+	+	+	Can hear audio for cues etc.
SEARCH (1st push)	CLV		+	+	+	
SEARCH (2nd push)	CLV					
PLAY	CAV	+	+	+	+	
PAUSE	CAV				+	Sound disturbing in pause.
STILL/STOP	CAV			+	+	Sound disturbing again.
SLOW	CAV		+	+	+	Sound OK down to one-third speed.
3 X FAST	CAV		+	+	+	
SCAN	CAV		+	+	+	
SEARCH (1st push)	CAV		+	+	+	See below *
SEARCH (2nd push)	CAV					

+ Indicates function operational.

* Machine goes in to STILL FRAME on first push, and hence sound is disturbing (see PAUSE), but this is in the software and cannot be modified.

Dwight Writes....

A look at the American
laser scene with
Dwight R Decker

Aren't laser discs neat?

It's awfully easy to wax so enthusiastic about the whiz-bang technology that your friends start edging away when you start off on some new rhetorical flight of fancy describing the splendid sound and gorgeous picture. Even my best girl has been complaining: "I tell you my philosophy of life and you respond by telling me about your 'toy'!" The only answer is to tie your doubting friends down in front of the television screen and show them just what this baby can do.

But even the niftiest hardware isn't of much use if there's nothing to play on it, and it's a bleak picture your editor paints [scans, surely, Dwight-Ed.] of the retail LV disc situation in Britain. That is, even in the big cities, only a relative few shops carry discs at all. For the sake of comparison, Ye Ed wanted to know how easy or difficult it is to find retail stores in the United States, where LaserVision has been a going concern for a few years longer than in the UK.

At first glance, it ought to be a simple matter. The US is currently in the midst of a major video boom. VCRs are selling hand over fist with steadily dropping prices, and video shops are springing up on nearly every street corner to sell equipment and rent tapes. Latest figures indicate that almost 20% of American households have VCRs now, and that has led to all manner of oddly varied enterprises jumping into the tape-rental market, including supermarkets, convenience store chains like SEVEN-ELEVEN, and even U-HAUL, a chain that hitherto specialised in renting trucks and trailers to do-it-yourself movers, to say nothing of all the tiny Mom & Pop operations that are no more than a storefront with a small supply of current movies on tape. The fierce competition has driven rental prices so low that it's difficult to see how anyone can make money at it, yet a survey of video stores shows that no less than 98% of their tape business is in rentals, not sales. Except for a few major blockbuster titles with unusually low prices (calculated to pull in volume sales), almost no-one buys tapes. They're generally too expensive, and it seems that few people collect movies anyway, preferring to use their VCRs for time-shifting, renting movies, or copying programmes off the tube.

Still, with so many video stores bursting out all over, there ought to be a large number that deal in laser discs, right? Not exactly. The situation may be better here than in Britain, but the stores that do carry discs are decidedly in the minority. The shoestring rental operations that offer just a limited range of current hits on tape don't bother with discs at all: not enough people own players yet. The same for large companies like SEVEN-ELEVEN and U-HAUL that basically do something else and are getting into movie rentals as a sideline: discs are just too esoteric, with too little popular demand and too small scale a profit.

Unhappy Returns

The stores that seem to do best with laserdiscs are mid-range speciality shops, large enough to carry a good stock of hardware and software, small enough to have a good rapport with customers, and specialised enough to be able to deal with problems as they crop up. Even better is when the store ownership and/or management have a personal belief in and commitment to the LV format, and don't regard it as just another product line, over in aisle three between paper towels and boxes of cereal.

What all this gets back to is the unfortunate fact that in the U.S., laser discs have had an enormously high defect rate. A store can't just sell a disc and forget it the way it can, say, a tin of KattoChunks: a percentage of the discs it sells one day is going to be coming back to haunt it the next, and experienced, knowledgeable clerks are required to handle the situation. More than once I have found myself arguing with teenaged clerks who new absolutely nothing about laser discs and their problems. I frequently had to give a basic lecture on the theory and operation of the laser videodisc just to make the clerk understand what the problem was, and sometimes even that didn't help. Laser discs look so good compared to tape that a disc riddled with multicoloured speckles doesn't seem bad at all to the untrained eye.

You end up selecting a video dealer the same way you decide where to buy a car: not so much for the initial purchase as for the service afterwards.

To see how all this works in practice, let's look at my own situation. I live in one of Chicago's western suburbs, in the midst of one of the largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. There are at least four or five stores within easy driving distance of my home that carry laser videodiscs, including one that conducts a nationwide mail-order business. Somewhat further away are still other stores where player owning friends of mine do their shopping. Even when I drive forty odd miles to visit an old college chum who lives on the Indiana corner, there's a video shop right around the corner from him that sells discs. Virtually every current title is readily available at one store or another, though sometimes I have to do a bit of calling around to see which store happens to have a copy of a given disc at the moment.

Different Strokes

Different stores of course have different personalities, different ways of doing business. Take MUSICLAND, a national chain record stores with outlets in seemingly every shopping mall in the country. In recent years there has been a distinct slump in the record business, and MUSICLAND has experimented with more or less related sidelines: CDs, videogame cartridges, video tapes to some extent, and yes, videodiscs, both laser and CED. A couple of years ago, every MUSICLAND store in Chicago put in large videodisc displays, then apparently stood back to see how the things sold. After a while, the MUSICLAND stores in my area took the videodiscs out, but a friend of mine reports that at least a couple of the chain's outlets around him still carry them. Part of the problem may have been a kind of record-store mentality: nearly everyone knows what a record is and owns a record player of some sort already, so MUSICLAND can sell just software just about anywhere. Making a go of selling laser discs, however, would depend on the number of people owning LV players in the area serviced by the store. Selling more discs by selling players would be a chicken-and-egg job MUSICLAND wasn't set up to handle; not only did the stores not carry equipment, they didn't even have an on-site demonstration player and monitor to show off the software. (The advantage for the customer there, however, was that stores would take defective disc back cheerfully; you didn't have to wait for a suspicious clerk to put the disc on a player and show him what the problem was.) Further drawbacks were MUSICLAND's limited selection of titles and a policy of pricing discs one or two dollars above the suggested retail. At this stage of the game, laser buyers tend to be buffs who have the PIONEER catalogue virtually memorised and know precisely what each title ought to cost, so that didn't go over.

Just the opposite sort of store is an operation we'll call "Zeppelin Video" (because it took over a building that once housed a furniture store and the cavernous interior is about as big as a zep hangar). Before the home video boom, the Zeppelin people were a friendly couple who ran a tiny, hole-in-the-wall TV shop. When video came in, they saw their chance and went for it: soon they moved across the street to the furniture store, filling it to the scuppers with TVs, VCRs, disc players, and software of all kinds. Since then, they've opened up branch stores. Zeppelin was also an early believer in the videodisc, carrying both CED and laser. The place does an enormous tape rental business, but as the clerks there told me more than a few times, the owners would rather sell movies in whatever form than rent them. The headaches of running a lending library are apparently considerable. Zeppelin was where I discovered laser discs; I bought my first three discs there even before I had anything to play them on. Displayed on racks along several aisles, the rows upon rows of colourful disc jackets were an impressive sight. Plus, Zeppelin had the endearing habit of marking down the prices substantially of slower-moving titles.

But I had my problems with Zeppelin. Actually the problems were really with PIONEER for pressing bad discs, but Zeppelin was selling them, so that's where I took my returns. The clerks couldn't believe anyone could be having so much

trouble with discs - I was getting to be a familiar sight in the store - and arguments were frequent. Matters reached a head with my copy of 'Mysterious Island' whose speckles showed up glaringly well on my home 19" TV but were little in evidence on the store 12" set. Failing to resolve the situation with the problem disc I gave up and went home, later taking up the thing with PIONEER directly. They exchanged the disc with no fuss and I haven't been back to Zeppelin since.

These days I buy most of my discs from VIDEO DYNAMICS: a well-stocked with friendly clerks. Unlike the other stores previously mentioned, this is not a something-else shop that happens to carry laser discs on the side; rather, VIDEO DYNAMICS is a shop that specialises in discs (both laser and CED), and handles tapes, CDs, and hardware as sidelines. So the clerks and owners know the product thoroughly and have the expertise to help the customer if a problem should arise. They also do mailorder, but since I live within ten miles of their shop, I don't have to go that route.

Laser buffs living outside the metropolitan areas are of course not nearly so well supplied. A correspondent of mine who lived in rural Iowa had no local retail sources of discs at all, as LV has only barely dented the hinterlands, and had to rely entirely on mail order. There are several mail-order disc companies now, and besides VIDEO DYNAMICS I've dealt extensively with STARSHIP INDUSTRIES of Virginia and THE INSTANT REPLAY of Massachusetts. Like local stores, each has its own personality.

STARSHIP INDUSTRIES stocks literally every American title available. Older titles I can't find in Chicago area shops are usually still listed in the STARSHIP catalogue, plus they offer a 10% discount on everything they sell. Because of local laws, STARSHIP doesn't sell X-rated titles, but that hasn't stopped its business from booming in the last year. STARSHIP also publishes a newsletter, 'The Laser Beam', that began as a catalogue update and seems to be evolving into a fully fledged magazine. Pulling no punches, 'The Laser Beam' has not been at all reluctant to complain loudly and longly about PIONEER's appallingly high defect rate at a time when others in the field have approached the subject only gingerly, if at all. When you consider that STARSHIP's people make their living off laser discs and the time and labour they must spend processing returns eat enormously into their income, you can appreciate their position. It's given them the reputation of being laser's "bad boys", but it has paid off in terms of customer support, with customers regarding STARSHIP as a firm that will talk straight.

If STARSHIP INDUSTRIES strength is in the domestic American catalogue, THE INSTANT REPLAY specialises in Japanese imports. The key here is the fact that Japan uses the same NTSC television system we do in the U.S., so Japanese software is compatible with our equipment. Secondly, the Japanese laser catalogue doesn't quite match the American, so there are numerous interesting titles available in Japan that can't be had here. (The reverse is also true, and Greg Streeter, STARSHIP's proprietor, told me that he is certain a large number of the American discs he sells overseas are ending up in the Japanese market.) Because of contractual agreements that differ from country to country regarding the home video release of various properties, what THE INSTANT REPLAY is doing may be legally a little dubious, but so far no-one seems to have complained very loudly - perhaps because the laser market is still so small. THE INSTANT REPLAY also offers American discs at 10% discount, including the X-rated titles that STARSHIP can't sell.

A Conclusion?

With that, we conclude our tour of the American retail laser scene. The field is still growing, and as such, is still suffering growing pains. Supplies of many recent titles are at best erratic, and even though PIONEER seemed to have licked most of the defect problem towards the end of 1984, the problem still remains acute with vast numbers of discs pressed before that are still on dealers' shelves. On the other hand, reports are that disc sales have sharply increased in the last few months, so it remains to be seen how the market will develop from here. All this still begs the question: what kind of store is best suited to sell laser discs? A record store like MUSICLAND? A video hardware store like "Zeppelin"? A bookstore? (Some bookstores here are indeed experimenting with pre-recorded video tapes.) Some as yet undeveloped new kind of speciality shop that would sell only movies, whether on tape or disc? STARSHIP's Greg Streeter has expressed concern that smaller retail stores might get squeezed out of laser discs altogether, leaving only a few of the larger mail-order dealers to service the entire market. However beneficial that might be to his own business in the short run, it would hardly benefit the continued development of the laser disc medium. The future of the laser disc market in the United States on a retail level is anybody's guess.

All three of the American dealers mentioned in the above

are ready willing and able to ship discs to overseas customers. [NOTE HOWEVER that NTSC system discs are incompatible with PAL LaserVision discs and you will need an NTSC-standard LV player and a multi-standard monitor to view them properly. See elsewhere in the magazine for more on this topic.]

When making enquiries and requesting catalogues etc, please enclose something towards postage - a couple of \$ bills should be sufficient (see under 'Eurolaser' section for details on sending money abroad).

THE INSTANT REPLAY - 479 Winter Street, Waltham, MA 02154-1216, USA.

VIDEO DYNAMICS - 2318 S. Elmhurst Road, Mt. Prospect, IL 60056, USA.

STARSHIP INDUSTRIES - 605 Utterback Store Road, Great Falls, VA 22066, USA.

Other News

Interesting to compare American and British releases. Our version of Olivia Newton-John's 'Twist Of Fate' was 24 minutes long and pressed in CAV, with six songs instead of four. 'Heart Attack' and 'Tied Up' are the two missing on your version. We didn't have to suffer through interviews with ONJ and Travolta, either. As for the 'Two Of A Kind' clip, I wouldn't exactly say the setting is "church-like". Well, it sort of is, but given the lyrics of the song and the plot of the awful movie it promotes, the setting is more plausibly a tribunal in the next world. If I were coming back to have another shot at this world, I think I could do better than John Travolta.....if I were Olivia, I mean. At \$19.95, 'Twist Of Fate' is currently the cheapest 12" disc on the American market.

I recently picked up an old CAV copy of '1941'. After hearing about all the neat things people were finding on their "dead sides" I applied denatured alcohol to the supposedly blank sixth side of '1941' just to see what I could find. And what did I find? A sales training programme for selling the 1980 CHEVROLET 'Luv' truck, bi-lingual in English and Spanish! What was really strange was that while it was obviously supposed to be CAV, with still-frames and interactive features - most functions refused to work. Only scan functioned, though in CAV style rather than CLV. Presumably this is why the disc became a reject.

