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MAY 1987

ISSUE 11 £1.50

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# LASER DISC REVIEW

MAY 1987

ISSUE 11

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## NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATES -

Single copies of LDR are £1-50 sent anywhere in the world. For those outside Europe who prefer Air Mail delivery the cost is £2-50.

Reduced rate 4-issue subscriptions are £5-00 worldwide. The Air Mail rate for those outside Europe is £8-00.

ISSN 0267 - 9671

LASER DISC REVIEW  
PO BOX 526  
LONDON, UK  
SW10 9AB

Tel: 01-351 4535

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LASER DISC REVIEW welcomes correspondence but if you require a reply please include an SAE. Allowance should be made for the length of time taken to reply - the production of the magazine always being the first priority.

Printed in the United Kingdom by:  
Kingprint Ltd., Orchard Road, RICHMOND,  
Surrey TW9 4PD.

## Seconds Out - Round Two

Looks like there'll be a bit more activity in the disc world as the year progresses. For whatever reason, the manufacturers now think it might be a good idea to sell people the idea of video on disc. It always was a good idea - witness the excellent job they made of it in Japan which started out about the same time as us and now has 4,000 videodiscs in their catalogue - but no-one here ever seemed to grasp what it was they were selling. CD-Video is a second chance and no-one wants to get egg on their face (as is the expression we've heard on more than one occasion from industry executives) again. They won't if they do it right.

We could fill the magazine with what it is that makes people prepared to spend money on something they look at on a TV screen, but we can put it simpler than that for the space we have. Last time round it was decided what the consumer should see on a videodisc. Overawed by the technology they sat round and conjured up all sorts of special interest and educational programmes that would show it off and so sell millions of players. It didn't work. Every LV catalogue in the world exhibits the same misguided reasoning - the UK, the American, and even the Japanese one. In the last two territories they were alert enough to adjust and provide what the consumer actually wanted - just 'low-tech' films and music. There's been a hesitant re-adjustment here too but there is still some little way to go in fully understanding market needs.

The important thing is to respond to the market and to present the software in the best possible condition. That last bit really says it all. The disc market is a discerning market - regardless of what may be considered the artistic merit of any particular programme. It's all valid product. Anyone who cares to buy any programme on disc expects it to be in the best condition, presented and packaged in the best possible way and

generally worthy of ownership. The disc format promises the best quality - both in convenience terms and picture and sound performance - and that should never be forgotten. Otherwise we'll all be back here some years hence for a third go at it.

Before straying off onto other matters it might be appropriate to make some comment on the new packaging these CD-Video discs will likely appear in. The photo on page 9 is not an in-house effort and lacks the usual resolution as a result (it was all we could get), but it may be possible to detect the vague outline of the plastic casings that are planned. The important thing here for dealers who depend a lot on mail order is the sheer weight and fragility of these things. (Although you probably can't see it, the Dire Straits box is already cracked in the top left-hand corner.) The total weight of one of these 30cm disc packages is reported as being nigh on a kilo (that's 32 oz in old money!). How much are these things going to cost to ship round the country? Admittedly they'll create good product identity with CD Audio when on display in shops, but is that all that bears consideration. Just thumbing through 'the magazines' shows how important the mail-order sector of the disc sale market is. Dealers would be well-advised to make their voices heard in the appropriate ears.

The next issue of this magazine should be out sooner than usual. It will have an article in it about sound mixing for DOLBY films that was, at the last minute, ripped out of this issue to make way for more topical news. We are expecting more newsworthy activity on the CD-Video front soon, and the next issue will do its best to capitalise on this. So, don't be late in renewing your subscription - and we are extending the free back-issue offer to anyone so doing. Also this applies to any new subscriber. Just specify which issue (from the list on page 34) you want on the subscription blank and it will be sent by return.

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From: David Vickers, London

I wonder how many others have discovered that it is possible to obtain a test card from LaserVision discs. It seems that all discs (at least all those that I have tested) have this pattern recorded on each side - after the programme material ends and beyond the point where the machine returns to the start.

The way I have managed to display it is to choose a disc with a long playing time on one side and scan this through until close to the end. I then switch the machine off at the power switch, thus preventing the tracking mechanism from returning to the start. Next, I open the lid and replace the disc with one of much shorter playing time, close the lid and switch the power back on.

Just after it builds up speed I scan the disc forward. There follows an interference break-up pattern, whereupon I now push play and a test card of eight vertical coloured bands, reaching about two-thirds of the way down the screen, appears and stays there as long as required. If you scan back, the disc will eventually reach the normal recorded part of the programme.

If the index is pressed while the bars are displayed a row of five noughts appears where the normal frame/time code would be.

What I would like to know is does this procedure do any harm to the machine as there is a certain amount of 'protesting' noise from the tracking mechanism until the colour bars have been obtained? What is the reason for the existence of these colour bars?

Also what is the reason for all the long play discs (CLV) of recent years having the earlier revolutions of the disc encoded in CAV? Is there any way to actually achieve a still etc while the disc is playing this CAV segment? I've tried all manner of button-pushing tricks but to no avail. Maybe there is a simple modification that can be made?

This is a topic that crops up with some regularity from PHILIPS VLP 600/700 owners. The colour bars are as much a cosmetic solution to filling up the unused area of the disc as anything else. Rather than discs having a blank mirror-finish area after the programme portion ended, (on the outer part remember, not like the then-contemporary vinyl disc where such blanks are situated around the label area) the decision was taken to 'fill the disc up', so to speak. The disc mastering machine continues to run out to the edge of the disc recording this static colour bar display - thereby giving the resulting disc surface a more attractive appearance. The 24-bit code necessary to generate the frame number information is not present and as a consequence the disc will not respond to player manipulation. This loss of disc control also pertains during the video black lead-out (which, unlike the colour bars, is meant to be seen) that occurs just before the player disengages at the side end.

PHILIPS advice is not to attempt to bring up the colour bar signal. Achieving it is not likely to cause damage, but should the objective be forced past the edge of the disc it could be confused and in searching out the non-existent disc crash into it. The knowledge that one is not going to find any 'undiscovered' programme material on this unused part of the disc, coupled with the prospect of a hefty repair bill should be a sufficient disincentive to anyone not to attempt the

operation.

The reason for putting the inner tracks of CLV discs into CAV is to improve the picture quality on this 'difficult' part of the signal, at the extreme limit of the format. The disc label is not the size it is for decorative reasons - there is a limit to how tight the signal can be recorded. Putting the beginning into CAV loses little in the way of playing time as there will only be one picture per revolution in either CAV or CLV at this circumference. (The advantages of CLV increase the bigger the circumference - see LDR-8, p.30.)

This CAV portion on CLV discs is not accessible in any way. The player receives an instruction to treat it as though it were CLV and there is no way of tricking it into thinking otherwise. It would be necessary to change the disc format to use this part of the disc in CAV, and that would produce problems with field dominance requiring special preparation of masters to avoid problems with jitter etc. These are not insurmountable problems but until such time as the video disc becomes a dominant software format such additional intricacies are not likely to receive much attention from programme owners.

From: Theresa Sinclair, Australia

Referring to the "black blob" over the Emperor's face in *Return Of The Jedi* commented on in Issue 9, it is my opinion there is no fault on the disc - it is due to the process of rota-scoping.

When the principal photography of that scene was shot, a piece of mask, hair, etc., was showing and was probably not picked up until the rushes - the first viewing of that actual scene, or even much later into the production. At that stage it would have probably been impractical or too costly to shoot the scene again. Therefore they have to use roto-scoping, frame by frame hand-painting, to camouflage the fault. As tone values of black are very hard to imitate it shows up even more on the video format. This "black blob" is just as obvious in the cinema as it is on disc.

Another example of bad tone value matching in the matting trick-photography is in *Star Trek I*, when the Enterprise lands in the alien spacecraft and the crew walk out and confront the Voyager.

From: Brian Stephens, Tyne & Wear

In LDR-9 you asked if anyone had experienced laser rot in CDs. A friend of mine who works in a shop which sells CD players at the cheaper end of the price scale has mentioned that a lot of customers with them have had problems with a large number of 'faulty' discs. The discs tend to skip over parts of the tracks and if you hold them up to the light you can see very small holes beneath the surface. I have had my PHILIPS CD100 for a few years now and only once has it had such a problem. The disc was an early NIMBUS pressing of Gil Evans *The British Orchestra* on the MOLE label.

I examined the disc and was alarmed to find small holes and also quite a large gouge beneath the surface. Examining the rest of my collection I found around half the CDs have these small holes in the reflective coating. As yet I have no idea if the discs left the pressing plant in this condition. Possibly the inferior error correction in the cheaper players is unable to cope with such gaps in the information.

My two major problems are; will my



'faulty' discs get any worse?; and will any machine I buy in the future (such as a joint player, NTSC or PAL, with which I hope to replace my CD100) be able to cope with them, even if there is no further deterioration?

Every CD at LDR has at least a few pinholes in the reflective coating, regardless of their age. The error correction mechanism in the player should be able to cope with them, though they can serve no beneficial purpose by any stretch of the imagination. PHILIPS maintain that their single-beam CD players are better able to cope with disc errors than the three-beam models that are more popularly produced in Japan etc. Comparing the silvering of a CD with an LV disc may not be a useful exercise. On an LV disc such imperfections cannot be seen, as both halves of the disc are silvered and there is an opaque layer of adhesive in-between.

The crucial factor would seem to be not how faulty a disc might appear to be, but whether it gives up the ghost some time after acquisition when played on the same machine (or a better one). Faulty batches of CDs have apparently been made in the past, but PHILIPS said they do not consider it a problem now - at least as far as with the pressing plants they have working relationships with ie. the PDO/POLYGRAM group.

A reader once suggested that if optical discs were all they were cracked up to be then the manufacturers should give them a lifetime guarantee. Such guarantees have occurred in the world of vinyl, and at least one tape manufacturer has been making public a replacement guarantee that they have, in fact, always provided when customers have encountered problems with their magnetic products. The latter arrangement, at least, is one that most readers would be happy to go along with, and until such time as any encounter problems in this area it would appear safe to rely on the manufacturers' assurances of disc stability.