When I was in one local store recently I was looking for 'The Last Starfighter' but the clerk told me that it had already come in and sold out, but I did buy a disc anyway - 'Wings', the first disc to appear here with a Digital Sound soundtrack (even though it's a silent movie with just an accompanying organ score). Very clear B&W picture and pretty much intact (a few frames are missing here and there, but heck, the flick is nearly 60 years old!). I liked it quite a bit despite the weak plot. The aerial sequences are stunning. The only catch is that the scene is supposed to be WW1 France, but the ground below is very definitely California! On the Digital Sound front, 'Star Trek 3' has finally appeared. It's been announced for months - the tape and CED have been out for since late February - but the LV disc has been delayed week after week. The problem seems to be the digital soundtrack; PIONEER's California plant just couldn't press it properly and they had to send it to Japan for pressing. I notice that 'Wings' was pressed in Japan too.

All the tape buffs I know are depressed over news that EMBASSY released its tape of 'The Cotton Club' with its new anti-copying gimmick. Not that many people seem to care about that particular movie but what it bodes for future releases. The tape people amaze me. I've seen them proudly display their cherished collector's items and long sought-after rarities, fourth and fifth generation copies recorded at slow speeds to save tape, or stuff taken from TV and re-recorded to edit out commercials. Like your reader said in the letters page - "Why spend all that money to watch rubbish?" Or how about the people who spend \$100 or more for bootleg copies of movies that haven't been officially released to home video yet.

At least with laser discs, not only do you (usually) get superb picture quality that blows tape right off the screen, but bootlegging simply doesn't enter into it. I mean, if I showed up at the 3M plant with a copy of 'Ghostbusters' on film that I borrowed from somewhere and asked for x number of discs to be run off, I think a few phone-calls would be made while I was politely asked to wait in reception. But, I get the idea that among the tape buffs, there's a certain percentage that enjoys the skullduggery in outwitting the giant film companies and having even bad copies of films long before all their friends do. We disc people, however, get our copies about six months after everybody else.....

SURROUND SOUND

The merest mention of doing something on the topic of surround sound produced quite an unexpected reaction. Although four-channel sound appeared to be the next logical step when it became available in the early seventies, the negative reaction it received at the time would have implied that it was not really what the consumer wanted. Maybe this was not really the case.

Possibly one of the reasons four-channel sound never caught on was lack of a suitable application. There is undoubtedly an argument for having more than two speakers (Stereo) when trying to recreate the spread of sound we hear in real life (this assumes that all audio-visual media are striving ultimately to simulate a real-life experience, not to create artificial novelty, even though that might be an acceptable and valid by-product), but it does involve quite an upheaval in the living-room in order to organise the system and, in earlier times especially, a considerable extra expenditure. With audio only replay the effort may not have seemed worthwhile, but the incorporation of the TV screen in to the home entertainment system puts surround sound in a different light.

But to recap briefly on what happened to four-channel sound the first time round when several Japanese manufacturers saw this as "the next big thing" in audio. Much in the same way that several different videodisc systems have muddled the market, several different different approaches to putting four channels of sound on a blackwax disc were attempted. All of them incompatible needless to say. The only company to tackle the job properly was JVC with their CD4 system that required getting audio frequencies up to 50,000Hz on a vinyl disc in order to piggyback the rear-channel information on the normal stereo signal. This involved improved cartridge performance and, more importantly, better disc pressing techniques that only Japanese pressing plants seemed to be able to achieve. Whether it was lack of enthusiasm or lack of expertise, European and American disc manufacturers failed to grasp the challenge. (JVC have obviously learnt their lesson from pushing technology along the state-of-the-art route - witness the worldwide domination of the VHS tape format. This is possibly also the reason JVC also seem keen to promote the VHD disc system as they realise that success in the marketplace does not necessarily depend on having the best product. No doubt JVC still turn out innovative products in their research labs - they just don't bother trying to sell them anymore!)

Other companies took simpler routes to surround sound, CBS and SONY with SQ, SANSUI with QS (close!....but not close enough) but by avoiding facing the challenge head-on, failed to achieve the goal. At the time hi-fi audio reproduction was still limited to the vinyl disc, but one is bound to wonder today how might a better job been made of it by utilising a 4-channel cassette as a carrier. Cassettes at that time were only just nudging their way into the hi-fi arena (although, additionally, they may have been limitations in the licensing agreements on Compact Cassette whereby any development that threatened incompatibility was forbidden. Only in recent years, now that the patents are expiring, have the parameters of the Compact Cassette been extended to encompass double-speed decks and 4-channel 'Portastudio' type recorders.)

Tape would have probably had to have been the eventual carrier for surround sound as, even then, the next step on from 4-channel was a move towards 7 speakers! (7 separate sound channels) that would have coped with height information as well. Things never went that far. All that remains of the CD4 system today are the improvements in cartridge performance and vinyl technology - the latter having produced many of the 'supercut' audiophile re-issues and possibly helped JVC squeeze a video signal out of a VHD disc.

Since those days, the quest for surround sound has continued in but a small way in the home. Every now and again news appears in the hi-fi journals of products such as the MINIM decoder and broadcasts on the BBC related to it. Where surround sound has made a bigger showing is with the advent of DOLBY cinema sound. After applying DOLBY noise reduction techniques to reducing the level of tape hiss on Compact Cassettes (DOLBY B), giving the cassette a leg-up towards achieving reel-to-reel performance, and producing a slightly more comp-

lex DOLBY A process to cope with the increasing number of tracks (and therefore increased hiss) of studio multitrack master recorders, DOLBY took a look at how they might expand their operation by attempting to improve the quality of cinema sound.

Dolby MP

As anyone with more than a handful of LV film titles will be well aware of, the optical soundtracks on many feature films leave much to be desired. Though the potential of the optical soundtrack is greater, its being tied to a rather archaic frequency response restriction ('The Academy Curve') has meant that we get less out of optical tracks than should be the case. When cinema sound systems were established back in the era of the 78, there grew up a corruption of the frequency response curve on film soundtracks to compensate for limitations of the then current cinema loudspeaker systems. Subsequent improvements in PA systems were ignored and soundtracks were still tweaked to sound 'right' on amplification equipment of bygone days. That is how many LV discs end up having crackly soundtracks. If the disc is mastered from a cinema print, there is only so much that can be got out of the soundtrack before it goes into a level of distortion.

There have been other methods of raising the quality of cinema sound - magnetic striping being the most obvious example, but in cinema use magnetically encoded soundtracks were not particularly long lasting and were, in the main, restricted to prestigious city centre houses. Accepting this physical damage restriction of magnetic tracks, DOLBY took to applying Type A noise reduction to opticals. Ten films were so encoded before a step was taken toward applying the process to stereo soundtracks. Stereo itself is old hat in the cinema, pre-dating home stereo considerably but, like magnetic striping, wide-screen, and various other cinema novelties rarely got out into the general cinema circuit chains for all to see (and hear). DOLBY's approach to stereo brought back the SANSUI QS matrix in order to add a further dimension in the form of a rear sound channel. Rather in the same way that it had been a challenge to get four separate audio tracks on vinyl discs, DOLBY considered that putting four channels on optical tracks would involve too great a reduction in track width with all its associated limitations of bandwidth and handling damage.

What results from all this is the well-known DOLBY symbol on many feature films of the present day. In its most lavish form on 70mm features it exists as six-channel sound which requires three front speakers - Left, Centre, Right, two non-directional bass speakers to add 'physical' effect and a rear speaker. In its more basic form it exists as just Left, Right, and Rear. This three-channel DOLBY MP Matrix (Motion Picture) is what many of your LV discs that are in stereo have hidden away, waiting to be extracted. Yes, embedded in those stereo discs are sounds that can go places other sounds do not normally reach. In case you are wondering which discs are worthy candidates for exploitation, here is a list of DOLBY stereo films that are in the LV catalogue:

ABC - MANTRAP
ALIEN
ALONE IN THE DARK
ANIMALYMPICS
APOCALYPSE NOW
BRAINSTORM
CAT PEOPLE
CHAMPIONS
CHARIOTS OF FIRE
CLASH OF THE TITANS
DRACULA
ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK
FAME
THE FINAL CONFLICT
48 HOURS
GREASE
THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER

NO NUKES - THE MUSE CONCERT
OH HEAVENLY DOG
THE PIRATE MOVIE
POLTERGEIST
QUADROPHENIA
QUEST FOR FIRE
RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK
RAISE THE TITANIC
THE ROSE
SAHARA
SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
SATURN 3
SHOCK TREATMENT
SILVER DREAM RACER
STARFLIGHT ONE
STAR TREK - THE MOVIE
STAR TREK - THE WRATH OF KHAN

GWENDOLINE
HAWK THE SLAYER
HIGH ANXIETY
JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR
THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT/WHO
THE LAST AMERICAN VIRGIN
McVICAR
MEGAFORCE
THE MUPPET MOVIE

STAR WARS
THE SWORD AND THE SORCERER
THE THING
THIS IS SPINAL TAP
TO RUSSIA WITH ELTON
UNDERFIRE
VICTOR VICTORIA
XANADU
YES GEORGIO

Of course, not all the above discs have had their true stereo status confirmed ie 'The Thing' and so this list should be used with that proviso. Also, you may have noticed the DOLBY logo on the closing credits of other titles ('Urgh! A Music War') but as far as is known these discs have been pressed from mono tapes. (The reason for this would appear to be the minimal demand for stereo masters for VCR tape duplication. Like it or not, many of the master tapes that are used for LV are the same ones that are used for tape duplication. This no doubt accounts for the poor quality of many of them. There is also the possibility that in the interests of mono/stereo compatibility the stereo image might have been reduced partially on some tapes.)

Decoders

Listed below are some films that were made incorporating DOLBY MP stereo but are listed in the LV catalogue as mono. On past experience, some of these could prove to be stereo titles as well, in which case they should contain surround sound information: THE BIG RED ONE, ESCAPE TO VICTORY, EXTERMINATOR, GOLDENGIRL, GREEN ICE, THE HIGHEST HONOUR, INFERNO, KILLING MACHINE, THE MANITOU, MR BILLION, A WEDDING. (Any update on the stereo debate will appear elsewhere in the magazine.)

Running the audio output of your LV player into a decoder carrying the DOLBY MP logo and then into a separate amplifier and rear speaker will recreate that extra dimension experienced in the cinema. Note that the rear channel is not directional, it is just one channel. If you run this rear channel to two speakers you will not get sound travelling between the rear pair. The only movement of the sound image will be between the front pair and the rear speaker(s).

DOLBY make a point of saying that only decoders carrying their logo will adequately do the job on these discs. So where

does that leave the PIONEER SP101 that has no such marking and the already available MINIM decoder. This could be very much a repeat of the DOLBY B / JVC ANRS noise reduction debate where the two systems were close enough apart to avoid patent infringement, but close enough to bear a certain level of compatibility. PIONEER were in the SQ camp in the days of surround sound and later pieces of equipment also carried CD4 decoders so their approach would appear to be slightly different to the DOLBY QS based matrix if the SP101 is a spin-off of PIONEER's earlier surround sound work. It would appear that many of the PIONEER ARTISTS' NTSC LV discs have been encoded with the SQ matrix but it is not known whether this holds true for their PAL equivalents. We'll just have to wait and see. Both the PIONEER and MINIM models provide simulated depth and stereo effects even on mono originals. This is one reason that some listed mono discs in the catalogue can appear to be in stereo when replayed through one of these decoders.

This is about as far as it is possible to take the matter until the various decoders from PIONEER, MARANTZ, NEC and possibly others appear and can be judged on their own merits. The cost of making a conversion to surround sound is not insubstantial as the decoder is only part of the job. Extra amplification and speakers are also required though these do not need to be of equal standard to the rest of your system. Old equipment that may have been consigned to the attic could suffice, or, the next time you are planning an upgrade, your existing gear can just be shifted round to cater for the rear sound channels.

As to the future, one aspect of the continuing advance of LaserVision presents additional possibilities for the future. All these surround sound systems described so far have relied on squeezing rear channel information on to existing stereo soundtracks that hardly have room in the first place. PIONEER's CLD 900 has two digital sound channels with 94dB of separation and two high quality analogue channels with 55dB separation. At present the machine carries a switch to enable changing between digital and analogue sound on a Digital Sound laser disc. A more exciting possibility would be a centre position that would allow simultaneous replay of both analogue and digital soundtracks. It would serve no purpose with existing software, but, should someone take the trouble to prepare the soundtrack properly we could have four totally clean sound channels that would surpass anything offered by present simulated systems.

(Below - A closer look at the MARANTZ RV 353 surround sound processor)



REVIEWS

Owing to shortage of space (someone's review even got chopped to make way for this) the explanation of the review procedure is a little brief. Please refer to previous issues for further background.

A change occurs this time inasmuch as one of grading letters has been dropped. In practice it has proved impossible to attribute sound faults to the pressing - most of them definitely appear to be master faults, especially as far as films are concerned. Therefore the grading system is now VIDEO MASTER QUALITY/AUDIO MASTER QUALITY and then a single grading for the standard of the PRESSING. When grading masters the idea is to estimate generation loss and the like - it is not really meant to be used as an opinion of how alert the focus puller was or whether the sound engineer pushed the wrong fader up. This way, discs of aged content can receive an 'A' grading provided that every effort would appear to have been made to get as good a master as possible on to the laser disc, not what just happened to fall off the top shelf when the cupboard was opened!

Avoid discs graded with 'C's & 'D's if you are sensitive to the defects described in the text. Often people find these discs acceptable - it's down to preference on many occasions but the magazine must take some 'norm' as a starting point for assessment. Bear in mind that there can be considerable variation in the pressing quality of discs, especially the older ones. It is often worthwhile seeking to obtain replacements for spotty/flecked discs. For master quality it is a waste of time - every copy will exhibit the same characteristics. Fortunately, even the worst LaserVision discs are usually better than any cassette tape.

Talking of spots. Comment was made last time of the excessive number of white spots on discs released early in the year. Talk about a drastic turnabout! Even while issue 3 was at the printers the first of the EMBASSY titles started to appear - an what an improvement. Since then the majority of new discs have been impressively clean - even the ones containing lots of dark scenes. Presumably the bugs in the new injection-moulding process are being progressively ironed out. Older laser hands have commented that the newer discs are a significantly better than the early releases.

One thing that has become apparent on many of the newer discs is the excessive amount of contrast - often at the expense of being able to obtain a decent picture (ie. without losing too much detail at one end or the other on the grey-scale). The guess would be that, traditionally, there has been a need to boost contrast on the old 2P process where 'weak' pictures were often encountered, but the time for the need to do this would now appear to have passed. Examples of these contrasty discs are 'Saturday 14th', 'The Sign Of Four', 'Hound Of The Baskervilles', and 'Silkwood' though there are no doubt others as well. The first three of these are exceptionally sharp masters, exhibiting negligible generation loss and it seems a shame that when we do actually get some potentially 'A' grade masters there should still be these small criticisms.

As promised, there has been an attempt this time to give BBFC ratings though some of these do not seem to match the content of the films. 'Escape From New York' would be one of these and it was noticed that there was quite a discrepancy between the listed and actual running times. May be there was a different cinema version that justified the X rating. The best advice would be this; if you would normally only buy a film if it did have an X rating then treat these ratings with suspicion; if you wish to avoid X films, then avoid them all the same. Better safe than sorry.

Finally, discs marked with the letters 'MP' should contain DOLBY surround sound information in the stereo soundtrack (though we didn't hear them with this advantage unfortunately).

DONNA SUMMER A Hot Summer Night



SPECTRUM 040 192 1 £ 9.99

CLV - Ch COLOUR STEREO

1983 75 mins

SIDE 1: Macarthur Park/Love Is In Control/Unconditional Love/Romeo/Don't Cry For Me Argentina/On The Radio/Forgive Me

SIDE 2: Woman - One Night Only - Stop In The Name Of Love/Dim All The Lights - Sunset People - Bad Girls - Hot Stuff/Last Dance/She Works Hard For The Money/State Of Independence

A long time coming, this disc would appear to be on many people's wants lists. A rather lavish concert production (sets and costumes) recorded at the Pacific Amphitheatre, Costa Mesa, California (isn't that where PIONEER's disc pressing plant is located?). There was a momentary fear during the first number that Donna was singing to backing tracks (one has to be so careful with these disco people!) but during the second number a real musician is glimpsed behind the set. Musical Youth pile in for 'Unconditional Love' and one is hard pressed to keep up with Donna's costume changes as the show proceeds. She looks a bit out of it at times - may be a hint of tiredness as it would appear to be the final show of a tour. 'Romeo' sparkled among the faster numbers, but really all the songs work in this live context. At the end of side one Donna gets religion but handles it reasonably well.

The impression is given that 'Last Dance' is the end of the show but applause draws an encore which fortunately must have been contemplated as Donna appears in yet another frock and a new set! Are we supposed to believe this is all spontaneous? 'State Of Independence' is the real finale and deserves to be.

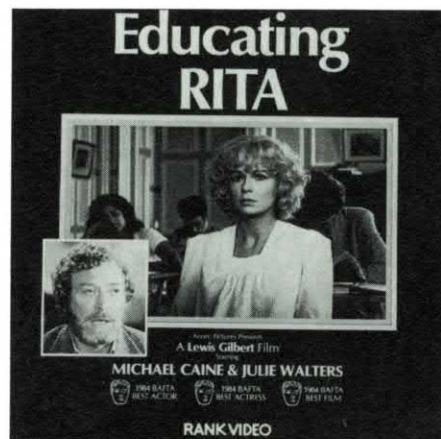
It's the sort of song that does not appear overly 'clever' in its composition but has a justifiably appealing and enduring quality nonetheless.

As a presentation this is all a bit showbizzy for me although it is undeniably well done. Personally I prefer this sort of music to be a little more intense and direct. May be Donna could be persuaded to do a follow-up at one of Blackburn's more fashionable niteries?

Video originated master, presumably NTSC, the quality is pretty good. Sometimes Donna's jet-black hair clogs up so a modest reduction in contrast might be in order on the TV, but this is an observation rather than a defect. Sound is good - there is a little hiss now and then but nothing untoward. The pressing is generally OK but possibly a little 'busy' in some of the plain areas of background. A bit spotty too I suppose, but acceptable. If you have ever liked any Donna Summer record you are unlikely to be disappointed in this.

[A - / B +] [B -]

EDUCATING RITA



RANK VIDEO D 0206 £ 13.99

CLV COLOUR MONO

1984 108 mins Rated 15

STARRING: Michael Caine, Julie Walters
DIRECTED BY: Lewis Gilbert

The recent steady trickle of characteristically British films that have won international acclaim could easily make one forget that, a few years ago, there seemed to be some doubt that we even still had a film industry. 'Educating Rita' is a rather engaging story of a Liverpool hairdresser (Julie Walters) trying, against the wishes of her husband who wants her to stay home and have a baby, to better herself by taking an Open University course under the tutelage of an English professor declining into alcoholism (well played by Michael Caine).

It does make a pleasant change to be dealing with a reasonably current addition to the LV catalogue such as this, and though it may not be the masterpiece some of the publicity would suggest, it is a welcome title. The acting style is a little theatrical in parts but both featured stars acquit themselves well and I found the film considerably more involving than the excerpts I had seen on TV suggested might be the case. If anything, it was the exceptional number of sunny days observed throughout the film that made

me wonder if this was the same Liverpool I've been to, and certainly, some of the locations did not quite ring true (the railway station scenes specifically). But these are no more than minor observations.

The only real disappointment was the quality of the print utilised for the disc release. Admittedly Michael Caine's character is supposed to have something of a drink problem, but no-one standing right-ways-up should have a complexion that red. Unusually for RANK films, the definition was none too special either. Sound was a bit edgy and undynamic and there was a discernible high-pitched whistle audible at low level. Although none of this will really spoil your initial enjoyment, one would have hoped for better in a film that, indeed, many would want to keep.

[B - / C +] [B +]

DURAN DURAN Sing Blue Silver



PICTURE MUSIC PMI 99 1063 1 £ 9.99

CLV COLOUR STEREO

1984 85 mins

Where have I heard this introductory music before?..... A documentary of a 1984 Duran Duran tour of the USA - "3 months, 18,000 miles, 51 dates in 40 cities, 554,000 people". Why such a mammoth endeavour should be undertaken is not immediately clear, but as we eavesdrop on tour manager Spy Matthews negotiating the finer points of a promoter's contractual obligations the truth slips out. Duran Duran have obviously been forced into this endless slog of touring in order to satisfy a craving for an obscure brand of Russian vodka which can only be procured by Spy threatening to pull the group out of the following nights' shows.

Fortunately, in the midst of such drama, time is found to showcase the group performing against a background of enthusiastic fan worship - so this is good stuff for fans to watch too. The stage performances are a bit studio perfect in sound quality and the resulting style is more akin to some of the pop promos they have done.

If you are a film fan you would be well advised to avoid seeing this disc. Although it even says "documentary" on the sleeve you will find yourself watching something originated on 35mm and, for the most part, shown on the disc wide-screen with black strips

top and bottom. Before now, this magazine has cited the pop world's ability to get superior master quality on to laser discs - this is just adding insult to injury!

The transfer from film to video does seem to have produced a little graininess which spoils an otherwise superior picture. A little tweaking of the TV controls is necessary to retain sufficient colour without it going bitty, but certainly the definition is outstanding. The pressing was spotless and the sound excellent. One final comment, the labels carry chapter numbers but there is no chapter facility in the disc itself.

[A - / A] [A -]

THE WHO

The Kids Are Alright



SPECTRUM 791 514 1 £ 9.99

CLV COLOUR STEREO MP

1979 97 mins

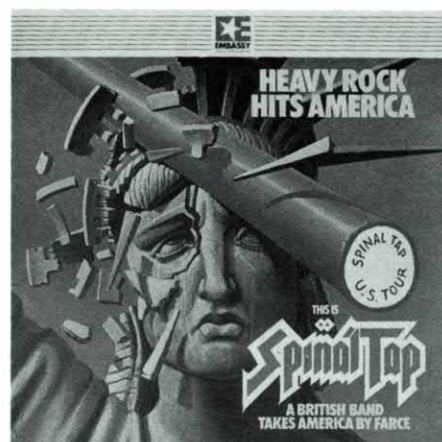
Whereas the production team for 'Sing Blue Silver' had to come up with something in three months, the time scale of this Who retrospective runs to nearer twenty years. There is less talk here and the aim seems to have been to let the music do the talking. What chat there is mostly comes from Russell Harty interviewing the group, and his presence is a little greater than one would wish. Other footage comes from 'The Smothers Brothers Show', 'Shindig', 'RSG', 'Beat Club', 'Woodstock', 'Rock and Roll Circus' and various live shows. Some songs are mimed but most are genuinely live. A clip of Mose Allison's song, 'Young Man Blues', from the London Coliseum, though of undistinguished quality, was appealing to me, but there is enough from each period to satisfy most people's tastes. For someone like myself who derived more pleasure from Keith Moon's radio shows than the Who's music, the brief post-interview clip (side 2 / 0.17) proved a sensitive reminder of a true character of the music world whose inner depths obviously exceeded the popularly held view.

For the age of some of the contents the overall standard of video is good and one is not left to alter the TV controls between each segment. There are some reasonably large white spots that crop up although it is hard to say what is the cause of these. Sometimes a

white vertical line is faintly visible in the darker scenes. Although basically of good quality, half way through side one a 'chomping' sound appears on the right hand channel and distracts now and again. Some of the clips on side two get a bit crackly at times as well.

[B - / C +] [B -]

THIS IS SPINAL TAP



EMBASSY ELV 2081 £ 13.99

CLV COLOUR STEREO MP

1984 79 mins

STARRING: Rob Reiner, Christopher Guest, Michael McKean, Harry Shearer
DIRECTED BY: Rob Reiner

The original intention was to slot this spoof rockumentary in after 'Sing Blue Silver' and 'The Kids Are Alright' and make a few witty comparisons. In practice it didn't work out that way. The supposed fiction of 'This Is Spinal Tap' runs closer to the realities of the music business than either of the genuine efforts manage.

As British mega-group Spinal Tap undertake their farewell US tour (following a twenty year career where they have cashed in on every trend that came along) we observe them encountering all the put-downs and rejections that the entertainment industry meets out to its former idols as they slide uncomfortably back down the ladder of success.

The disc functions on several levels. First off, you can have immense fun playing it to unaware friends and see how long it takes them to twig (the longer it takes, the greater the likelihood they are actually in the biz. If they get past the end of side one without cottoning on it's a near certainty they work for a record company or write for the NME). Then, you can join in for the joke. The third, and most enduring aspect is that, with each view, you end up looking for the flaws that give the game away. Even Patrick Macnee in a brief role as Sir Dennis Eaton-Hogg, head of Polymer Records, rings true. Fans of 'Young Doctors In Love' will also get a kick out seeing Michael McKean ('Dr Simon August') as a long-haired, and very credible, English musician.

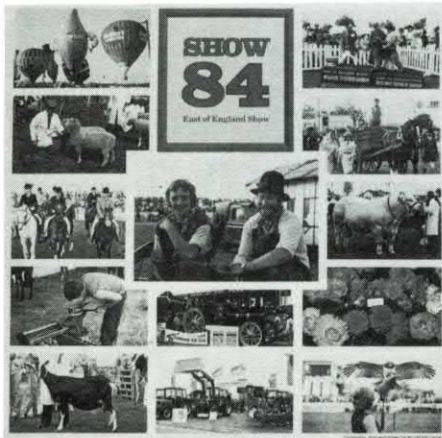
'This Is Spinal Tap' is presented in what (before the advent of 'Sing Blue Silver') would be considered an authentic, grainy documentary style.

That makes it hard to grade the disc but it seems about right. The sound is generally good, though whether the momentary sound distortion and dropout on one of the earlier music tracks is all part of the joke too (the caption tells us the location of the recording was Chicago's 'Fidelity Hall') is debatable. Certainly there is something of a high-pitched whistle on the left-hand channel for much of the earlier part of the film, albeit at low level, and it is only this detail that is likely to detract from an otherwise acceptable quality disc.

I bet Keith would have liked this disc too.

[B+ / B-] [B]

SHOW 84



INTERACTIVE PICTURES		EES	£ 29.99
CAV	COLOUR	MONO	
1985	47 mins + c 15,000 stills		

At long last, a still-frame disc that is available outside the educational/commercial sector. Admittedly the subject matter of 'Show 84' may not be the sort of thing to have laser fans rushing to their dealers to get hold of a copy, but one must applaud the decision to make the disc generally available. One would hope that a certain level of crossover between con-

sumer and the educational/commercial fields would be beneficial to both sides.