From: G.J. Schofield, Lancashire

I am writing to you about RELIABLE VIDEOS. On the 12th June, 1986 I sent them a £15-00 postal order for *The Fury*. When I heard nothing by November I wrote to them asking what the problem was and to the present day have had no reply. That was the first time - and now the last - I will ever order by mail again.

Fortunately the number of complaints the magazine receives about the non-arrival of discs ordered from RELIABLE VIDEOS is diminishing, but the odd one such as the above does occasionally still sour the morning's postbag.

The latest information we have is that the proprietor, Peter Lennon, has ceased trading from the Pershore Road address and is to be contacted at 12 Hampton Court, REDDITCH, Worcestershire. We are informed that the new owners of the shop premises (which now trades under the name of SELLY PARK VIDEO) have no connection with Peter Lennon.

From: Bert Collier, Lancashire

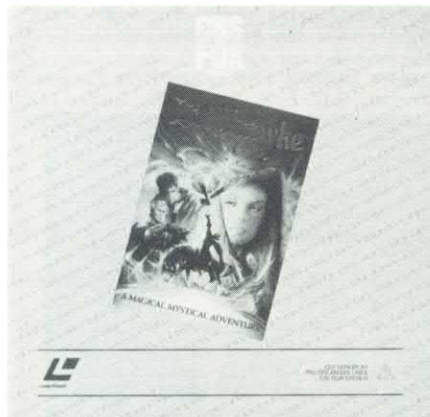
As is my normal practice, I rent on VHS before I even try the LV version - to see what kind of storyline the film has. I was quite shocked with the poor quality of *Indiana Jones & The Temple Of Doom*. As if the grain wasn't enough, the contrast was dull and the overall picture vague. I realise it was VHS, but even so,

it's a long time since I have seen one that poor - and it was not a pirate copy. I may be premature in assuming the LV version will be similar but I am inclined to be wary of CIC's new titles after this.

On the other hand, *Ladyhawke* was quite good (as VHS goes), so I would guess the LV version should be something like acceptable.

LDR tends to economise on reviewing disc contents for the very reason that many readers preview their purchases in some way - either in the cinema or via tape rental. This letter obviously arrived some time back, but as a result, offers some valuable insights into the problems of explaining to software suppliers the quality requirements of LV discs.

The reality is that *Indiana Jones*, while not a specimen piece by any stretch of the imagination, is better than its predecessor and exhibits none of the VHS copy faults to any significant degree. On the other hand, *Ladyhawke* turns out to be a poor NTSC conversion with 'focus shifts' and of suspect overall sharpness. It does, however, have quite a nice 'look' to the image - the trouble is the disc reveals this to be of only superficial depth and the master is painfully inadequate for disc use as a consequence. But it probably does look OK on VHS.



From: Terry Riley, Australia

I found your editorial on the issue of film censorship in relation to videotape/disc release most frightening. It does make one think twice before purchasing a disc if it is known to be cut. Oddly the situation is the complete opposite in Australia. If a film has been cut for cinema release (to allow the admittance of a younger and larger audience) the tape is, in most cases, the complete version with a higher classification - simply because it is for private viewing. The LV disc of *Indiana Jones & The Temple of Doom* is cut in places that are left intact on the Australian videotape release.

From: Hans Kristian Pedersen, Denmark

If we are going to have dummy chapters in musicals (LDR-10, 'Discussions') I would prefer them to be numbered straight - 1, 3, 5, 7, etc on the starts of the songs with the even numbers denoting the song ends. I am interested not only in the songs without dialogue but also the movie without the interruption of song and dance routines. Straight numbering is easier and leaves everyone to their own choice.

More important is the changeover point and some good examples exist on older discs. *Absolution* freezes the picture with a fading of the sound, then fades

the picture, and you can still press the Stop/Eject button on the remote if you don't want to see the side end identification. By the time you have got up and reached the disc player it will be ready to be opened. Side two of *Absolution* begins straight away with a fade-up. No annoying 'Side Two' is indicated.

*Prom Night* is even more refined. At a convenient changeover point the picture freezes, the sound fades and 'End Of Side One' is superimposed over the picture. Unfortunately you have to endure 'Side Two' before getting on with the movie.

From: T. Gibbs, Birmingham

I am having trouble getting the four Bruce Lee discs that are released in Holland. Do you know if they are uncut?

The only source of supply for Dutch discs we have is VIDEOSCREEN, Postbus 426, 3430 AK Nieuwegein, Holland. Tel: (03402) 70933. On a duplicated list of their's we have the Bruce Lee discs are priced at £26-00 each, plus £2-50 postage. As far as we know the discs are the complete versions.

## Small Ads

At present the SMALL ADS column is run as a free service so please keep your entry as brief as possible. List ad details clearly on a separate piece of paper from any other correspondence to arrive here by April 30th. It is not possible to take ads over the phone.

□□□ FOR SALE - Many LV discs - Jaws, Blue Hawaii, Wild Geese, Blue Max, Longest Day, Exterminator, Benny Hill etc. Send SAE for full list - M.D. Orwin, 233 Sheffield Road, Barnsley, South Yorks, S70 4DE.

□□□ FOR SALE/EXCHANGE - Benny Hill, Casanova, + 20 others. SAE for list. WANTED - Blues Bros, 39 Steps, 2001, Joni Mitchell - Munro, 246 Claymore Drive, Collydean, Glenrothes, Fife KY7 6TQ. □□□ WANTED - Tom & Jerry discs (all), Elvis On Tour, Elvis/T.T.W.I.I. Also LDR 1/2/3. J. Bosse, Gruener Weg 6, D-3370 Seesen, West Germany.

□□□ FOR SALE - MAGNAVOX front-loading NTSC LV player (PIONEER LD700 clone). £350-00. Alan Bell Tel: (0603) 620980 or 01-609 1435.

□□□ FOR SALE - MAGNAVOX VC8010GY01 NTSC player, top-loader, remote, CX, 110v. \$200-00. Frank M Meek, 1652 Mount Eagle Place, Alexandria, Virginia 22302, U.S.A. Tel (703) 931-1359.

□□□ FOR SALE - Police Academy £9. Deadly Blessing, The Fan, Final Exam, Road Games £4. The Rats £5. Firestarter, Tightrope £8. Tel: Chris Bick (0703) 455481.

□□□ WANTED - LDR 1/2/3. Also cheap players & discs. Write - J. Dexter, 137 Franklin Road, Gosport, Hants PO13 9TR.

□□□ FOR SALE - NTSC LV discs - Deathstalker, Galaxy Of Terror, View To A Kill, Murphy's Romance, House, After Hours, Up'n Coming, Jewel Of The Nile, Clue. Tel: Vaughan (0606) 883855.

□□□ FOR SALE - VLP700 £125. 58 film discs at half price £349. Pair Wharfedale Diamond speakers £75. All ono. Tel: G. Hughes (0203) 455735.

□□□ WANTED - Will pay reasonable price for Apocalypse Now, Cabaret, Galipoli. A. Groebe, Im Lindenhof 7, 8307 Effretikon, Switzerland.

□□□ WANTED - Tropical Hi-Noon, Cat People. Good price or swap. Tel: 01-586 7859.

□□□ WANTED - LDR 1/2/3. Tel: Norwich 484642.

□□□ WANTED - Blues Bros. J. Bevan, 3a Dunkeld Gdns, Baguley Hall, Manchester. Tel: (061) 945 2790

□□□ FOR SALE - VLP830 in as new condition. £274 + carriage. Also 50 discs. Send SAE for list. Clive Holdstock, 10 Maes-Yr-Afon, Holywell, Clwyd CH8 7HP.

□□□ WANTED - The Warriors. K. Gardiner, 58 Chamberlain St, Gosnells, Western Australia 6110, Australia. Tel: (09) 490 1611.



# NEW PRODUCTS

## PHILIPS 400 Series

PHILIPS have announced the availability of the first of their 400 series professional videodisc "drives" - replacements for the 830 series of players which have now been phased out.

The front-loading 400 series has been engineered on a modular basis, thus improving servicing and reliability. The average random access time is quoted at less than 1 second, with instant jump when accessing up to 50 frames either side of the one currently in play. The maximum CAV access time is 3 seconds. With CLV discs average access is 5 seconds, with a 15 second maximum.

The players are equipped with RGB video outputs which maintain full bandwidth during all play modes. They utilise Gallium Arsenide solid-state lasers and feature all-electronic CCD timebase correction. There is a built-in Sync Pulse Generator to allow genlocking of several video sources.

All functions for non-computer controlled applications are via the infra-red remote control, that can make use of the players in-built RAM to generate up to 16 lines of programme instruction. (ie. Up to 16 chapters could be memorised).

### PHILIPS VP410

**Optics:** AlGaAs semi-conductor laser with 780nm wavelength, numerical aperture 0.5 and operating output between 3-5 mW.

**TV system:** 625/50 RGB/CVBS PAL.

**Dimensions:** 420w x 120h x 400d (mm), or with disc tray open 740d.

**Weight:** 14kg approx.

**Power:** 220/240V 50Hz AC (internal tap for 110V).

**Consumption:** 60w approx.

**Connections:** Audio 1/2 In & Out, CVBS Out, CVBS In (2), Sync Out, Sync In (2), Euroconnector, Pre-Amp HF output from optical deck, RS232C (Switchable), Wired R/C socket.

**Remote Control Functions:** Play Forward/Reverse, Still F/R, Step F/R, Audio 1/2, Scan F/R (x20), Goto (Search), Fast F/R (x3, x10, x20), Slow F/R (1/3, 1/10, 1/25, 1/50, 1/100), Standby, Pause, Start/Repeat, Screen Display, Input Entry & Correction.

**Video Bandwidth:** RGB 5MHz (-3dB), CVBS 3MHz (-3dB).

**Video S/N Ratio:** 40dB typical unweighted, 50dB typical weighted.

**Timebase Instability:** <10ns (normal play).

**CVBS Output:** IV into 75 Ohm.

**RGB Output:** 3 x 0.7V into 75 Ohm.

**Audio Bandwidth:** 40-20,000Hz (-3dB)

**Audio S/N Ratio:** 50dB unweighted.

**Distortion:** 1% at 1 kHz (100% mod.).

**Audio Input:** 2.5V rms/47kOhm.

**Audio Output:** 650mV rms.

**Noise Reduction:** CX (Auto-switching only).

### PHILIPS VP415

The VP415 - presently known as the BBC Domesday LV player - shares the same basic functions as the 410 but also incorporates an LV-ROM facility. Here up to 324Mbyte of data per side can be

stored in place of the disc's audio tracks and is done so "in the established CD-ROM format". 6kbyte of data per picture frame is possible and a data transfer rate of 150kbyte/sec (maximum) is quoted, dependent on computer.

The additional LV-ROM circuitry is retained in a (fixed) base addition to the 410, and this carries two additional sockets - an RGB (TTL) input (6-pin DIN) and a 50-pin SCSI socket (Small Computer Systems Interface). The height of the player is 160mm as a result, but all other dimensions are the same. The 415 weighs 15kg approx.

Exact prices were not quoted, but the simpler 410 is certain to be over £1,000 and the 415 (by process of computation on the BBC Domesday package in which it is only currently being sold) about £2,500. Further information: PHILIPS, Interactive Media Systems Division, PO. Box 298, City House, 420 London Road, CROYDON, CR9 3QR. Tel: 01-689 2166.

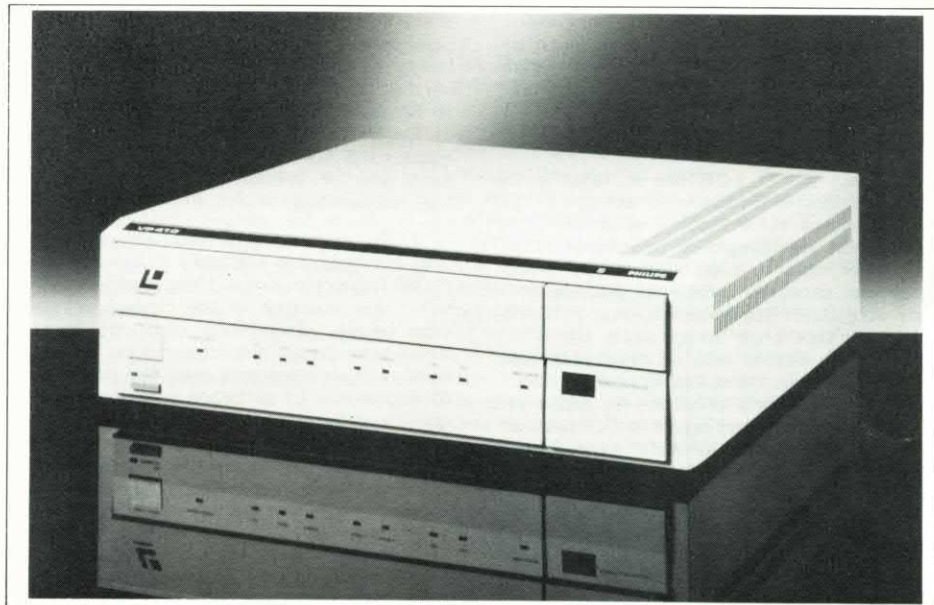
## MARANTZ CD94

Just when we're hoping to get LV and CD in the one box, MARANTZ put out a CD player that comes in two! The CD94 has a separate converter unit - the CDA94 - that will become available in the Summer, but the main unit is available now and will function as a stand-alone player in the meantime. The £799 (approx) CD94 features 16-bit 4 x oversampling and is based on a non-magnetic aluminium chassis. Special attention has been paid to capacitor and power supply stages. The audio output ICs are separate for each channel and each stage. The player is convenience oriented with Favourite Track Selection, 20 track programmability, and variable headphone output. There is a full-function I/R remote.

MARANTZ are also announcing the availability of their LD20DMS & LD50DMS speakers that are derivations of the LDM20/50 models - but with the option of bi-wiring - a feature previously only available in considerably more exotic and expensive speakers. MARANTZ are promising improvements in clarity at prices of £125 and £179.... plus the cost of the extra speaker cable.

Contact - MARANTZ(UK), 15/16 Saxon Way Industrial Estate, Moor Lane, HARMONDSWORTH, Middx, UB7 0LW.

Tel: 01-897 6633.





## A DOLBY In Every Home?

By the end of 1986 nearly 60 different models of surround sound decoders conforming to the DOLBY MP licence specification were in existence. (This figure being only for consumer units and excluding those designed for professional applications.)

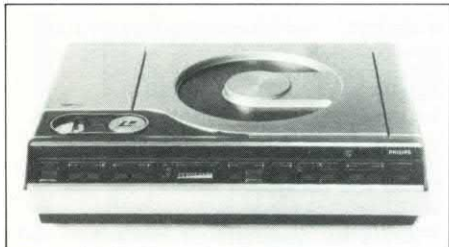
Most of the 25 different manufacturers are, predictably, Japanese and there is hardly a significant volume producer who does not have at least one model of decoder as part of their range - even if only a minority of these are available as part of their UK product line. We hear rumours of even PHILIPS coming into the market with a decoder some time soon.

However, until such time as stereo TV broadcasting reaches UK shores we are unlikely to be able to enjoy such exotica as DOLBY MP Surround encoded TV transmissions, the like of which commenced in the US on November, 21st with an episode of Stephen Spielberg's *Amazing Stories* broadcast by NBC TV. (The actual episode was *Go To The Head Of The Class*, directed by Robert Zemeckis, an AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT/ UNIVERSAL TELEVISION production.) CBS TV broadcast the first live network programme in DOLBY Surround on the 25th January - Super Bowl 21, the American football finals.

## VP 600 & 700 Mods

While many dream of the possibility of a multi-standard LV player - able to take all the world's discs, even if it means still having a multi-standard monitor on which to view them - Edinburgh reader Colin R. Hunter has been taking steps to do something about it.

Studying the internal workings of his PHILIPS VP700 and the relevant service manuals for it and its US NTSC MAGNAVOX equivalent, his conclusion is that there are only minor differences between the two players. (Remember, these MAGNAVOX players - that were the original LV machines used for the launch of the technology in the US - were manufactured by PHILIPS in Europe and shipped to the US in kit form. The UK PAL models would have probably come off the production line straight after.)



The mechanical adjustments needed to alter the VP700 to NTSC capability are fairly straightforward, but the non-availability of the necessary dropout circuitry and video demodulators is an obstacle. Colin has received helpful service information support from MAGNAVOX/ NORTH AMERICAN PHILIPS but supplies of the vital components are no longer extant. So, unless any of our US readers happen to be sitting on a defunct MAGNAVOX 8000/8005 player that they'd be prepared to salvage the

required board from (it's called the 'Complete Video Servo Panel' - Part No: 703915 - 9) Colin's conversion efforts remain in abeyance.

Undaunted Colin is looking forward to the next generation of players when he will again research the possibility of providing a dual-standard model. With these the availability of the requisite spare parts is not likely to be such a problem.

In the meantime he can offer some help to readers who may wish to improve the functionality of their existing VP600/700 players. Says Colin - "It has always been my opinion that the VP600/700 were sorely in need of a pause button to halt the slide assembly while muting the picture and the sound. For £15.00 I am offering to add a pause button (placed just above and to the left of the lid eject switch) to these players. The pause mode can only be effected manually since making it remote-controllable would be prohibitively expensive. I am offering this upgrade only through THE LASER CENTRE (address below) at present."

"For users who connect the audio outputs of their player through a manual hi-fi, and I think that includes most of us, it is not possible to remote switch the sound. For £5.75 I can add two buttons which will duplicate the Audio 1/2 buttons on the player. Thus the improved remote control can now switch the left and the right channels on and off at a very modest cost. The two buttons are mounted to the right of the word 'PHILIPS' - at the bottom right of the handset - with the black button tops about 6mm above the handset surface. This upgrade will only be available directly through me at this address - J. Colin R. Hunter, 7 Craigmillar Park, Newington, EDINBURGH, EH16 5PF - Tel: 031-667 8964."

For the pause upgrade contact - THE LASER CENTRE, 16 Lochrin Buildings, EDINBURGH, EH3 9NB. Tel: 031-229 5960.

## The Swiss Watch - II

Since our previous mention of videodisc activity in Switzerland (LDR-5) the situation has remained fairly static. After the separation of activities of PHILIPS (SWITZERLAND) and AUTOPHON (SWITZERLAND) in the laser market, AUTOPHON AG has stayed the leading representative for all LV software. Because German PHILIPS has not offered any more discs since the end of 1985, AUTOPHON has been forced to obtain supplies from the UK - music product as well as English language titles. As Marketing Director, M. Clausen, points out - "You can imagine, the result of this is that because German is the predominant language here, the LV disc business remains minimal - but we have not given it up as lost. And for very good reason. We expect that towards the end of the year several hardware producers will introduce combination LV/CD players, and since Swiss consumers are leading in CD sales per capita we expect a new boom in the LV market to follow. Present possibilities are limited because there are no companies offering new German-titled videodiscs. We are hoping that some hardware producers will also start manufacturing the necessary

software for the domestic market. Already we have noticed a trend in this direction and are optimistically looking towards the future."

AUTOPHON AG are to be found at Zurcherstrasse 139 (Postfach 342), 8952 Schlieren, Zurich, SWITZERLAND.

## Join The IV League

INTERACTIVE COMPUTER SERVICES, independent consultants on interactive videodisc and electronic publishing, advise us that they can offer some "used, but in very good condition" PIONEER LD-1100 (PAL) players (with the requisite chip, cable-set and software for the BBC Computer) at an all-in price of £250-00. This would enable anyone with a BBC micro to drive CAV discs and start experimenting with interactive videodisc applications. Some set-up support is offered in the price, and if required (at extra cost) genlock, overlay, and overlay monitors can be provided.