Proclaimed as "the brainchild of John Sayer" this record of the 1984 East Of England Agricultural Show offers both a documentary film of the event and a still-frame archive amounting to some 15,000 pictures designed as a reference aid to livestock breeders. In addition, the stills section covers other aspects of the show - flowers, farriery, falconry, show jumping, art, photography, music, trade stands, dog agility stakes, ballooning etc, etc. Everything, whether it moved or not, appears to have been captured with either a still or movie camera. Indeed, if you attended the show yourself and stood still long enough for someone to get you into focus you may even be included! The still-frame section is spread over two sides, preceded on side one by the show documentary, and on side two, a series of interviews with the show's sponsors - these being some of the big banks and a selection of companies related to the agricultural industry. Any notion of idyllic country living and England's green and pleasant land take something of a knock viewing this section of the disc. Industry is the word!

The still section on side one runs from frame 39780 onwards, again featuring show activities before moving on to individual animal photos. The quality of the still-frame section was something of a disappointment it must be said. Normally one would expect an actual still photographic original to produce a clearer still video frame than could be achieved by just holding a moving sequence in still-frame mode. The theoretical resolution of a still photograph on 35mm film is greater. This is not the case here. In the earlier documentary part of the disc, frame 3400 produces a clear, detailed head shot of a bull, and frame 32240, a similarly well-defined close-up of a falcon. None of the intended still-frames matches the definition and tonal separation of these examples. Many of the stills are of erratic levels of density (some are very bleached out indeed), their definition is poor, and most are fairly grainy in texture. One can be understanding of the daunting cost of assembling such a quantity of stills given the pressures imposed by the brevity of the event, but it would seem that better results could have been obtained by dispensing with the still photography altogether and just selecting suitable still frames from the movie footage - certainly if the quality of the two cited examples could be achieved throughout by this means. There are captions included in the still frame section of the disc but some of them are cropped off at their extremities - presumably because they were composed on a 35mm slide whose format differs from that of the TV frame. Side one concludes at 47757.

On side two the still-frame section commences at 30265 (though it is hard to be precise as the caption runs for many frames in itself) and concludes at 37838. A similar mixture of livestock and show exhibits is featured. Frames 32200 - 32202 show the PHILIPS LaserVision tent. In the first frame, an interior shot, one of the famous revolving racks containing 200 sleeves can be seen, situated beside a large bank of monitors. In the foreground is a VLP830 - rarely seen out of captivity.

Not every frame on the disc has

been viewed, but hopefully a general impression of the contents has been conveyed. A printed index sheet is included in the sleeve and there is also a computer floppy additionally available. The general quality of the movie segments of the disc is good, if a little grainy - certainly adequate for the intended use but one would have hoped for something better as far as the quality of the still-frames is concerned. The achievable still-frame quality of a LaserVision disc is better than this aspect of 'Show 84' would indicate and future discs of this type could well do with a reconsidered means of origin-ation.

LA BOHEME



ARTS INT.	04 AI 010	£ 23.99
CLV - Ch	COLOUR	STEREO
1982	114 mins	(Two discs - 3)

FEATURING: Ileana Cotrubas, Marilyn Zschau, Neil Schicoff, Thomas Allen, Gwynne Howell, John Rawnslay
CONDUCTOR: Lamberto Gardelli

A live recording from the Royal Opera House Covent Garden - 16/2/1982

Picture, if you will, a garrett in the Latin Quarter of Paris on Christmas Eve in the mid-1800s. Four friends share this meagre dwelling - a poet, a painter, a musician, and a philosopher. When the opera opens we find Rodolfo the poet and Marcello the painter trying to keep warm while they work. In desperation they even burn one of Rodolfo's manuscripts, which quickly flickers and dies in the stove. This stark opening sets the scene for one of the world's favourite operas, a beautiful and tragic love story.

Puccini's music score teems with luscious melodies, several of which will be familiar even to non-opera goers. In Act 1, when the two lovers meet and fall in love, we hear 'Your Tiny Hand Is Frozen', 'They Call Me Mimi', and 'Lovely Maid In The Moonlight' in quick succession. Another favourite in Act 2 is 'Musetta's Waltz Song' followed in Act 4 by the famous tenor/baritone duet 'Ah Mimi, False And Fickle Hearted'. (I've used the the familiar English words here, although the opera is sung in Italian.)

From the first tender meeting of Rodolfo and his frail Mimi, the plot progresses to their sad parting and reconciliation and finally her tragic death in Act 4. In the theatre, the end of the opera usually brings a momentary stunned silence as the audience struggles to overcome its emotions.

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This is then followed by an ovation as everyone acknowledges the genius of maestro Puccini and (often!) the interpretations of the performers. Fortunately for LV opera buffs, the latter is true in this instance.

The "star-crossed lovers" are played by Ileana Cotrubas and Neil Shicoff, both of whom live up to their international reputations with their fine performances. She, the ever beautiful and frail embroiderer with the voice of an angel, and he, the sensitive poet sweeping Mimi off her feet with his charm and vocal ability, but nonetheless one of the boys when it comes to horseplay with the rest of the gang of four.

Marcello, the second hero, carries on an intermittent and fiery romance with the flighty Musetta, excellently played by our own superb baritone Thomas Allen and Marilyn Zschau. The two other Bohemians are well played by those two stalwarts of British opera - Gwynne Howell and John Rawnsley (complete with wedding ring - I don't believe Schavnard was married!).

This stage production was originally presented in 1974 and so there has been plenty of time to iron out any glitches. I would only question the fact that Act 2 seems very cramped due to splitting the stage into two parts, one for the street and the other for the interior of the Cafe Momus.

In the absence of superimposed English sub-titles I would commend two bi-lingual translations to your notice, either of the two will suffice, depending on your means and academic interest:

ENO/Royal Opera Book No. 14 - 'La Boheme' Bi-lingual translation and historical notes etc. - £2.00.

Metropolitan Opera Classics Library - 'La Boheme' Bi-lingual translation, history, plot, critique. Hardback. Published by Michael Joseph - £12.95. ISBN 0 7181 23034.

Here then is a stylishly performed and produced Royal Opera House presentation guaranteed to wring the stoniest heart. It should be popular with established enthusiasts and prove a good starter disc for aspiring opera viewers looking for a tuneful work with 'soul'.

As a point of interest, the opening caption on the disc states the scene is set in Montmartre (ie near Sacre Coeur) whereas, according to Kobbes Complete Opera Book, it is actually set in the Latin Quarter (ie near the Pantheon) - these two areas being a fair distance apart.

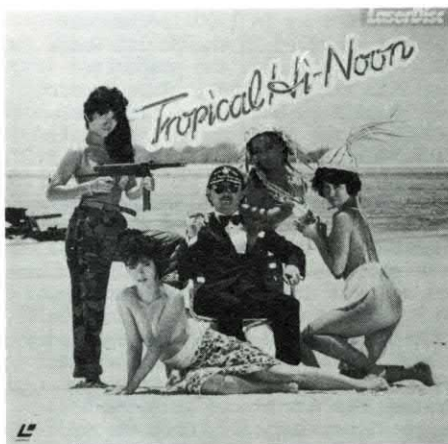
[KEITH ARNOLD]

Disc quality: There did seem to be a little grain in the original video but a reduction in contrast on the TV produced, for the most part, a very pleasant picture. Some of the camera shots were not as crisp as they could be but this would be in the original recording, as would the occasional drop in level on some of the voices when they are located too far off mike.

This would appear to be one of the later pressings of the initial group of Arts International releases and is considerably cleaner than its predecessors. Many of these Arts International discs have static dark backgrounds that show up the slightest amount of flecking and spots but this copy of 'La Boheme' was refreshingly clean and can be recommended.

[B+ / A-] [A-]

TROPICAL HI-NOON



PIONEER ME 104 - E £18.95

(CAV) - Ch COLOUR STEREO CX

1983 56 mins

FEATURING: Mari Uemura, Kaori Shima, Keito Asabuki, Mika Hijiri
SONGS PERFORMED BY: Seiichi Nakamura & Honey Drunker
DIRECTED BY: Shinya Yamamoto

Quite extraordinary music disc that's dedicated purely to the on-screen cavortings of four naked Nipponese nubile. It features a relentless synth-jazz soundtrack, courtesy of composers Seiichi Nakamura and Hiromasa Suzuki (means nothing to me either), and stars four shameless femmes who take it in turn to undulate alarmingly upon some far eastern beachhead. Gritty clumps of wet sand are rubbed enthusiastically in to diminutive breasts and there's much pouting of lips. It would be hot stuff indeed were it not for the fact that it's all done in the best possible taste.

The screen is regularly filled with a huge tanned haunch and little else. Great lengths were obviously travelled to avoid confrontation with one of those less photogenic bodily orifices. Even so this is a notable release as it was the first UK LV to feature out and out titillation, however modest. The girls are possessed of quite astonishing symmetry, and for those of us that way inclined, there is much to delight the eye.

Picture quality is excellent with superb definition and colour saturation and the stereo sound track refreshingly sharp. A clean pressing too. Apparently these kind of discs proliferate in Japan.

[A - / A] [A -]* [STEVE KEATON]

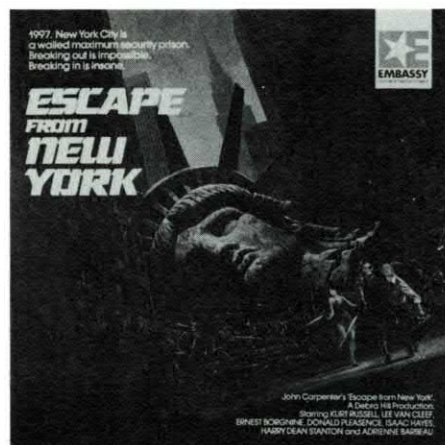
* Allowance should be made in this grading for the fact that this disc has been incorrectly mastered and will not produce a jitter-free still frame.

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ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK



EMBASSY ELV 1602 £13.99

CLV COLOUR STEREO MP

1981 95 mins Rated X

STARRING: Kurt Russell, Lee Van Cleef, Ernest Borgnine, Donald Pleasence, Isaac Hayes, Harry Dean Stanton, Adrienne Barbeau
DIRECTED BY: John Carpenter

'Escape From New York' is perhaps the most elaborate fantasy adventure yet from cult director John Carpenter. Ambitious to the point of absurdity and populated with a plethora of typically bizarre Carpenter characters, it's an infinitely collectable item.

The year is 1997 and Manhattan has been walled up and converted into a maximum security prison containing three million assorted murderers, muggers, rapists and lunatics. All well and good until Airforce 1, the Presidential jet, is scuppered by terrorists and plunged into central Manhattan! Naturally someone now has to enter the wasteland and rescue the President, beautifully underplayed by Donald Pleasence. Enter arch criminal Snake Plisskin (Carpenter favourite Kurt Russell). Understandably Snake is somewhat underwhelmed with the prospect, so to ensure that he completes his mission, explosive bolts are implanted into his neck. A subtle form of coercion to be sure.

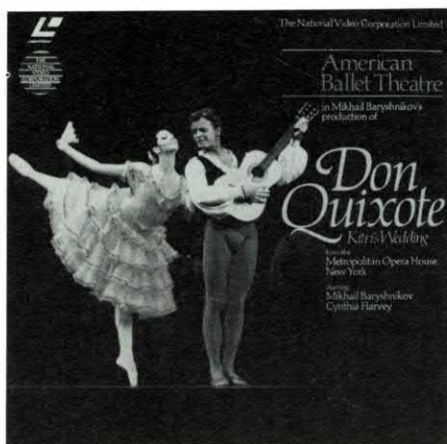
Now, to be honest, the various machinations of the plot don't bare too great an examination, but the imaginative set pieces and sheer pace of the movie carry you through regardless. It's a triumph of style over content. The monosyllabic dialogue is a joy recalling Carpenter's seige thriller, 'Assault On Precinct 13' (sadly unavailable on LV), and Kurt ("Call me Ssssnake") Russell grimaces with great effect throughout. Ernest Borgnine, Lee Van Cleef, Adrienne Barbeau, and Harry Dean Stanton all provide strong, if somewhat loopy, support.

Picture quality is unfortunately only adequate, even allowing for the gloomy setting. Definition is only fair and the image grainy, but the soundtrack is excellent. Dynamic with good stereo separation and considerable punch it makes a meal of Carpenter's marvellous synthesiser score. To my mind, given a better master and a slightly less spotty pressing (would be graded B without the spots, you may be luckier), this is the kind of release that justifies LV. It's eminently cultist, visually and aurally exciting and thus the backbone

for any specialised collection. If only more releases were so suitable.

[C + / A -] [C +] [STEVE KEATON]

DON QUIXOTE



ARTS INT. 04 AI 018 £19.99

CLV - Ch COLOUR STEREO

1983 85 mins

FEATURING: Mikhail Baryshnikov, Cynthia Harvey
CONDUCTOR: Paul Connelly

From a performance at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York in June 1983 with the House orchestra

The ballet is loosely based on the story of Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616). It was first produced at the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow on December 26th, 1869 by Marius Petipa

who then revised it for a later, grander production in St. Petersburg in 1871. However, the Moscow version staged by Alexander Gorsky in 1900 is the one that has survived in the Soviet Union and is the basis for the production staged in the West today. This version by Mikhail Baryshnikov was first shown in 1978 by the American Ballet Theatre with the sets and costumes designed by Santo Loquasto.