Contact - Michael Grove, INTERACTIVE COMPUTER SERVICES, The Old School House, Medcroft Road, Tackley, OXFORD, OX5 3AH. Tel: (086983) 479.



The Leicester based video dealer VIDEOQUIP has lately been offering the PIONEER PX-7 MSX computer (see review LDR-7) for sale at a reduced price of £229-00 - the price covering a package including a data recorder, lead, software etc. In this form it is really designed as a videotape titling system, but the computer itself will easily interface with the PIONEER LD700, and almost as easily with the LD1100.

Contact - VIDEOQUIP, 5 Fosse Road South, LEICESTER, LE3 0LP. Tel: (0533) 558818.

## The Rot Spot

Every time a mention of laser rot appears in these pages it prompts at least one phone-call from a panic-stricken reader who has discovered a rotter or two in their collection and is unnerved by the experience. And understandably so. But folks often misinterpret the symptoms and mistake a particularly spotty pressing for a deteriorating one. It is important to differentiate between discs that are made spotty and those that become spotty.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that many older discs were manufactured with too many dropouts and spots - either in the shape of coloured flecks or just white spots. But this isn't what we call a rot disc. Discs that have suffered from laser rot more often than not started out as comparatively clean pressings, but due to manufacturing defects developed an ever-increasing number of spots and dropouts as the months passed. They'll fill the screen, often swirling up and

[ Continued on page 12 ]



# CD VIDEO

## Pictures on a disc ! - whatever next ?

During a week of the worst weather the country had seen in some decades and with the normally bustling capital's streets eerily deserted PHILIPS put on a show in London. Even though many businesses were running at half-cock (due to absent snow-bound staff) enough record and video company executives turned up to see what new optical disc goodie the Dutch electronics giant was pre-viewing. The day was a Thursday - January 15th to be exact.

It wasn't PHILIPS first demo of its new CD off-shoot. The previous November a similar presentation took place in the US - again only to software companies and again merely to drum up support for their new hardware. And quite what is this new product exactly? Would you believe CD Video?

As sneakily mentioned in these pages some eighteen months back PHILIPS have been toying with the idea of producing a CD Video 'Clip' disc that would feature 20 minutes of conventional digital audio plus, on the outside track, an extra five minutes of digital sound with an analogue video accompaniment. Just the sort of product to make use of all those promo videos record companies regularly churn out and have no real sale market for at present. What with the unsuitability of the existing CD discs to replace the present 7" vinyl single it looks like a good idea, and with the ever decreasing size (& price) of CD players they also dangled the prospect of a future

generation of portable CD + flat-screen TV units that could be watched on the train or bus as well as just being listened to. And they weren't thinking too far in the future for these dedicated portable players - a year or two maybe. That soon.

And once you've put video onto CD it lays the field open to all manner of optical disc products that might conveniently be marketed in the guise of CD and hence cash in on that product's runaway success. (And CD is now a runaway success, being one of the fastest-growing consumer electronic products of all time.) What better way could there be to launch a multi-format disc player, capable of playing just about any optical disc you feed it. If CD folks like that medium - and they also take a shine to video on CD - then even bigger discs with all manner of long-form music programmes and movies are going to go down just dandy. That's sort of how PHILIPS put the whole idea across. A whole new family of optical discs - CDs, CDs with video, bigger (20cm) double-sided 40 minute all-video CDs, and really big 30cm two-hour all video CDs. Terrific!

In America, where PIONEER has been selling a remarkably similar concept these past two years (and even longer in Japan), such laser discs (and the players on which run them) are not quite the same hot news. PHILIPS apparently didn't even invite PIONEER (or CD co-patentholders SONY for that matter) to their US show. Like in the UK that event was specifically aimed at software producers (neither of these showings were in any way official product launches) which might have accounted for both PIONEER and SONY's absence, but seeing as both these companies also operate software operations of some substance in the US their exclusion from the event seemed a little strange to say the least.

But still, PHILIPS must have been sufficiently encouraged by the reception to the concept to shift into gear with a proposed product launch. On February 12th they announced an agreement between themselves and SONY over standards for a new compact disc videoplayer able to play all three sizes of disc - 12cm, 20cm, and 30cm and that will sell for between 1,500 to 2,000 fls (guilders). That's about £500 - £600. (Last year the going price was £400, or "30% more than a reasonable quality CD player". Things have obviously changed a bit.) A market

unveiling is expected this Summer for the NTSC market - the June Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in the US seems the likely premiere venue, followed by a PAL showing at the Berlin Funkausstellung show this Autumn. Quite how long after these dates the players will actually be in the shops is not precisely defined but "pre-Xmas" is being confidently talked about.

Significantly there will be different players in NTSC and PAL territories, brought about by the inability of PHILIPS and SONY to agree a world-wide standard for the video track on the disc. After starting out as a world standard product CD will now become regionalised on the basis of the local TV system. SONY would have preferred it otherwise and this was apparently something of a sticking point in negotiations that were going on with PHILIPS people (in Japan) last year. However, as a SONY spokesman stated rather magnanimously, "We lost that one" and so until the more alert hardware manufacturers devise a way round this inconvenience the present NTSC & PAL divide will remain.

### WHAT HAPPENED TO LASERVISION?

Regular readers might by now have noticed that we've managed to get this far in the article without even mentioning that other (and strangely similar) optical disc product - LaserVision. There is no LaserVision any more - at least that's the way PHILIPS are angling it and thereby avoiding any association with previously failed marketing endeavours. LaserVision is sufficiently low-key as to be effectively no-key. There is unlikely to therefore be any confusion between it and CD-Video as far as the untapped market for the new... err, newly-named product is concerned. Of course, it won't work out quite as smoothly as that. They probably don't realise it yet but there are going to be some horrendous clashes of terminology and general confusion about what to call all the various formats. PHILIPS are talking of reviving the vinyl terms of Extended Play (EP) and Long Play (LP) for the 20 & 30 cm size discs. Extended Play is what the Americans call all CLV LV discs, and come to think of it, is it really on to call a disc the size of a dinner-plate 'Compact' anything?! And what of Japan with its 4000 LV titles in the catalogue - will it be name-change time there too? One reasonably uncontentious marketing ploy is the colouring of CD-Videos gold as opposed to

### CD Single Announced

As part of their February 12th announcement of CD-Video SONY & PHILIPS also agreed plans to define a new CD-Audio single format to act as replacement for the 7" 45rpm vinyl disc. The new 75mm (3") mini-CD will play for up to 20 minutes and be fully compatible with existing players with the aid of an adaptor. Future CD players will be re-designed to accommodate the new disc without any such device and the product is expected to be available by the year end. A US SONY spokesman was reported to be suggesting a CD single price in the \$2.00 - \$2.50 region, approximately £1-50 (although it should be pointed out that US singles prices have historically always been extremely low and European prices may be that much higher).



silver for the audio-only disc.

SONY's commitment to some sort of videodisc player is something of a turn-round for the company after several years of distancing itself from the consumer application of the product - a situation that has only softened recently in the Japanese domestic market. They now seem to appreciate the value of a multi-format optical disc player.

PIONEER are in a rather strange position with all this sudden renewed activity with videodisc. After having spent the last five years developing the US and Japanese markets and, by making the very first LV/CD player (the CLD900), they have really done all the ground work and now look in danger of being swamped by this intrusion on what has, by default, become their private territory. One doubts whether PHILIPS would have made any attempt to revive LV technology as soon as they have were it not for the dramatic uptake in Japan where disc is - in software value terms - the equal of videotape.

PIONEER, UK appear to be waiting to see how the software situation here develops before they commit themselves with a new player. It is no big secret that PIONEER have been less than encouraged by PHILIPS past attempts at establishing a decent software base in Europe, so their caution may be well-founded. PIONEER have also been offended by the recent Common Market tariff increase on imported optical disc hardware that, regardless of whether there is any foundation to the suggestion, is being seen as a hostile protectionist device ill-suited to developing a videodisc market that is as yet not there. In spite of what may go on in the areas of technical agreement over standards, on a local marketing level there appears to have been precious little co-operation so far between PHILIPS and PIONEER in Europe.

At present, though, PIONEER can justifiably lay claim to being the largest manufacturer of videodisc players in the world and this would seem a position they would not gladly relinquish. So, taking into account the company's usual guarded publicity given to its forthcoming products, new hardware from PIONEER could well arrive with little warning.

#### ALL CD PLAYERS NOW OBSOLETE

To PHILIPS, and all the other manufacturers' benefit for that matter, one of the strongest marketing levers afforded by the CD-Video concept was probably not intentional. But, by putting video on 12cm CDs, they have overnight obsoleted every CD player in existence. As soon as the first clip discs appear in the shops CD player owners will find themselves fingering a product in their dealer's racks that they can't take home and play - least not the video portion. (The audio part will still be playable on existing CD players - but who wants to shell out a fiver for a twenty-minute disc with no pictures?) Logically, lots of existing CD player owners won't be too miffed at this shortcoming in their present equipment (classical music fans, for one, aren't going to be prime candidates for the latest Five Star videoclip), but like it or not there is a significant level of one-upmanship involved in such consumer durables and not to have 'the latest thing' is going to be a major influence on the take-up of the new combi player.

This is maybe why the player will go for a higher price than originally



expected. Promoted the right way it will have an element of elitist appeal initially, and on top of that, there are going to be software supply problems. Just who is going to be pressing all these new disc formats in time for a launch? Existing CD plants will be under no pressure to kit out for the new 'big discs' (20 & 30cm size) when they already have all the conventional CD production they can handle. So, in Europe, that leaves PDO, Blackburn and SONAPRESS in Germany readily equipped to manufacture. The USA, with at least three or four facilities, is better able to handle an increase in EP and LP disc production (Hey look - we're getting into it already!) and PIONEER's present refit and expansion of its Carson plant will have proved most timely.

In Europe, though, quite modest sales of combi players will dramatically change the disc supply situation where presently a press run of 1,000 30cm discs is considered a good-sized run. Bumping up the size of the runs won't be too much of a problem, but if they are taking on the pop music market with any seriousness they'll be dealing with a product with a shelf-life of days and weeks instead of months, and with only two plants covering the whole of Europe it may turn out to be something of a convenience to start with the higher-priced hardware.

#### AND LV ONES TOO

But little of this will worry existing LV owners who will just be thankful to see some positive hardware activity at last, even if it does not bring about a dramatic upturn in the supply of film titles early on. (The music market is the one they will be going for.) Best start putting cash aside now for a new player. This will be an essential purchase before too long. The last we heard was that LV discs will appear with either digital or analogue soundtracks -

[ Above: New discs (and packaging) for a new player. The Dire Straits 8" was pressed some time back (and is in CAV). The Von Karajan/Otello is on DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON. Both discs are probably sample test-pressings. ]

whichever is appropriate for the programme content. The appearance of CX decoding on the latest PHILIPS professional players (see page 6) looks like a good sign of it being incorporated in the new consumer models, and so future analogue discs will remain reasonably compatible with existing hardware. But any disc released with a digital soundtrack will need a new player. It is unlikely that discs will be issued in both formats. Existing LV collections will remain playable on the new players, but the supply of software compatible with the current players will surely decline over the coming years as they reach the end of their serviceable life.

For owners of VP600/700 players - by far the bulk of the UK player population - contact with any form of new player is going to be a most pleasurable shock, so dramatic has been the development of the technology since those pioneering gas-laser days. These PHILIPS players are near on ten years old now, being basically PAL versions of the very first MAGNAVOX players that launched the LV system (or VLP as it was then known) in the USA in 1978. Yes, 1978. And they're still going - just! Reviews elsewhere in the mag will show just how much things have passed us by. There is no way, though, these reviews can really describe the significant improvements in picture quality that will follow through on the next generation of PAL players. If you thought the picture quality on LV discs was good you'll be even more impressed with how much better still it can be.

Now, how many shopping days is it to Xmas?



# WHAT'S UP DOC?

## Document & Data storage on optical disc

The evolution of the optical disc is now taking on a momentum whereby all the potential uses are teetering on the brink of day to day normality. Some of these applications are being pursued in less publicised areas, but in spite of their low profile they **are** happening.

You don't have to explain to people what a CD is any more - it has a market identity. (Though the bulk of the populace is still confused about videodiscs - perhaps fortunately so in the light of forthcoming developments). The data and recordable discs that have been dangled before us for some years are now beginning to receive a similar push. They won't be high street consumer products (yet at least), but are going to be more aggressively marketed at the commercial user. There is a huge potential market for optical disc storage - a market that is presently being hogged by magnetic tape and paper. Under the sponsorship of CONTROL DATA, a day-long seminar was held in London at the end of January to bring manufacturers and potential users together to encourage the pace of change.

In a marketing tie-up reminiscent of the deal struck between PHILIPS and DU-PONT, the US CONTROL DATA CORPORATION (a computer peripherals manufacturer) has formed with PHILIPS a new company called LASER MAGNETIC STORAGE INTERNATIONAL (LMS) to develop the data and storage market in both magnetic and optical products. It's a 51% PHILIPS, 49% CDC arrangement and a number of subsidiaries are also involved in the deal - OSI (OPTICAL STORAGE INTERNATIONAL the drive makers, for example). LMS is based in Colorado Springs, USA.

### WORMS IN THE MORNING

Recordable 30cm discs, offering 1 gigabyte per side of capacity are being increasingly exploited for large-scale document/image storage. On a two-sided disc that means about 650,000 sheets of A4 documents can be recorded. (An LV disc has a 4 Gbyte capacity, twice as much.)

Unlike the analogue LV disc all these recordable data discs (WORMS - Write Once Read Many times) are digitally encoded in different ways and are tied to their own manufacturer's media (disc type). The discs are not interchangeable. For example, it is not possible to put a disc from 3M's Docutron system into PHILIPS' Megadoc equipment.

The Megadoc discs, which are made at PDO, Blackburn, rely on the drive's laser burning a pit into the 'pre-grooved' glass disc, coated with a layer of tellurium alloy that is susceptible to deformation when subjected to heat changes. The impressions that are created can then be read back by the same laser at lower intensity. The two sides of these glass discs are bonded together with an air gap between in order to produce a suitably stable environment. (One of the reasons for using glass rather than plastic is that it is less susceptible to altitude effects. The LMS 1200 Disc Drive specifications stipulate an operating environment between -300m to 2,500m!)

Not all applications of WORM discs are restricted to document storage. Using the CCIR 4:2:2 digital component coding standard (CCIR 601), up to 2,200 photographs can be stored on a 30cm disc and such an application lends itself to TV broadcasters who require immediate

access to picture libraries for illustrating news bulletins and the like. LOGICA, the computer software company, spoke at the seminar of their *Gallery 2000* retrieval software designed for this photo-file application. They suggested that by using it to harness a 20-disc jukebox of WORM discs 44,000 photographs could be held on line with a maximum retrieval time of 12 seconds.

But what counts to the office user is as much cost as convenience - whether discs are being used in place of magnetic tape or as part of a document retrieval system. Blank discs have been running at around £250 per gigabyte but are expected to drop to the £125/£150 mark later in the year. There is an element of competition between the various makers (3M, HITACHI are others operating in the area), and by the end of the decade £100 discs (2 Gbyte) are envisaged. Some commentators in the field predict "\$10 discs" eventually.

While the current price still compares unfavourably with magnetic tape (which in this context means the large reels of tape used in mainframe computer installations), 1989 prices are expected to be comparable, and besides, there are other factors in the equation. Hardware, and the related space costs, will tip the balance in favour of optical disc sooner - plus there are convenience features of lower maintenance costs and increased data life to be considered. Mainframe computer tapes require constant conditioning to prevent data loss and systematic re-copying on a near-annual basis can be a routine protection measure.

Recordable optical discs are confidently claimed to give 10 years error-free life and at the seminar there was adventurous talk of this being upped to 30 years in the near future. The life expectancy of these WORM discs is definitely not, as yet, an established fact. A speaker from the Government's Central Computer & Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), who have been dabbling in optical technology for some years now and have recently been serious users of document storage devices, claimed to have been unable to extract any form of media life guarantee from those manufacturers who had been touting for the Agency's business - "We couldn't get a guarantee for 10 years, let alone 30".

### FORTHCOMING TRENDS

Increases in disc capacity to 8 Gbytes are seen as feasible "within 5 years". And this is without moving to a larger size disc, which is a possibility that is



[ 30cm WORM Disc Drive  
with disc out of its caddy, which is shown behind ]

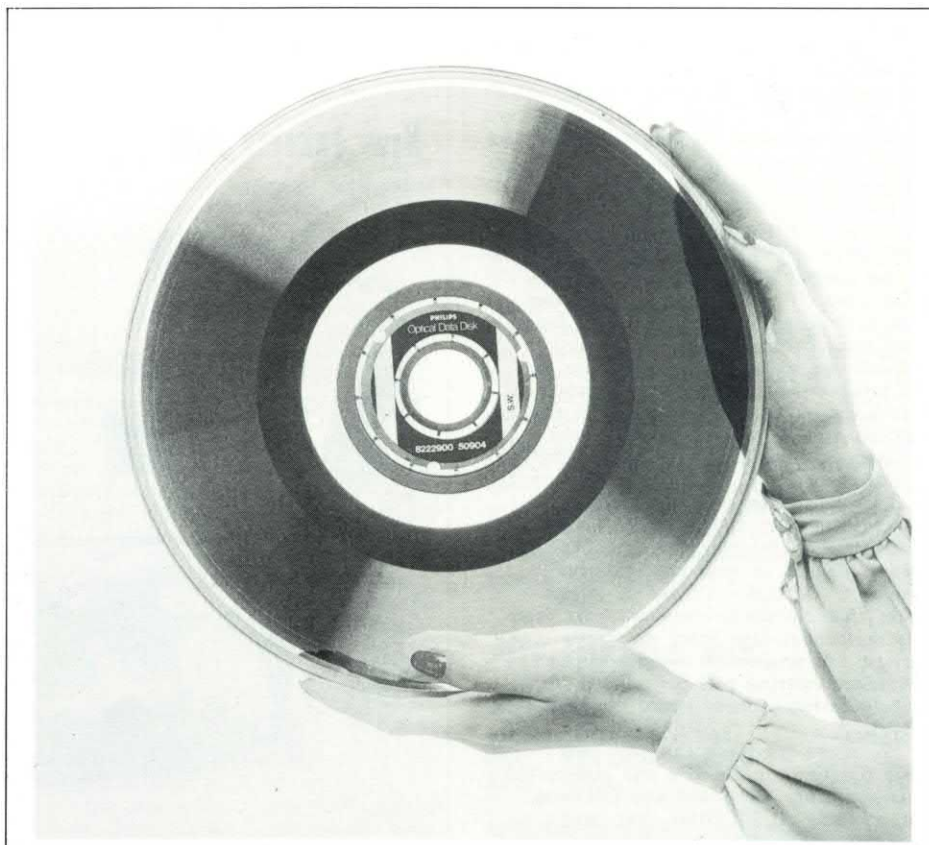


sometimes mentioned. (If a four-fold increase is on the cards here, it suggests the possibility of extended playing time consumer audio and videodiscs - or in the case of the latter, the easy transition to a higher bandwidth TV standard.)

More immediately (within the next year or so) we should see the introduction of an industry-standard 5.25" (130mm) WORM disc offering 500 Mbytes (2 x 250) capacity and designed to fit into IBM PC type computers. This will be a plastic, not glass, disc and there are in fact already some non-standard versions on the market (at a price), but there is welcome enthusiasm for establishing a common standard of 5.25" disc - both physically and with due regard to data interchange.

Re-recordable, or re-writable, discs are already laboratory realities, but their reliability is not yet assured and it seems unlikely that the market will see a usable product till late '88 or 1989 - and that may be forcing the pace.