The Petipa/Gorsky versions were in four acts and a prologue but Baryshnikov has tried to produce theatrical sense wherever possible, and his version runs only to three acts and a prologue. The biggest change is in Act 2, where its two scenes are now in reverse order so that the tavern scene which was Act 2 Scene 1 and includes the tricked marriage, is now placed as Scene 2 so the plot runs logically into the wedding in Act 3. The original Act 3, which is Don Quixote's dream sequence in an enchanted forest, is now incorporated into Act 2 at the gypsy encampment.

The ballet is set in 14-15th century Spain and tells of Don Quixote, the knight of the sorrowful countenance, who, consumed with the vision of his idealised chivalric love, the lady Dulcinea, wanders the country with his servant Sancho Panza ever seeking the idealised woman. "He's a muddled fool, full of lucid intervals" says Sancho in the original novel. The scenes of romance and courtship of Kitri (Cynthia Harvey) and Basil (Mikhail Baryshnikov) leading to their eventual wedding are set in contrast with Don Quixote's eternal pursuit of his idealised lady. In fact, Don Quixote, in the final scene, leaves the wedding festivities to continue his quest. Basil and Kitri's wedding has been just an incident in his long search.

The production conveys the brilliance and colour of the Spanish setting well. The supporting dancers are fully utilised when on stage and are not allowed to stiffen and become part of the scenery as can so often happen. This helps to move the pace of the action along and maintains interest between the set pieces. Ludwig Minkus' music and the dancing complement each other in a joyful spectacle. The cast's enthusiasm and vivacity are infectious and this comes across even through the remoteness of the video medium. Espada, the bullfighter, is suitably arrogant and good looking whilst Gamache is an engaging upper-class twit. Basil dances with incredible spirit and verve throughout and Kitri matches his style with poise and grace. Of the smaller parts, that of Amour (Cupid in the dream sequence) must be praised for her sprightly precision and her obvious enjoyment of the role. The Don, Sancho, and Lorenzo are practically non-dancing parts here. The orchestra, under Paul Connelly, play Minkus' score with panache and retain appropriate sympathy for the narrative line.

The single disc is presented with Act 1 in side one - run time being 30 minutes, and Acts 2 & 3 on side two - run time here 55 minutes. This gives a total playing time of 85 minutes as opposed to the 90 quoted on the disc sleeve. The breaks between acts and scenes are denoted by views of hand painted scenes taken from a Spanish fan. None of the breaks is captioned.

The disc comes with the usual printed stout outer sleeve on which is included the list of chapter numbers with brief descriptions of the set pieces in their running order. Packed in with the disc is a colour folder detailing the cast members and a resume of

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the plot by Clement Crisp, the Financial Times ballet correspondent. Rather oddly the resume comprises details of three acts and a prologue but there is no prologue on the disc except for a very brief view (10 seconds) of Don Quixote and Dulcinea. Mr Crisp's prologue seems to be omitted, which may explain the missing five minutes of the programme.

This version of Don Quixote by the American Ballet Theatre is a most welcome addition to the catalogue. Whilst purists may complain that it is not as the Petipa/Gorsky conception, it certainly makes theatrical sense and also good entertainment.

[TONY WELLS]

Disc Quality: The definition is not particularly impressive and this is probably the result of being a conversion from an NTSC original master. (The softly defined credits give this away.) This will not be of much consequence in the close-ups but it does mean that the full stage shots lack the potential for detailed study. The sound was fine, if a little hissy. The pressing seemed satisfactory in all respects, other than a tendency to show rather too many white spots. These were mostly lost in the brightly lit scenes but they did become a little distracting in some of the darker scenes at the start of side two.

[B - / B +] [C +]

TEARS FOR FEARS In My Mind's Eye



POLYGRAM VIDEO 040 349 1 £ 9.99

CLV - Ch COLOUR STEREO

1984 58 mins

SIDE 1: Start Of The Breakdown/Mothers Talk/Pale Shelter/The Working Hour/The Prisoner/Ideas As Opiates/Mad World - We Are Broken/Head Over Heels/Suffer The Children/The Hurting/Memories Fade/Change

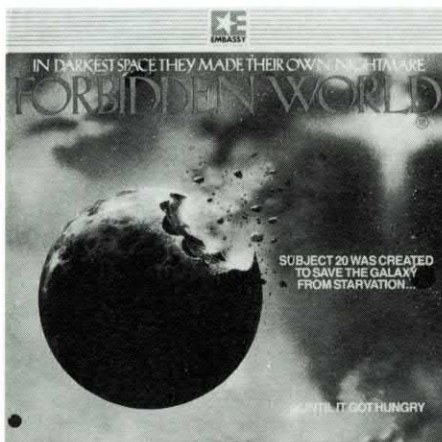
Live at the Hammersmith Odeon and, as far as picture clarity is concerned, a world apart from the Dire Straits video done at the same venue. The audience do not figure too prominently in the presentation, and at times you tend to forget it is a concert performance altogether. The rather heavy use of video effects perpetuates the illusion. On rare occasions the group do offer a few words of introduction to the songs, but on this evidence are unlikely to be nominated for showbiz entertainers of the year awards - you'd

have to like their music to want this disc.

It is a pity not to be able to recommend this to a wider audience as it represents quite a good example of both master and disc quality. The definition is stunning on some of the close-ups and in spite of the disc being, at 58+ minutes, near the limits of what can be crammed on one side of a disc, does not appear to have lost anything being transferred to the medium. Possibly the contrast is a little fierce and the colour a trifle weak, but this may very well be a characteristic of the original stage lighting. The sound is clear and strong with just a little hiss evident. Really there is very little to criticise here. (Note: 'We Are Broken' and 'Head Over Heels' are performed as a medley and the subsequent chapter numbers are one number out as a result.)

[A - / A -] [B +]

FORBIDDEN WORLD



EMBASSY ELV 4030 £ 13.99

CLV COLOUR MONO

1982 77 mins Rated 18

STARRING: Jesse Vint, Dawn Dunlap, June Chadwick
DIRECTED BY: Allan Holzman

Commander Mike Colby (Jesse Vint) is summoned to the planet Xarbia where a project to create a new food source to satisfy a galactic food shortage has gone wrong. The opening scenes in the spacecraft remind one of several previous space epics but as the action shifts to the Xarbian base and we observe Dr Barbara gliding down a corridor in skin tight trousers and high heel shoes the name of Roger Corman floats across the screen on the credit roll and the intended style of the ensuing production becomes apparent.

Do not think, however, that production values have been compromised here. Grant you, it's not exactly 'Star Trek 3' but the moments of suspense and the special effects are skillfully conceived and the sets convincing - not a trace of cardboard in sight. This latter commodity has been reserved for the acting. At one point on side two, where the action hots up, Commander Mike shouts out a series of orders to the assembled crew and, as he visibly wilts under the pace of his vocal delivery, you desperately hope that the monster will hold off for a few extra moments to allow him the much needed time to

complete his lines. Some of the scientific theories expounded by the other members of the cast are equally endearing in their style of delivery. Surprisingly, several viewings of this film did not lessen one's appreciation, and, if you are ever faced with a bunch of boisterous visitors arriving on your doorstep after closing time, this film should provide an ideal group viewing experience.

What makes the crucial difference to the enjoyment of the disc is the especially sharp film print that has been utilised. The level of illumination of the production is very low (whatever advances future technology will bring, it would seem that light bulbs are going to be in short supply). Reasonably one suspects that this is just an 'artistic device' employed in order to enhance the suspense. What you do see is very sharp. Unfortunately some of the reel changes produce some significant scratches and spots that are of equal clarity. Perversely I found these added somewhat to the authenticity of the production, but I could imagine they may annoy others. The total result is a 'A' grade master with grade 'C' scratches - hence the compromise 'B' grading. Some of the handling damage to the film spills over to the soundtrack which has moments of the 'frying tonight' syndrome in evidence, albeit at low level. Otherwise the sound is quite good. Special mention must be made of the pressing, which considering the darkness of the picture for most of the film, is unbelievably streak free and devoid of any white spots.

[B / B] [A -]

MAZE Live



PIONEER ARTISTS MP 163 - E £ 19.95

CLV - Ch COLOUR STEREO CX

1981 57 mins

SIDE 1: You/Changing Times/Joy & Pain/Happy e - Feelin's/Southern Girl/Look At California/Feel That You're Feelin'

Although now five years old, the release of this disc neatly coincided with sell-out concert performances by Maze on their recent UK tour. An eight piece soul/disco/funk group, call it what you will, the end product is a live concert recording that works well as a video and audio disc.

Frankie Beverly, the singer and composer of all seven songs, looks like he's just stepped off a space-shuttle mission, all white jump-suit and base-

ball cap, but playing either guitar or electric piano he leads the ensemble effortlessly through the set - it's that type of music. nothing too energetic here. The presentation is fairly straight - switching between close-ups and stage wide shots plus many glimpses of members of the audience who would appear to be invited rather than paid up punters. You get the impression that too many of them are there for the occasion rather than to groove along. Several of the manifestations of audience enthusiasm look rather forced. That said, the music is OK.

Beyond a bit of sibilance breaking through on the vocal mike at the beginning and end of the disc, the dynamic range of the sound is impressive. (The disc was played with CX and without - the sibilance appeared marginally worse without CX.) Other than that it is very much a demonstration of the achievable sound quality from an LV disc. Video performance failed to match. Another seemingly poor NTSC transfer, you could mistake picture quality for VCR tape. Close-ups aren't too bad, but seeing the whole stage in shot produces almost a double image to the picture. There is a noticeable red shift too. Certainly no better picture quality than the previously reviewed Joni Mitchell disc and one would have hoped that PIONEER would have found someone better to do their transfers by now as it reflects badly on the quality of their pressings which in this case seemed perfectly acceptable bar a few moments of line dropout. (The audio grading is marked down only for the sibilance as it is otherwise A quality.)

[D / B+] [B]

BRAINSTORM



MGM / UA	UMLV 10314	£ 13.99
CLV	COLOUR	STEREO MP
1983	101 mins	Rated 15

STARRING: Natalie Wood, Christopher Walken, Louise Fletcher, Cliff Robertson
DIRECTOR/PRODUCER: Douglas Trumbull

Michael Brace (Christopher Walken) and Lillian Reynolds (Louise Fletcher) are two research scientists employed in the R&D section of an American hi-tech computer/automation company. They have developed what could be described as the ultimate in audio-visual systems - a machine capable of recording the user's sense data as it is experienced in the brain. By simply placing the chip-filled headpiece on one's head and hitting the play button

one can experience and enjoy (or otherwise!) the experience of someone else. Sight, smell, sound, taste, touch, memories, thoughts all become shareable at first hand. Natalie Wood as Karen Brace, Michael's estranged wife, works in the design department and is responsible for turning the prototype headgear and its accompanying trolley full of electronics into the lightweight 'Walkman like' consumer desirable with which the company, run by Alex Terson (Cliff Robertson), hopes to reap a fortune in profits.

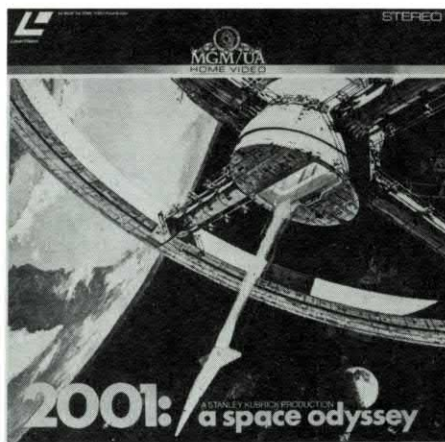
However, as with so much advanced technology, the Defence Department has gotten interested in the potential military applications which are totally in conflict with the ideals of the inventors. The machine's potential for good is demonstrated by Michael's use of it to reconcile his relationship with Karen; its demonic possibilities by the way of an accidental and brief exposure to a military experimental brainwashing tape that severely traumatizes their son. As the element of suspense is an important part of the film, I shall refrain from revealing the denouement in order not to spoil any potential purchaser's enjoyment. Personally, I found it very effective and moving, but that said, the film is certainly capable of providing several pleasurable viewings and thus is a good choice for disc release.

[ALAN BELL]

Disc quality: Excellent sound on opening credits and the attention to the sound is apparent throughout - the only reservation would be the over emphasis on certain everyday noises, footsteps, closing doors etc which can detract at times. The laser disc obviously loses nothing here. The cropped (originally Super Panavision) picture is a little soft in some scenes and the colour a little faded. A good pressing as far as can be told.

[B / A-] [A-]

2001



MGM / UA	UMLV 10002	£ 15.99
CLV	COLOUR	STEREO
1968	134 mins	

STARRING: Keir Dullea, Gary Lockwood
PRODUCED & DIRECTED BY: Stanley Kubrick

'2001' has been described as a "stimulating enigma", "a work of cinematic genius" as well as being dubbed "the most boring piece of pretentiousness ever committed to celluloid". A report circulated in the trade follow-

ing some MGM executives attending a pre-release preview gave their reaction as 'My God! We've got a twenty million dollar silent movie on our hands'. The LV disc release was not itself without some mystery and confusion: the original discs were missing a ten minute segment of the film and those missing minutes turned a somewhat obscure plot into an impenetrable puzzle. So, if you have a copy already and side two begins without you having seen the mysterious TMA #1, the monolith on the Moon, you should take steps to change it for the second issue which contains that essential sequence.