Development on re-writable discs is mainly concentrated along two avenues - hybrid magneto-optical discs (that are closest to being perfected) and those based on phase change. Here the sensitive recording layer is converted from an alloy to crystalline state, and then back again. This is seen as the more elegant solution - and it works - but the tendency for the recording layer to change state of its own accord remains a rather crucial bug still to be ironed out.



#### A ROM WITH A VDU

The afternoon session was entirely given over to CD-ROM exploitation. CD-ROM was being promoted as a relatively high cost data distribution format to the sort of end-user who is prepared to pay not insubstantial sums for regularly updated databases. To get around the non-recordability of CD-ROM the general consensus seemed to be that buyers of CD-ROM databases will become more in the way of subscribers than one-time purchasers. The purchase price may well be a lump-sum transaction, but every few months, or each year, the subscriber will receive an updated disc and discard the previous one. (How do you bring yourself to throw away a £500 disc?!) This was the way the PHILIPS

representative speaking on behalf of LMS outlined the developing market, though with such high-priced software it is difficult to see how this will encourage a dramatic take-up of CD-ROM hardware. The new PHILIPS half-height drive is expected "soon" (months) and must be considered the first serious hardware entry from them - the current top-loaders really only being developmental products. To reduce the depth of the new drive to make it suitable for incorporating into the body of the computer there is no loading drawer. A (removable) transparent plastic caddy has been designed to avoid handling problems that would have otherwise occurred fitting the disc into the narrow slot. Presently there is no standard for these protective caddies, but this too is imminent.

A speaker from BRS-EUROPE, the company responsible for the retrieval software for the British Library CD-ROM mentioned in LDR-6, gave some cautionary advice in respect of the still not quite defined CD-ROM standard but at the same time encouraged attendees to get involved in some CD-ROM publishing now, in order to fully realise the data capacity of the format - something that is difficult to comprehend until such a step has been taken.

BRS-EUROPE have a history in database applications, for example with on-line PRESTEL-type systems, and are keen to apply this expertise to CD-ROM.

Their initial energies went towards conventional videodiscs, firstly with a medical disc and then with the *Grolier Academic Encyclopaedia*, but they found themselves tied by the lack of standardisation of the technology. Having done the initial work in NTSC they found they had a product limited to certain territories and the speaker was none too complimentary about the inability of PHILIPS to be able to come up with NTSC players in Europe to exploit their software development. That world compatibility he saw as the appeal of CD-ROM.

Later in the year BRS are anticipating launching their most adventurous CD-ROM venture - the monthly publishing of *Whittakers Monthly Book List* that details every book in print and is presently supplied in printed form. The challenge of revising and updating the disc each month - from the preparation through to the disc mastering/pressing stage - will be an interesting test of the maturation of the technology.

The final speaker, Ed Varney of SILVER PLATTER, another company offering similar CD-ROM preparation services to BRS and the company responsible for the Post Office *Postcode Address File* (containing all the UK's 23,500,000 postcodes), created a bit of a stir at the closing of the day by promising the availability of an IBM compatible lap-top computer with a built-in CD-ROM drive for less than \$1,000 by the end of the year. This brought forth a degree of interrogation from the LMS people in respect of his product sourcing, but Varney declined to be drawn. This low price approach to the technology is obviously in advance of the general plan.

Less controversial, but nevertheless an interesting piece of the jigsaw was SILVER PLATTER's announcement of the

forthcoming availability (months) of the pre-mastering software to enable in-house tape preparation for CD-ROM - thereby cutting out the middle man and allowing the publisher to go straight to any CD pressing facility (at present only a few plants are equipped to handle CD-ROMs) and get the discs pressed from their own completed tape.

While some of the optical disc applications outlined at the seminar may at first seem remote from those that pertain in the home, in the same way that they basically all stemmed from the consumer videodisc, it is that very product that stands to benefit from the huge amounts of money now being poured into the technology by major industrial companies all over the world. As they say, what goes around, comes around.

#### The Show Scene

Some conferences and exhibitions dealing with these other uses of optical discs are upcoming and may prove useful (and at mostly over £100 a day, fairly pricey) sources of further information for readers with special interest in the field.

Imminent is **Optica 87** - "The International Meeting for Optical Publishing and Storage" - being held at the RAI Centre, Amsterdam April 14-16. There are additional meetings/lectures being held the previous day (13th) too. Details from: Learned Information (Europe) Ltd., Woodside, Hinksey Hill, OXFORD OX1 5AU. Tel: (0865) 730275.

Set for June 8-10 in London is **OIS '87** - the 4th Annual Conference and Exposition on Optical Information Systems. Topics listed include interactive videodisc, CD-ROM & CD-I, data storage/distribution and document image processing systems.

Details from: Alice Taylor, OIS LONDON '87, 3 Henrietta Street, LONDON WC2 8LU. Tel: (01) 240-0856.



[ Continued from page 7 ]

down in a rhythmic fashion, and the player will struggle to even play such an affected disc. This is laser rot.

The big break-out (as far as UK discs are concerned) occurred when PHILIPS changed from the 2P disc pressing process to the injection moulding one presently being used. Readers who bought titles such as *Poltergeist* and *The Thing* found their discs collapsing into a blizzard of dropouts within months of purchase and the problem was so bad (and unexpected) that discs just stopped coming out of the Blackburn plant till the cause of the problem was found and put right. This was around the end of 1984. There is a clutch of discs (both new releases and re-pressings from this period) that are susceptible to deterioration and LDR is always pleased to hear reports from readers of defective titles. It is our belief that rot discs come not only from this period but also from the very earliest UK production when a reflective aluminium coating was being used in the manufacturing process (since changed to a silver).

So, these rot discs fall into two basic batches - early 2Ps and mid-period pressings from 1984, and the following list contains all LV titles that have been reported to the magazine on more than one occasion:

COLONEL CULPEPER'S FLYING CIRCUS, CHARIOTS OF FIRE, ELEPHANT PARTS (PIONEER), FLIGHT OF THE DRAGON, MERLIN & THE SWORD, PEEPER, POLTERGEIST, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, THE ROSE, READY STEADY GO (I & II), SIOUXIE & THE BANSHEES/NOCTURNE, THE SLEEPING BEAUTY, STEVIE NICKS (PIONEER), THE THING, VIDEOHITS, XANADU

Readers are advised to check their personal copies of these discs, and if found to have become defective, return them to their dealer for replacement. The appearance of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* in the list will probably affect many readers, but if it helps save any unnecessary worry, the LDR copy that has taken early retirement is the 9/83 pressing (look at the bottom right-hand corner of the inner sleeve to find this date).

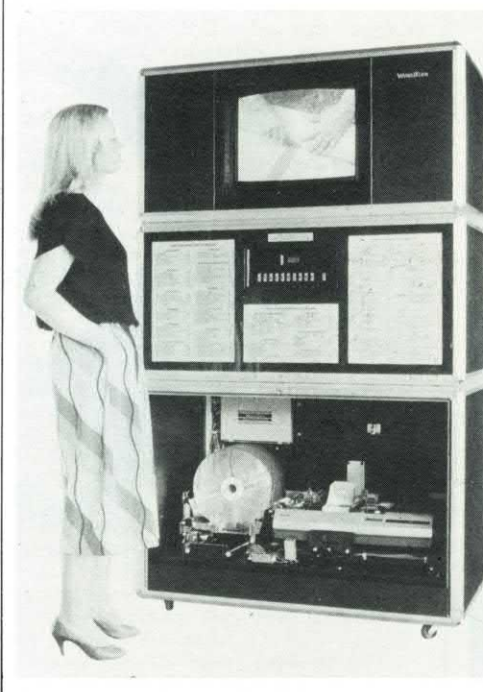
## NTSC Players

Good news on the UK availability of NTSC LV players. STEREO REGENT STREET, 245 Regent Street, LONDON W1R 7AF - Tel: 01-491 7922 can again supply some PIONEER brand players that run on 240 volts and only need be connected to an NTSC capable monitor to play US and Japanese LV discs. In stock are CLD900 LV/CD combination players at £600, and to special order (takes about a week or two), they can supply the latest PIONEER CLD909 LV/CD unit for £750.

## More New Titles

Edinburgh dealers DH AUDIO VISUAL, or THE LASER CENTRE as they are now being called are planning to go into the LV disc business with both new film titles and some of the more in-demand back-catalogue items. Owner David Henry is actively pursuing leasing deals with

## New Jukebox Hits



One of the most puzzling non-exploitations of the videodisc has been that of the video jukebox - at least as far as the laser product is concerned. THORN-EMI have made a bit of an effort with their VHD disc based system but this WURLITZER Lasergraph jukebox built around the PHILIPS 830 type LV player is the only one we know of that exploits the more worthwhile disc format.

The Lasergraph comes in various configurations - for either music or point-of-sale-applications - and can access a caddy holding up to 15 x 30cm discs. (Further Info: DEUTSCHE WURLITZER GmbH, Alter Postweg 408, 4995 Stemwede 1, West Germany - Tel: (05745) 280.

We still await news of a possible launch of PIONEER's music video jukebox system in Europe. This is based on 20cm NTSC LV discs and negotiations are presently under way. The PIONEER unit can retain 48 discs (of up to 10 tracks), making 480 songs instantly available.

Of course, the impending availability of CD-Video clips will mean a ready supply of software, thus making music applications even easier by enabling the use of regular consumer videodiscs.

several UK software companies and expects to be able to announce more precise release news soon. Further information is available on 031-229 5960 and trade enquiries are also welcome on this number. We'll obviously carry more news on this encouraging development in the next issue.

## New HDTV Disc-Player

Although TOSHIBA is not a name that springs immediately to mind when thinking videodisc, owners of players such as the PIONEER LD1100 will more than likely find a TOSHIBA helium-neon laser buried in its internal workings, and it will thus come as no great surprise that the company has been working on other aspects of the technology similarly out of sight. Their latest announcement is of a 90 minute HDTV disc-player (2 x 45 minutes) that relies on a new short-wavelength laser to increase playing time over previous endeavours.

HDTV disc-players fall into two main categories. The SONY HDVS system we have previously mentioned is a full-bandwidth device (with a resulting shortish playing time) aimed at carrying hi-definition pictures into public exhibition areas such as cinemas etc. For the home, and in order to achieve reasonable playing times, a different route is being pursued by using MUSE signal compression techniques. Standing for Multiple Sub-Nyquist Sample Encoding (well we can pronounce MSNSE!) the technique brings the 20MHz signal down to a more manageable 8MHz (PAL LV disc is 5MHz). NHK, the Japanese broadcasting organisation who initiated all the developmental work on 1125-line HDTV, have already shown such disc players capable of 30 minute a side playing times. The TOSHIBA development

(which is scheduled to be shown publicly within the coming year) seems to have upped the ante by some margin.

NHK have proposed a MUSE standard for domestic videotape too, which Japanese manufacturers are expected to work to when developing the next generation of VCR machines in time for their new era of broadcasting.

Although not in quite the same league, we understand that PHILIPS also have plans for disc players able to exploit the enhanced bandwidth potential of the proposed European MAC TV system that will probably appear as soon as an 'official' decision has been made as to the future of local TV standards. The resistance to the Japanese HDTV system is sufficient to suggest that, unofficially, the decision on the future is already made and the world will continue to be divided by different TV systems.

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# ? THE LOST GENERATION



The story so far..... Once upon a time, in a nearby land, came a new disc technology that threatened to rule the world. But it fell upon stony ground and the perpetrators retreated from whence they came. Some time later, in a land far away, the shiny disc was re-discovered and much refinement to the hardware took place. Such was the resulting success that those back in the nearby land took up their crusade once more and poised themselves for a new dawning.

Well, something or other like that took place - and is about to. And, not before time. PAL disc fans should be able to join in on what has been increasingly the preserve of those living in NTSC TV areas. So as to fill in the gaps, these hands-on reviews of two of the latest Japanese players - SONY's LDP-730 (with a digital frame store) and YAMAHA's CLV-1 (a totally new LV/CD player) - should whet the appetite for some of the advances that might appear in the next generation of PAL machines.

Both these players are, of course, NTSC machines and only sold in Japan (though IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT are planning to sell a badge-engineered version of the CLV-1 in the USA shortly). Conceivably the YAMAHA player could be upgraded to cope with the new CD Video clip format and, if the UK division so decided, be marketed in a PAL version here come the CD Video launch. It is certainly a significant product (by virtue of its trim dimensions and general sophistication of operation), and even the sound flaw in the model we had was not sufficient to dampen the enthusiasm for it. (Both the SONY and the YAMAHA players turned out to have faults as it happened, but given the time scale of the article it was not possible to ascertain their degree of seriousness in time for our deadline.)

[ In the photo on the left are the YAMAHA CLV-1 (top) the SONY LDP-730 (middle) and MARANTZ LV10CD (bottom). The LV10CD is a version (again for the Japanese market) of the PIONEER CLD-7(909) - another of 'the lost generation' of hardware that never made it to UK shores. ]





[ PIONEER CLD900 (left) and LD707 (right) ]

Where we left off was in Issue 7, when reviews of the PIONEER CLD900, the world's first LV/CD combination player, and the LD707, a second-generation solid-state LV-only player were featured. Making a machine capable of playing both audio and video discs required quite a lot of mechanical ingenuity - the CLD900 was a bulky piece of equipment and relied on a rotating frame to swivel the relevant motor into place under the disc. That's what made it as high as it was. But it certainly worked and performance-wise the picture quality was very much on a par with the then current LD700.

The LD707 (which is the export number of a player that in Japan PIONEER call the LD7100) was the follow-up to the LD700. Substantially slimmer it featured much-improved electronics (370 line horizontal resolution and a better video S/N ratio) and a new type of drawer design which took the disc into the machine and then dropped it down on the spindle. The drawer didn't just slide in

and out as before. PIONEER claimed the machine only contained one fifth as many components as its predecessor and this was certainly apparent in the feel of it. Though giving a noticeable improvement in picture performance - with much brighter and less grainy images - the 707 never appeared in the USA, let alone in a UK PAL version. In fact, even its Japanese life was pretty short and it didn't stay PIONEER, Japan's top-of-the-line model for the year or so that would normally be expected.

At about the time of the LD707 other Japanese companies began taking a more serious interest in laser videodisc in the home market. VHD, another disc system, was then doing equal business to LV and was supported by many major companies. Previous PIONEER models had up till then been re-badged for sale by other names in the laser camp, but with the arrival of the LD707 both SONY and YAMAHA introduced LV players of completely their own manufacture.

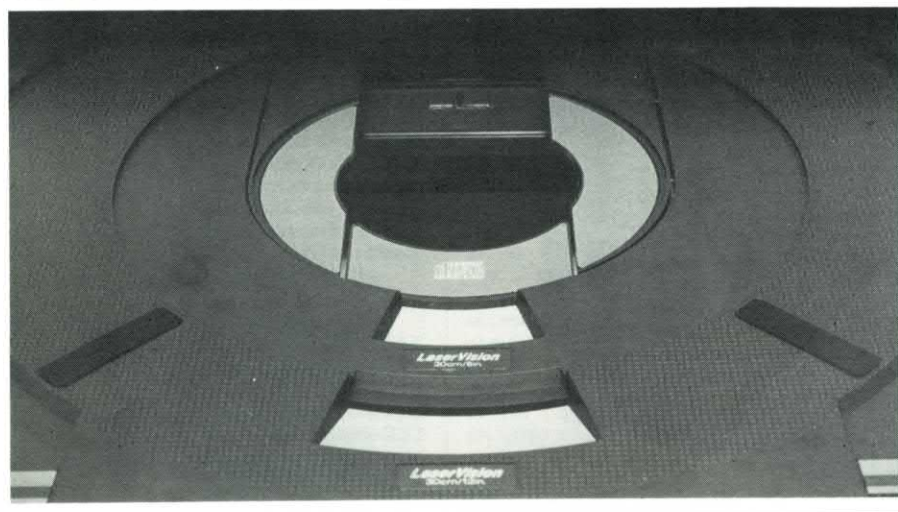
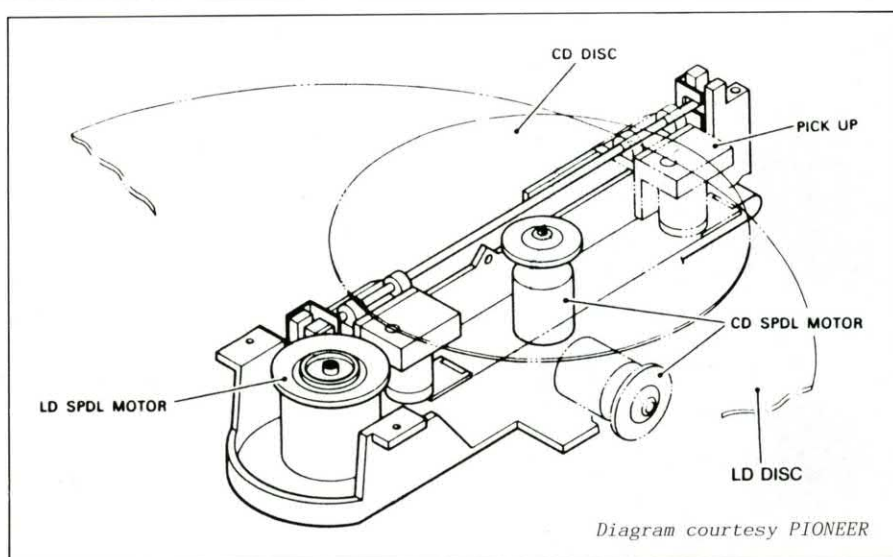
And both manufacturers' products were performance and price competitive. The LD7100 soon appeared heavily discounted and PIONEER promptly brought out their second-generation combination player, the CLD-7 (the CLD909 in its export form), that retailed for very nearly the same price as the LD7100 those few months earlier. The CLD-7 listed at ¥158,000, the LD7100 ¥149,800. Considering the LD7100 needed an add-on D/A box, the DA-1, which cost an extra ¥39,800, to play PCM LV discs the price drop was even more dramatic.

#### PIONEER CLD-7

The CLD-7 is again very much akin to the 7100 in its LV characteristics, though picture performance was bumped up to 400 lines. It incorporates the same drawer-loading arrangement but eschews the rotating motor frame of the previous combination player. This time the LV motor is fixed, as it would be in a dedicated LV player, and only the much smaller CD motor needs to be moved into position. It pivots up from a horizontal rest position when not in use to fit halfway along the laser slider track. But even if this arrangement is simpler (and saves 50mm of player height) some modification to the drawer becomes necessary as a result.

This is now a two-piece unit, although a casual inspection would probably not reveal this fact. It is plenty obvious when a view from below is taken and the additional sliding mechanism can be seen. Because the motor for the CDs is now set further back, the middle part of the drawer separates during the loading process and carries them that bit further back to the CD spindle.

The CLD-7 has other refinements. The optical assembly utilises electronic time base correction in place of a mechanical tangential mirror system. (Time base correction, TBC, disciplines the outputting of the video signal from the disc, which tends to come off at fluctuating speed, due to the eccentricities of the disc track and inconsistencies in the rotational speed of the disc. The TBC regulates the flow of the signal to the correct rate.) The machine also incorporates a chip, borrowed from use in video camera technology, to generate a blue background whenever the disc is not in play mode. The accompanying photographs illustrate some of these displays and show the ability of the player to identify disc sides electronically.



[ Left: In this diagram of the CLD-7(909) the revised motor positions can be seen. The CD motor is shown lying down, as when the laser pickup is moving along the track for LV discs, and vertically for when CDs are played. Below Left: The grey part of the drawer is physically separate from the main drawer, and once inside the player carries on moving further back to put the CD on the spindle. ]



The remote control of the CLD-7 is essentially that of the LD7100, with certain of the functions overwritten to cope with CD terminology. In the programmability department things are again very much as with the 7100. The CLD-7 does have a nice feature in that it is possible to programme the player before loading the disc. This is a specially handy feature if you want to program a film that has alternate (chaptered) endings (such things do exist!).