The film is in three parts. The first, 'The Dawn Of Man', takes us from about 100,000 years B.C. to the 21st century. The basic hypothesis of the movie is that evolution on Earth was assisted by outside intervention. The appearance of a rectangular black slab in the middle of the Neanderthal desert inspires the man-apes of the time to discover the first rudiments of technology. Weapons of stone and bone transform them from frightened scavengers into hunters and killers. The episode ends with man-ape killing his own kind - the first murder? - and in triumph the victorious man-ape triumphantly hurls his thighbone club aloft where we cut to an orbiting nuclear bomb. This is the famous 'Blue Danube' sequence as the Pan-Am shuttle docks with the gracefully rotating space station. Man is on the stage of his journey which will take him to the second monolith on the Moon, which is quite literally a signpost to the stars. We are into the second part of the film - 'Jupiter Mission: 18 Months Later', and it is here that the second major concept is realised, that of machine intelligence and its implications in the form of HAL 9000, the ship's computer.

HAL is a product of pure logic, but in order for easier relations between him and the crew to exist, he has been programmed with human emotions. The unfortunate consequences of this are to create a conflict in his rationale. HAL begins to doubt the crew's conviction and belief in their mission and perhaps even their ability to complete it successfully. HAL becomes confused: his prime programmes are at odds with one another - he cannot achieve success whilst succouring a human crew that he does not trust, so he attempts to dispose of them all. The sole survivor, Dave Bowman (Keir Dullea), is thus alone as he leaves the ship in his space pod for the last time to make the encounter with the third monolith and Man's destiny with the stars: 'Jupiter Space And Beyond The Infinite'.

If any part of '2001' has dated it is the opening of this section. The 'cosmic rollercoaster' of geometric patterns and obvious terrestrial landscapes photographed in infra-red were not wholly satisfactory when the movie was new, but after a decade of 'Star Wars effects' they seem lamentably tame. Conversely, the space pod and Bowman's final resting place - a Louis Quinze suite is disturbingly inspired. The very last shot: the star child foetus staring at you from the screen with eyes full of knowing is also as unnerving and awe inspiring as it ever was.

'2001' is a film that requires and merits repeated viewing and therefore its availability on disc is ideal. It is unfortunate that that it is not a wide-screen presentation as the original Ultra Panavision frame composition and photography (by master cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth) is an essential

part of the whole, reflecting the dimensions the Universe and the vacuous loneliness of interplanetary space. The film was originally intended for and presented on the Cinerama screen. The soundtrack is good, the stereo excellent, and makes the most of the use of classical music throughout: the opening to Richard Strauss' 'Also Sprach Zarathustra', amazingly undiminished by the continued use on television in programmes with any slight space content; Khatchaturian's 'Gayane Ballet Suite' evoking the loneliness and isolated routine of long space flights as the solitary astronaut jogs his way round the ship like a hamster on a treadmill; 'Lux Aeternae' and 'Atmospheres' by Gyorgy Ligeti remaining to make the film a splendid work of audiovisual art. The discs are well packaged and make '2001' a worthwhile investment. It is worth spending time getting to grips with this difficult but rewarding film.

[B / A -] [B -] [ALAN BELL]

SPARTACUS



ARTS INT. 04 AI 021 £23.99

CLV - Ch COLOUR STEREO

1984 125 mins (Two discs - 3)

FEATURING: Erek Moukhamedov, Mikhail Gabovich, Natalia Bessmertnova, Maria Bylova
CHOREOGRAPHY: Yuri Grigorovich
CONDUCTOR: Alygis Zhyuraitis with the orchestra of the Bolshoi theatre

Choreographed by Grigorovich to Khatchaturian's score, the ballet tells the story of slave Spartacus and his wife Phrygia who are captives of the Roman general Crassus. Spartacus incites his fellow slaves to revolt against the Romans (a revolutionary theme close to the heart of the Russians). Following his initial successes in battle against the Roman legionaries he is betrayed and killed.

Spartacus is the second of two great dance dramas mounted by the Bolshoi company (the earlier work being their 'Romeo & Juliet'), and is the third and definitive attempt at this theme by the Russians - two previous ballets, one by the Kirov company and one by the Bolshoi, were failures.

This presentation is a splendid combination of both strong and lyrical dancing set skillfully to Khatchaturian's dramatic and often strident score. (The love theme from Spartacus was used as the title music for 'The Onedin Line' TV series.) Even after a first viewing two powerful images remain in the memory; the opening seconds in the first act where the Roman

general poses arrogantly above the wall formed by his soldiers' shields before they break formation to charge forward across the stage, and the final act with Spartacus impaled high on a pyramid of spears.

Mikhail Gabovich dances the part of Crassus and, although his acting is extravagantly over the top in typical Bolshoi style, it works well on this occasion to emphasise the cruelty and megalomania of the character. In contrast, Erek Moukhamedov uses a more restrained style to portray the slave Spartacus, but is an equally strong dancer with high soaring leaps. Natalia Bessmertnova dances the part of his wife, and Maria Bylova is cast as Crassus' mistress. Although both of these dancers are provided with excellent solos and the parts of the female slaves are well danced by the shapely Bolshoi corps de ballet, Spartacus is essentially a male-dominated ballet with stirring formations of goose-stepping Roman soldiers filling the massive Bolshoi stage. As a bonus we are shown both the outside and interior of the Bolshoi Opera House before the ballet begins, and, during the final curtain calls we get a reminder of the enthusiasm which was shown when this company brought Spartacus to Covent Garden in the sixties.

The cutting and editing of the recording has been done with taste and thankfully does not detract from the flow of the dance - a situation not always achieved with ballet. Close-ups, when they occur, are done for valid dramatic reasons and are only used during static moments. Changes in camera angle and cuts between medium and long shots are not overdone, and the whole width of the stage is in view when the overall floor pattern demands it. The sound quality is consistently good throughout and gives a realistic impression of the atmosphere.

[PETER READ]

Disc quality: Impressive definition on the video although the sound seemed a little thin to me. Almost entirely composed of dark scenes it was only the modest amount of spots that kept this from being graded with an A on the pressing - it is better than a lot of the other ballet discs in this respect though it may be the case that there are two different pressings of this disc. The reviewed copy was a later one. Really though, you could well mistake the picture on this disc for a genuine live broadcast image.

[A - / B +] [B -]

BUGSY MALONE



RANK VIDEO	725 7000 0	£ 13.99
CLV	COLOUR	MONO
1977	93 mins	Rated U

FEATURING: Scott Baio, Jodie Foster, Florrie Dugger, John Cassisi
MUSIC BY: Paul Williams
DIRECTOR: Alan Parker

The sleeve comment which states "Quite simply, there has never been a movie like it" is well substantiated in this gangster musical whose characters are all played by 'children' (with an average age of around twelve). In the past, the American film industry seems to have been the country's worst propagandist by producing a plethora of films portraying gangland warfare, and it is a relief to see a light-hearted musical on this subject which has a complete absence of blood!

The story is set in the New York of 1929 - prohibition time. The suave Dan Danny (Martin Lev) and the bombastic Fat Sam (John Cassisi) are rival gang leaders in dispute over the control of the city's rackets. Dan Danny has the edge on Fat Sam in that his hoodlams have acquired the latest in armaments, the 'splurge gun' (a tommy gun which fires deadly rounds of custard). The hero, Bugsey Malone (Scott Baio), is a fight promoter who meets the heroine, Blousey Brown (Florrie Dugger) while she is unsuccessfully trying to audition as a singer at Fat Sam's speakeasy. Hearing that the leading lady in one of Dan Danny's productions has opted out, Blousey then attempts to audition for this part, but the star returns and kills her chances (the tiny part of Dan Danny's leading lady is played by a very young 'Bonita Langford'). None of all this has very much to do with the plot although it provides opportunities for various enjoyable song and dance routines expertly performed by the youngsters (the voices of most of the solo parts are obviously dubbed by adult singers, although no credits are given for this). Perhaps the most polished performance, both acting and singing, is given by Jody Foster who plays Tallula, Fat Sam's moll.

'Bugsey Malone' took a year to cast and used youngsters from both sides of the Atlantic. The care taken in the casting is evident in the way that the actors match their parts, particularly in appearance (only the girls in the chorus line are angelic!). The film was written and directed by Alan Parker, and produced by David Puttnam and Alan Marshall at Pinewood Studios.

[PETER READ]

Disc quality: Soft-focus pictures are always a little tricky to assess but really this looks about right. There is a bit of hiss on the soundtrack that could have better. The review copy was noted to be a very early LV pressing but compares favourably with the current ones. Now and again a few spots appeared but did not seem too obtrusive.

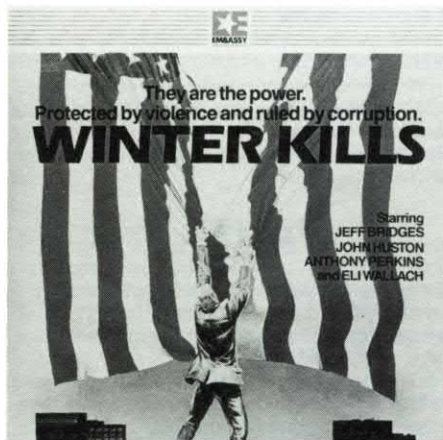
[A - / B] [B]

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WINTER KILLS



EMBASSY	ELV 2056	£ 13.99
CLV	COLOUR	MONO
1979	87 mins	

STARRING: Jeff Bridges, John Huston, Anthony Perkins, Eli Wallach, Sterling Hayden, Dorothy Malone, Tomas Millian, Belinda Bauer, Ralph Meeker, Toshio Mifune, Richard Boone.
DIRECTED BY: William Richert

Think of a recently assassinated US President and the ensuing twenty years of speculation surrounding both the identity and motivation of his killers. This is what adds up to make 'Winter Kills'. A supposed chance encounter with a dying man who claims to be the assassin of his Presidential elder brother sets Nick Keegan (Jeff Bridges) off on a search for the truth.

Most of the events and characters depicted relate to real-life incidents and personalities - just the names have been changed to protect the innocent (and avoid the lawsuits!). One wonders whether Keegan was a wise choice of name with its greater similarity to the current President's name than the intended inference.

The sequence of events is fast paced. Hardly a scene lasts more than a few minutes, and characters come and go with rapidity - indeed, most of them get bumped off as soon as they have delivered their lines. Are we supposed to be taking all this seriously? Jeff Bridges appears to, and you can't help thinking he popped out the studio for a smoke when the director was giving everybody else the script directions. There are a (very) few moments of intentional humour that lend credence to this. Failing that, it must qualify pretty high up on the Byzantium scale.

Ralph Meeker portrays a fifties gangster in a flashback sequence and an uncredited Elizabeth Taylor pops up in a similarly brief non-speaking part.

Originally a Panavision production, there is a loss of content at the extremities of some scenes due to cropping. The resulting picture quality is also diminished and there are variations in definition throughout, along with a hint of graininess now and again. Sound is OK and the disc, bar a few spots, reasonably well pressed. (Note: Though listed at 94 minutes, no more than 87 minutes could be squeezed out of the reviewed copy. This may account for the slightly frantic pace of the production. Has anyone seen a longer version of this?)

[C+ / B-] [B-]

EVERLY BROS Reunion Concert



MGM / UA	UMLV 10331	£ 9.99
CLV	COLOUR	STEREO
1983	65 mins	

SIDE 1: Claudette/Walk Right Back/Cryin' In The Rain/Cathy's Clown/Love Is Strange/When Will I Be Loved/So Sad/Bird Dog/Be Bop A Lula
SIDE 2: Barbara Allen-A Long Time Gone-Step It Up And Go/Bye Bye Love/Wake Up Little Susie/Devoted To You-Ebony Eyes-Love Hurts/Till I Kissed You/All I Have To Do Is Dream/Lucille/Let It Be Me

The last two Xmas's have seen the broadcast of differing compilations of this Royal Albert Hall reunion concert. (A friend found this difference out to his cost as he was merrily taping over the previous year's recording with the expectation of an improvement in quality due to the installation of a new aerial - the second broadcast was different!) The price you pay for the best quality version is that this MGM Disc is somewhat shorter in playing than either broadcast.

Some of the harmonies miss at times and even the novelty of the reunion does not seem enough to inject life into some of the hits; but there is enough here of interest. An unexpected interpretation of 'Be Bop A Lula' remains reasonably faithful to the arrangement on the first CADENCE/LONDON album and is one of the too few songs where backing group and singers work as one. There is obviously something that goes on between Don and Phil that a temporary back-up group, regardless of their stature, are hard put to participate in. They can only reproduce an accompaniment with competence and respect yet it is evident that, even after their ten year lay-off, the Brothers are responding almost intuitively to each other's spontaneous inflections and are trading on an empathy that the backing group are not privy to enjoy. The closing song, 'Let It Be Me', justifies the purchase of the disc, if only for the opportunity to observe Phil's facial expressions as he hangs on every note Don sings - there is a nervous energy apparent that is quite exhausting to watch. Towards the end of the number Phil breaks into a knowing smile - one of the great moments captured on a laser disc. Incidentally, the acoustic set is included in this disc, marred possibly by a rather clumsy changeover point at the end of side one.

Whether one would recommend this to a non-fan is debateable. If you are a fan there is possibly nothing to be

said that could stop you buying this disc - that is if you do not own it already.

Good quality video originated master. Sometimes the lighting mangets a bit over-enthusiastic flashing the stage lights on and off 'psychedelic style' - but then this is the RAH so may be one should be grateful they have caught up with 1968 at least! (I bet they still haven't forgiven Frank Zappa for playing 'Louie Louie' on the Hall organ yet though...) Sound is good here. Some of the between-song audience reaction has been rather excessively boosted in the manner of certain American TV productions.

[A- / B+] [A-]

TARZAN THE APE MAN



MGM / UA	UMLV 10109	£ 11.99
CLV	COLOUR	STEREO
1981	108 mins	Rated A

STARRING: Bo Derek, Richard Harris, John Philip Law, Miles O'Keefe
DIRECTED BY: John Derek

If Richard Harris looked a bit out of place in '99 & 44/100% Dead', it certainly does not take him more than a few moments to find his true niche here, and he is soon cranking out the dialogue at a seemingly ever increasing rate of decibels. As James Parker, estranged father of Jane (Bo Derek), he is inhabiting a lakeside encampment in West Africa when she arrives from England and subsequently joins him on his search for "the inland sea".

Needless to say, their success in finding it allows Jane the opportunity to have a dip... and the chance to divest herself of her already flimsy cotton outfit (something she makes a habit of for the remainder of the film). Just before side one runs out, this Tarzan chap appears (Miles O'Keefe). He too has all the right contours.

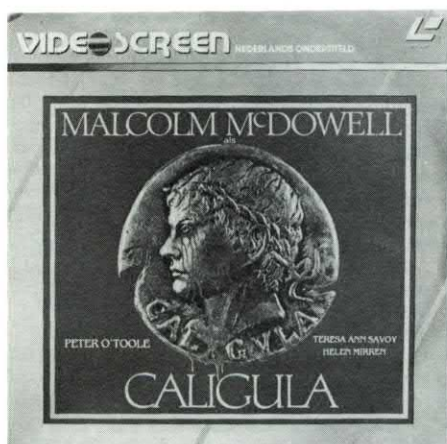
By the time you are over on side two, you do start contemplating the thinness of the action. Regrettably so. In spite of the obvious handicap of trying to provide a star vehicle for Bo, the scale of the production could have easily allowed for developing the film as a kids' action/adventure piece with minimal extra effort. The nudity is fairly innocuous in this respect (yet a bit laboured at times). Or then again, more critical readers might just reckon this version of the Tarzan legend be no more than a right load of old bol-

eros.

One has to regret the cropping of the wide-screen image here. Although competently done, some of the spectacle is lost (as well as a little of the definition). The colour is especially pleasing throughout, and seeing this film makes you realise how so many others are often lacking in this respect. The film runs a good four minutes short of its listed run time, but seeing that it is 112 minutes in its NTSC version, 108 minutes would appear about right. The sound is very good, definitely stereo, and the pressing of average standard.

[B+ / A-] [B]

CALIGULA



VIDEOSCREEN VLP 2043E (Holland) fls-89

CLV COLOUR MONO Dutch Subtitled

1979 147 mins

STARRING: Malcolm McDowell, Peter O'Toole, Helen Mirren, Teresa Ann Savoy

More than a little re-editing would be necessary in order for 'Caligula' to be anything other than an adult film. It seems a little perverse to be reviewing a film that two years ago failed to sustain interest past the first twenty minutes. Sustaining interest may be an exaggeration - a tap on the Eject button (yes, another tape) got us on to other things, 'Airplane' if my memory serves me right. Now, because 'Caligula' is a LaserVision disc I find myself sitting through the whole thing for the first time and as it no longer has notorious or sensational value, certain hitherto unobserved aspects come to the fore.

Although much of the action is embraced by Italian extras and one appears to be observing pure spectacle, the main characters are portrayed with conviction, and if 'Caligula' is generally acknowledged to be no more than 'porno masquerading as Art' the cast make no concessions to such a notion. (Though there is the suggestion that the sex scenes were cut in after the stars had departed the sets. This is not immediately apparent.)

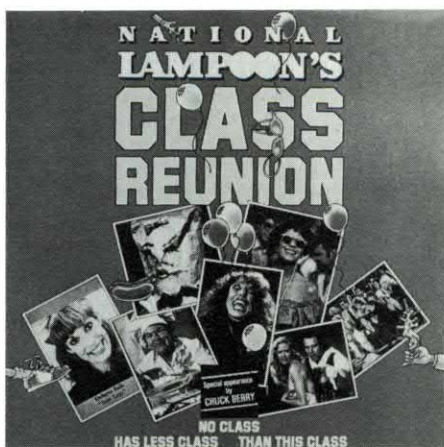
It still leaves me peering cautiously through spread fingers at some of the gorier moments and it is hard to adjust to the rapid transitions between sex and violence. It is difficult to believe that under Caligula's rule anybody had any fun at all, and this aspect lingers as the overall reservation about the production. If this was life as it really was, there would have been no point in carrying on; there is no humour, no real affection, no relief from

the tyranny - life here has no purpose.

This version of 'Caligula' is in English with Dutch sub-titles which occupy rather more of the picture area than normally because the film has been (thankfully) left in wide-screen. Print quality is unremarkable, but having never seen the original it may be the case that the colour was a little cold and bleak in hue - it fits the mood of the piece.

It has to be said that, as the disc only arrived just before press date it didn't get the full LDR review treatment but side 2 definitely had some unacceptable colour speckling that caused it to be sent back for replacement and it is not yet known whether this is just a sample defect. (Other VIDEOSCREEN discs people have seen would appear to have been OK.) The two discs that go to make up the set have been pressed at different times and the second disc is a markedly better pressing - stronger and more vivid in colour. If you can't wait till next time round for us to check this out further you can obtain this disc direct from the label itself, VIDEOSCREEN in Holland. See 'Europe' pages for ordering details.

CLASS REUNION



RANK VIDEO D 1076 £ 11.99

CLV COLOUR MONO

1983 82 mins Rated 18

STARRING: Gerrit Graham, Michael Lerner, Shelley Smith, Fred McCarren, Miriam Flynn, Stephen Furst, Blackie Dammett, Marla Pennington, Steve Tracy, Jacklyn Zeman

DIRECTED BY: Michael Miller

Anything presented under the 'National Lampoon' banner is more than likely to be in particularly poor taste and in that respect 'Class Reunion' will not disappoint.

What starts out as a festive reunion for the Class Of '72 turns into a disaster as the former pupils are bumped off, one by one, in the school building in which they have become mysteriously trapped. Any resemblance this bears to the 'Texas Chainsaw Massacre' (as the sleeve implies) is possibly a greater mystery.

'Class Reunion' does succeed to a degree but lacks the detailed production effort to sustain it through frequent repeated viewings though it will no doubt get yanked down off the shelf now and again.

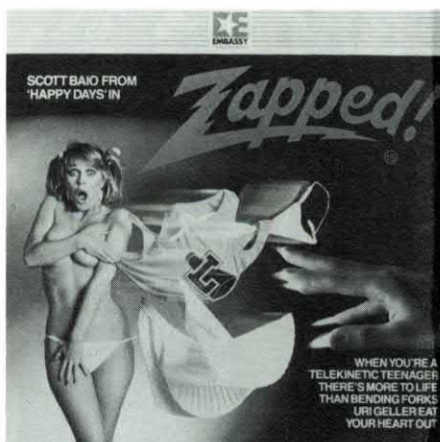
An unseen Gary US Bonds makes a spirited effort of singing the title song (over the beginning and end credits) and Chuck Berry gives a cameo performance during the reunion dance

miming (rather badly) to abbreviated versions of 'It Wasn't Me' and 'Festival'.

The 18 Certificate would appear a little excessive when one considers the unrestricted availability of the magazine and possibly any public body set up to look after our interests would be better occupied ensuring that discs such as this turned up with the Dolby Stereo Surround Sound track that it should've - instead of the rather hissy mono one we have ended up getting. The original print is a bit off colour too and rather contrasty and these may be the reasons we got this one at the lower than usual fl1.99 price. Fortunately there seems to be no comparable diminution in the quality of the pressing which, considering the darkness of many of the scenes, is pleasantly free of spots.

[B- / C+] [A-]

ZAPPED



EMBASSY ELV 1604 £ 13.99

CLV COLOUR MONO

1982 96 mins Rated 15

STARRING: Scott Baio, Willie Aames, Heather Thomas, Robert Mandan, Scatman Crothers

DIRECTED BY: Robert J. Rosenthal

'Zapped' makes reference to several previous films based on the powers of the supernatural but may have done so at the expense of coming up with anything of its own of any substance. The added novelty here is Barney Springboro (Scott Baio of 'Happy Days') being able to expand his telekinetic powers to facilitate the removal of fellow students' clothing but this is all done with a certain modest restraint.

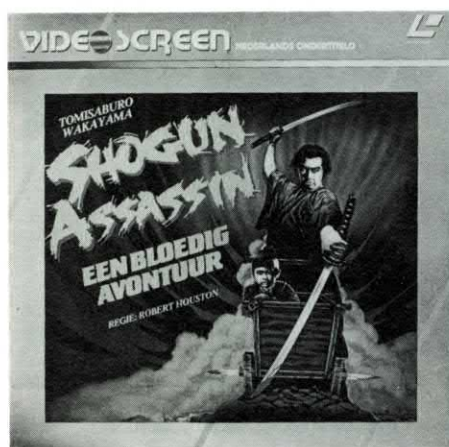
All that remains is a collection of passable humorous moments that do not really add up to make the sort of film you would want to see more than a few times. Some of the adult roles have some depth - Robert Mandan ('Soap's' Chester) playing the bumbling head and Barney's parents give some amusement. A very brief and decidedly tacky 'Star Trek' spoof sequence was possibly the only time that the film really shifted into gear and one regrets this pace was not maintained throughout.

Sometimes indifferent films justify themselves in the LV catalogue by turning up with particularly good master quality. But not here. It's a rather softly defined picture and a bit of a hissy sound but the pressing seems OK.

[C+ / C+] [B+]

NG...WHAT'S HAPPENING...WHAT'S HAPPENING...WHAT

- VLP2062E PLANET OF THE DINOSAURS - w. James Whitworth, Charlotte Speer.
 VLP2064E THAT LUCKY TOUCH - Comedy revolving round arms dealer and journalist covering NATO war games w. Roger Moore, Susannah York, Shelley Winters, L.J. Cobb.
 VLP2069E The GLOVE - w. John Saxon and Rosey Grier.
 VLP2070E SHOGUN ASSASSIN - w. Tomisaburo Wakayama. Directed by Robert Houston. Unfortunately only in mono from reports.
 VLP2071E HELLHOUNDS OF ALASKA
 VLP2072E TOURIST TRAP - Chuck Connors horror about group of teenagers trapped in desert gas-station.
 VLP2073E A TASTE OF HELL - Two US officers trapped in Philippines by Japanese invasion w. John Garwood, William Smith, Lisa Lorena.
 VLP2074E ENTER THE DEVIL - Satanic worship in the West w. Josh Bryant, Irene Kelly, Dave Cass.
 VLP2075E ALLIGATOR - Baby croc thrown down toilet comes back years later some twenty feet longer to wreak revenge.



Other titles in the VIDEOSCREEN catalogue are mostly Dutch language:
 VLP2035E BAKKEN AAN DE BAR
 VLP2063E BATALJON MALLE MEIDEN (French with Dutch sub-titles)
 VLP2045E HET BEEST
 VLP2031E HET DEBUUT
 VLP2032E EEN VROUW ALS EVA
 VLP2048E ELCKERLYC
 VLP2034E LIEVE JONGENS
 VLP2047E MARIKEN VAN NIEUMEGHEN
 VLP2033E MYSTERIES
 VLP2044E SABINE
 VLP2036E TIROLER SLIPPERTJES (German with Dutch sub-titles)
 VLP2059E DE NEGERHUT VAN OOM TOM
 There are also four childrens titles in Dutch language.

All these companies appear to be able to deal with orders written in English language (only the English can't speak anybody else's language!) but please keep your letters as straightforward and to the point as possible. All orders should be C.W.O. And do make sure your address is clearly legible.

MONEY

It can be time consuming finding the best way of sending money abroad. In the case of VIDEOSCREEN it is quite OK to send English banknotes via insured post but normally, sending money to a company is best done by a transfer

of some sort. Sending UK bank cheques is no good, regardless of what currency you make them out in. Either arrange an I.M.O. (International Money Order) with the Post Office or a Bank Draft with your bank. Bank Drafts tend to be a bit expensive at £5-25 a time. If you send money to VIDEOSCREEN via your GIRO A/C get hold of the information sheet from NATIONAL GIRO first if you have not made an International Transfer before - it tells how to fill in the transfer slip in a different way. (Tel: 051-928 8181 ext 8700).

If you are writing to the USA for lists or anything and need a few \$ bills - these can be bought at a bank for a modest charge (75p). It's normally OK sending cash in the post if it is a small amount, but for more substantial sums a Money Order from the bank is a good idea. It is a lot easier and cheaper doing these for amounts in US\$ than it is for European currencies in spite of us being in the Common Market!

Readers in other countries who wish to deal with suppliers mentioned in the magazine had best write first if they want goods to be sent outside Europe, especially if by air.

KING KONGTINUED

In issue 2 we gave brief mention of the US re-issues of 'King Kong' and 'Citizen Kane' in CAV format by CRITERION. The Welles' film was reproduced from a 35mm RKO vault negative and, running to 119 minutes, spread over three discs. Although NTSC CAV discs do manage 30 minutes per side, the addition of the three minute film trailer and a 100+ still frame collection, as well as the arrangement of the whole into 29 separate chapters necessitated the extra disc. Such attention to detail doesn't come cheap (the disc sells for \$89.95). Cheaper, at \$74.95 (and 101 minutes) is a similarly detailed re-packaging of 'King Kong' where both RKO and Library Of Congress archives provided different segments of the original to make up the best attainable print. Again chaptered, this disc contains the dual soundtrack feature where the 'spare' mono track contains a running commentary by film historian Ronald Haver.