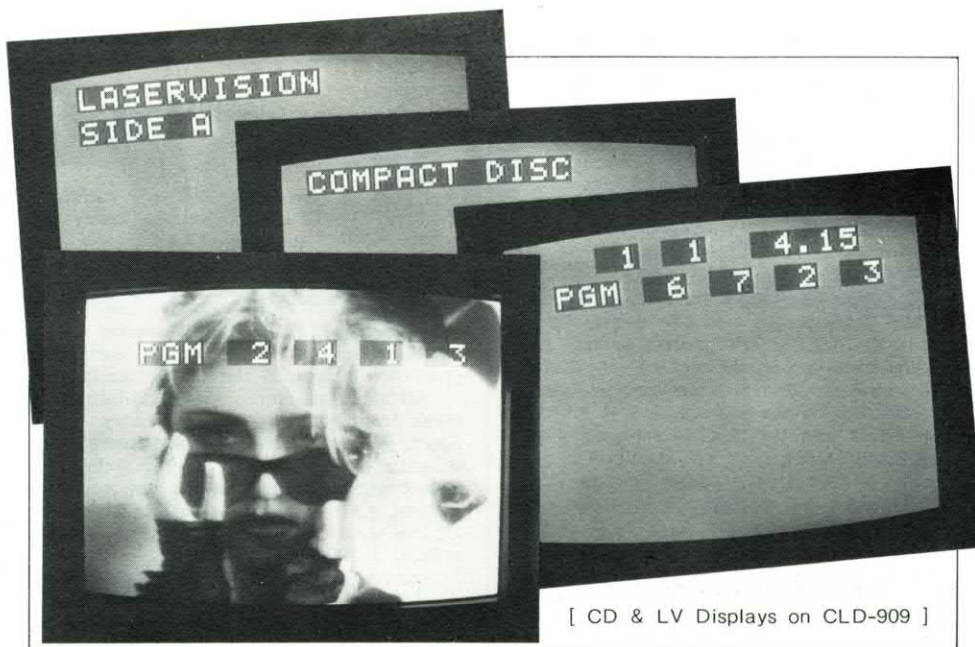
#### SONY LDP-730

SONY, as of this writing, do not make a combination LV/CD player. To fill the gap in their model range they make compatible LV (LDP-330LC) and CD (CDP-330) players. Wired together the LV player uses the CD player's digital-to-analogue conversion circuitry to decode Digital Sound LV discs.

The LDP-730 is their top-of-the-line player. SONY too have dispensed with the straightforward in/out drawer mechanism of their 500 series players and have moved onto the in/down, up/out type of drawer of the PIONEER newbies. Unlike PIONEER's tendency to eliminate as many controls from the player front as possible - in favour of the remote - SONY tend to keep the basic motion control functions on the machine. With this player the remote is necessary to program, and operate a few of the secondary functions (CX on old non-auto discs, TV/LV switching etc). Apart from the ability to play Digital Sound discs, the LDP-730 also bears an extra 'Digital' legend that refers to its ability to grab frames off CLV discs and display them as still pictures - just like a CAV disc! Well, almost, but more of that later.

In many ways the new player does not have quite the elegance of the previous SONY consumer models (with the rounded drawer fronts). The drawer flap (this refers to the flap that folds down before the drawer-proper slides out) retains the transparent area that enables discs to be seen while in play (though only from the edge). You need a torch to see anything inside, and it's probably best left that way if SONY have plans to sell it in the US where the ability to see just how warped some of PIONEER's US pressings are will probably cause a bit of a stir! The machine is quite large - not so much in bulk (it is not very high) - but it seems its width and is plenty deep. It isn't that heavy either, which is strange. When you come to press the Eject button the drawer is pushed all the way out under motor control, and when you have loaded the disc a slight push back sets the motor off again, and it pulls the drawer all the way in. Play commences automatically.

The front panel display is quite comprehensive. The relevance of the



[ CD & LV Displays on CLD-909 ]

hours element of the time display is a bit puzzling. It also counts minutes and seconds. There is no evidence of an NTSC disc ever creeping past the 60 minute point. It may just be a standard display panel that SONY did not feel justified changing specially for LV and no great significance should probably be attached to it. Virtually every operating mode has an illuminated legend to define its use. When you do a Time/Chapter search the Time display disappears to accommodate a keyed-in entry. Similarly, if a CAV disc (here the panel gives a frame count) the display zeroes to receive your chosen search frame.

Explaining the transport functions in relation to the infra-red remote control is a little more difficult than in past reviews. The remote is only labelled in Japanese which isn't the sort of language you can easily get to grips with via the usual bi-lingual dictionary. But at least the player controls are in English. The four main ones are self-explanatory (the Play and Still actually illuminate when engaged). ACS is an Auto Chapter Skip that allows you to skip through any chaptered disc. Step are the still frame buttons, forward or reverse. The remote has the Multi-Speed Still/Step controls common to the PIONEER models already covered. The Scan operates at two speeds, but it's at this point the digital picture aspect of the player begins to intrude into its operation.

#### DIGITAL VIDEO MEMORY

There is a frame-store memory in the 730 that has sufficient capacity to hold a complete TV picture on the screen - indefinitely. It affects the operation of the player in many ways. All the time a

disc is in play the TV screen never goes blank - no matter which function is being engaged - and even during a time or chapter search. (Pause is the exception, but because you have a still facility with CLV its relevance decreases.)

Going back to where we left off, in scan, here a push in either direction produces a strobe-like sequence of still frames as you run through the disc (in colour). The rate is about 5 frames per second. The scan button has two speeds; light pressure is a slow scan, heavy pressure (it's easy to feel the difference) a fast scan, and at this speed still pictures are put on the screen at longer intervals. This is, of course, with CLV discs. Before going further the Normal/Flash-Freeze switch should be explained. Every disc you put in the 730 is, within limitations, a "CAV" disc. But there are important if subtle differences.

With CAV discs the switch should be set in the Normal position for best picture quality. It is interesting to slide it in and out and see how the definition diminishes when using the frame store. However, when you have a video-originated CAV disc that has jittery still frames, there is an advantage in using the flash-freeze setting as this eliminates the picture jitter. Going from still to scan in the flash-freeze setting causes the player to revert to normal CAV mode. When you drop back into still the flash-freeze re-engages. It would be more convenient for the CAV mode switch to be on the remote - with CAV discs you do find the need to switch positions during play.

But CLV discs benefit the most - and obviously so. The frame store doesn't





grab every single frame - it works out to about 16 or 17 for each second of the elapsed time readout (as opposed to the previously mentioned 5 frames per second in real time scan) when still-framing through the disc. It doesn't always grab the same frame either. You'll be still-framing through the disc, notice something like a pressing blemish, still-frame back and find that it's not there. You sometimes have to make several attempts to find the exact same frame again. But it's precise enough for all the uses you would require on normal entertainment-type programmes. There is a graininess to the picture, but it looks very much like the original image grain. The reason there is a loss in picture quality is that only a single field is being stored and displayed - in normal play two such fields are interlaced together to produce a complete picture (of which 30, in NTSC, go to make up one second of screen time). But the picture doesn't look synthetic in any way. In both still and scan modes you lose the sound. In Multi-Speed you don't.

**Multi-Speed** only works in forward motion and in only 6 different rates (as opposed to 9 in true multi-speed with CAV discs). But such a comparison is probably not a fair one to make. Whichever rate of picture still-frame advance you choose the soundtrack continues in real time. The frame-store just grabs selected frames and displays them as stills. The slowest rate of picture change is 1 frame every 3 seconds, the fastest 6 frames per second. There is no flicker between frames (as there is in slow scan) and at the faster speeds you achieve the semblance of continuous motion, albeit at a curious pace. It is quite an effective device to analyse details of the action. The important point to grasp is that when you reduce the speed you get bigger jumps between the pictures - not more time within which to view the same number of pictures. At the 3 second position each picture in a programme often turns out to be of a totally different scene, and it becomes like watching a slide show. Some films, and especially pop music, are strangely appealing watched in this manner.

Flash-freeze means you can at last read end credits too. It isn't possible to scroll back and forth quite as you would wish (the multi-speed does not work in reverse), but by using first the scan button and then the still it is possible to access any part of the credits with sufficient precision and hold them.

#### PERFORMANCE

The picture on the SONY is basically good (it is rated at 400 lines) but there were some defects on the machine in review. Most important was the number of horizontal dropouts that would occur with some regularity during play. It didn't seem to relate to the quality of the pressing. (The player must have some very restrained dropout compensation it must be said - it made some US PIONEER pressings look truly appalling compared with the Japanese product.) Also there was some 'crimping' of the scanning lines that showed up on odd occasions. It was an erratic effect and fairly faint when it happened - but you'd notice very fine bunching of the lines in dark picture areas. That apart the picture quality was about on a par with the latest PIONEER models.

The remote control is quite large and by virtue of that fact is easier to use than its layout would imply. Ergonomically it's about average. The large play and

#### From Our Correspondent in Japan MARC COMFORT

HITACHI have replaced their rather chunky VIP-20D LV player with three new ultra-slim models. The VIP-15K (¥99,800) is a karaoke model with the appropriate mike inputs. The VIP-23D (¥119,800) has Digital Sound. The The VIP-25DX (¥129,800) is similar but also incorporates a DOLBY Surround processor built into the player itself.

All three machines have similar, clean front-panel styling and carry Eject, Play and Scan Forward/Reverse controls on the player, the remaining ones being restricted to the remote control. All machines weigh in at 8.3 kg, consume 26/27w, and measure 435(w) x 86(h) x 395(d)mm.

Incidentally, the PIONEER LD-S1 mentioned last time also has the frame store facility offered on the new SONY 730.

The January release sheet made claim of 4,000 LV titles now being available. (The front cover sticker so saying being located just below Kong's left hand.) It listed 67 new titles and the February list totalled 72. March only had 64.

*Rocky IV* is presently being sold at a special low price of ¥4,950. Usually, Japanese film titles go for about ¥6,800/¥7,800. (Currently the Yen rate is about 230 to the £.)