At these sort of price levels these discs, though expensive in LV terms, compare favourably with US tape prices and so are not unduly out of keeping with the market as a whole. The break-even point of the exercise is seen as being around 1000 copies of each title and with plans to continue the concept on to establish a collection of the best and most important classic films of all time, one can only wish them every success. Talk is of at least 100 titles in this endeavour and CRITERION have rights to many RKO and JANUS titles (the JANUS catalogue includes 50's and 60's non-American classics, many foreign-language features among them).

The only hiccup so far would seem to be a recent falling out of CRITERION's two founders, Robert Stein and Roger Smith, over whether other types of LV releases should be investigated - possibly including the production of original material. Whatever the outcome of this it can only be hoped that the original aims are not sacrificed as a result.

OTHER BITS

Update on German LV catalogue: these titles have not appeared - 'Maja Maja', 'Kid Creole', 'Meatloaf', 'David Gilmour', 'Grace Jones' plus a few others. One new release listed is 'QUEEN - We Will Rock You'. Oh yes, and a 'Nena' disc. Let's hope these do appear! ##### If you are interested in the MIKE HUNTER 'adult' discs listed on page 6, bear this in mind. The day issue 4 went to press we received a letter from HM Customs informing us a similar US disc had been impounded on its way to us. More news on the outcome of this next time but in the meantime, be warned! ##### SONY USA have announced their first LV title - 'QUEEN - The Works', due shortly ##### 'LE MANS' - This interesting Japanese disc gives a driver's eye view of the Le Mans circuit. As you look through the windscreen, your speed is displayed graphically at the top of the TV screen #####but not available here - PHILIPS do produce a component MATCHLINE monitor with separate tuner in 66cm and 51cm sizes. And for multi-standard applications there is a suitable GRUNDIG model. But why not here? ##### Available here in July is a new SONY 14" multi-standard Profel type monitor designed primarily for computer use. You may recall we announced this product last October. No news of the 20" version though ##### LDR now has subscribers in 14 countries ##### WHAT VIDEO reports that 35,000 copies of 'The Empire Strikes Back' laser disc were sold during the first week of release in Japan ##### A few other recent Japanese releases - 'Dark Crystal', 'Space 1999', 'The Quatermass Experiment', 'Frankenstein & The Monster From Hell', 'Metropolis' and a laser 45 of 'Do They Know It's Xmas'. Also a Barry Gibb 'Now Voyager' and 'Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra' in Digital Sound. Regular music titles include Tony Bennett and Henry Mancini concerts recorded in Edmonton, Canada and 8'ers from UB40 and Bill Wyman

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 ##### Sale or exchange - STAR WARS. Glyn Wiltshire, 65 Jackson Road, East Barnet, Herts.
 ##### Exchange for any film title - URGH! A MUSIC WAR. Stanley Metcalfe. Standish 421457.
 ##### Sale or swap - THE FURY, RAISE THE TITANIC, THUNDERBIRDS IN OUTER SPACE, WIND IN THE WILLOWS, STARFLIGHT ONE, IMAGINATION IN CONCERT. Tim Stubbs. Tel: 0823 54210.
 ##### £215 - PIONEER LD 1100 player + 3 free discs. Graham, Nottingham. Tel: (0602) 275769.
 ##### £8 - ZAPPED, GWENDOLINE. £6 - PHYSICAL. Or exchange. V. Williams. Tel: 0606 883855.
 ##### Exchange preferred for film titles - TOYAH AT RAINBOW, SOFT CELL, NOW T.W.I.C.M. 2, PHYSICAL, THRILLER, VIDEOHITS, VIDEOTHEQUE, SKY. Stephen Hignett. Tel: 061 973-0977.
 ##### £400 - SONY 50" VIDEO PROJECTION TV, KP 5010 PS. Telephone: 01 - 987 4857.
 ##### £125 - PHILIPS VLP 700. Brand new and unused (won as prize). Telephone: 0952 - 585553.

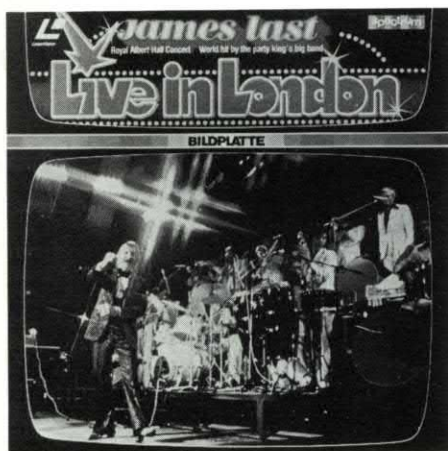
WANTED

BLUE HAWAII. Tel: D. Vickers 01 656 - 1684.
 ##### APOCALYPSE NOW, 1941. Top price. (Also have about 30 sealed film discs for sale). Andrew. Tel: 01 691 - 8376.
 ##### JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, STRAW DOGS, PLAY TENNIS. Also PIONEER LD 1100. T.B. Line, Madford, Solomons Post, Ridge Road, Maidencombe, TORQUAY.

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 August 31st for Issue 5. Wants ads will only be available if space permits.

collector's page

The catalogue really seems to be shaping up as far as rarities is concerned. In an ideal world every title would be available for eternity, but contractual problems as well as the plain inability of certain titles to produce sales inevitably results in discs going out of print. A glance at the back page will reveal 11 titles previously out of stock that are in the process of being re-pressed. There seems to be no set rule as to which of the remaining o/s titles will reappear. Before paying over the odds for an unobtainable title you should bear in mind this possibility of re-issue.



Presently confirmed as deleted are 'Blue Hawaii', 'Kate Bush Single File', 'Cat People', 'Inferno', 'Kagemusha', 'James Last', and 'Visiting Hours'. Copies of 'Inferno', 'Visiting Hours', and 'Kagemusha' still appear to be around and one is tempted to think that the two former titles are only listed deleted while the current video nasties campaign is on. The 'James Last In London' disc has gone out because POLYGRAM no longer have the distribution rights, but as this disc appears to be still available in Germany it may pay you to pursue a source of supply there. Some titles such as 'Conquest Of The Earth' and 'Private Lessons', though not technically deleted, are rarely seen and the latter one was definitely only pressed in small quantities. Whether the stock situation on these two will improve is again a matter of speculation. The availability of some other titles is similarly vague.

If you have been searching around for 'Parasite', 'Unhinged', 'Funhouse', 'Mink de Ville', 'Trinity Is Still My Name', 'Winter Of Our Dreams', and 'The Dain Curse' you need look no longer as these titles have not been released and are not likely to be now though it is tempting to wonder how near the first three ever got to making it. Sleeves of 'Funhouse' have been seen. Also seen has been a sleeve for the re-make version of '39 Steps' and this was in-

deed scheduled amongst the first LV releases but withdrawn without being pressed. Another sleeve that sometimes causes confusion is the one for the 'Stevie Nicks' disc that eventually appeared on the PIONEER label. You may come across CBS/FOX sleeves for this title but it never appeared on the label in practice. A recent sleeve oddity is 'The Seduction' - a disc that has taken nearly two years to appear and has arrived with a sleeve of a different design from the one that appeared in the EMBASSY advert in issue 2 of the magazine.

The previously known deletions of 'Apocalypse Now' and 'The Blues Brothers' show no immediate sign of making a reappearance as these are indicated to be contractual deletions. 'The Blues Brothers', though a desirable title, would appear from reports to be of dubious master quality and only in mono. (The sleeve says stereo but someone actually took the trouble to put mono stickers on the disc when it was realised to be wrongly labelled.) Bear this in mind if you are tempted to pay over the odds for a copy. 'Apocalypse Now' is generally spoken highly of. One other CIC double that has eluded many people is '1941'. In fact, not many people even know of its existence but it did creep out at the time of the original LaserVision launch and was promptly withdrawn when it was realised that CIC did not hold the rights to the title. Estimates of the quantity getting on to the market hover around 50 copies.



One novelty in the PIONEER list is 'Oriental Dreams' which was released twice, the second time with the addition of CX encoding. PRECISION VIDEO's epic 'Raise The Titanic' may also have been mastered up twice. Some copies of this disc show a chapter when you call up the elapsed time display but no-one has yet done a side by side comparison of the two versions to detect any differences in the content.

PHILIPS' welcome generosity in their Spring Giveaway was conceived as a promotion to stimulate the market and at the same time reduce stocks on some of the older titles that were considered be in excess of foreseeable demand. (The ARTS INTERNATIONAL discs were thrown in as a special gesture towards those owners who had only come to LV for the opera and ballet titles.) Response to the offer has far exceeded their expectations and PHILIPS appear to be quite pleased that this has been the case. A contributing factor to the higher than expected take up may be the fact that the racking operation that has been in use till recently was definitely failing to get some titles out into distribution and many owners saw discs on the list that they have been unable to obtain. Even though this is being written before the offer ends, the relevance to the Giveaway to the Collectors' Page is that some of these 'excess stocks' have now run out on some titles and presumably decisions will have to be made as to whether some repressings will be done or the 'sold-out' titles left deleted. Hopefully news on this in a future issue.



The introduction to the first Collectors' Page spotlighted some of the high prices being paid for the early US discs that were all issued in CAV (which means only 30mins per side in NTSC). If \$300 seemed like big bucks for Abbott and Costello then how about \$800 for 'Thoroughly Modern Millie'? In what appears to be still a young market it is hard to say how prices will settle, but by any set of standards these sort of prices would seem to be rather high for artefacts of such recent vintage.

Not all these early CAV discs are worth money by any means and more affordable fun is available to owners of commoner LV sets that happen to contain a blank side on one of the discs. Apparently it was the habit of DISCOVISION ASSOCIATES to slap a reject pressing on the blank side of their discs and cover the surface with a coating to prevent the side from being played. It would now seem that everyone who has these blank sided discs is now feverishly rubbing the coating off with isopropyl-alcohol (though there are a few discs whose coating resists removal by this means) and finding all manner of novelties beneath - unreleased film titles, LV player demonstration programmes, General Motors sales and training schemes etc. Before any British readers are tempted to embark on a course of solvent abuse it should be pointed out that the blank sides of European discs are just that - blank! How boring.

Any readers who may be interested in the US collectors' market may want to subscribe to a new publication by the name of LASERTRADER - a bi-monthly newsletter containing ads and information on the older collectibles as well as sales and trades of more recent catalogue items. One year's sub is \$10.00. (US funds only - cash or IMO). Write to LASERTRADER - PO Box 2111, Huntington, West Virginia, WV 25721, USA.

LASER CALENDAR

Previously announced titles, now available

CLASS, EDUCATING RITA, GORKY PARK, SILKWOOD, SPETTERS, THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY, SUPERTED, BREATHLESS, KILLING MACHINE, LONE WOLF McQUADE, LIANNA, MURDER BY DECREE, THE WICKED LADY, CLASS REUNION, SATURDAY 14th, THIS IS SPINAL TAP, UNDERFIRE, YELLOWBEARD, NAIROBI, THE SEDUCTION, GWENDOLINE, THE CHOSEN, THE FOURTH MAN, STRANGERS KISS, STREET OF THE DAMNED, RACOONS & THE LOST STAR, FAULTY TOWERS (all 4 discs), LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE, THE FALL AND RISE OF REGINALD PERRIN, PLAY SCHOOL, BY THE SEA/PICNIC, ANIMAL MAGIC, JULIUS CAESAR, GET FIT WITH THE GREEN GODDESS, SPLASHIN' AT THE PALACE '84, DURAN DURAN - Sing Blue Silver, CAMEL - Live, ENSEMBLE - FRENCH COURSE, THE WINE PROGRAMME (all 3 discs), EARTH WIND & FIRE.

Forthcoming - July onwards

RIPPING YARNS, MORE RIPPING YARNS, GRANGE HILL, THREE OF A KIND, DR WHO - REVENGE OF THE CYBERMEN, DR WHO - THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS, ALL CREATURES GREAT & SMALL, TOSCA, COSI FAN TUTTE, ARABELLA, TURANDOT, BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS w. DANIEL BARENBOIM - Nos 1/21, 4/13/18, 3/8/28, 26/25/6/19/20, 29/5/22, 23/30/15, 7/16/31, 14/24/9/10, 17/27/2, 11/12/32.

Previously scheduled - could arrive anytime

THE HIGHEST HONOUR, THE KEY, PLAYING FOR KEEPS, ERIC CLAPTON - WHISTLE TEST, REUBEN REUBEN.

Forthcoming - no known time

DER ROSENKAVALIER, ROMEO & JULIET, SYLPHIDES, SECRET GARDEN, TAKE HART.

Following are PIONEER discs: STYX - CAUGHT IN THE ACT LIVE, ASIA IN ASIA, TAKANAKA WORLD, TENMEI & CARIOCA - PALE MOON

Titles previously o/s, now re-pressed or being re-pressed

TINA TURNER, STAR TREK 1, STAR TREK 2, JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, 2001, THE COMPLETE BEATLES, CLIFF RICHARD - THE VIDEO CONNECTION, THE SWORD AND THE SORCERER, WHO DARES WINS, AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK.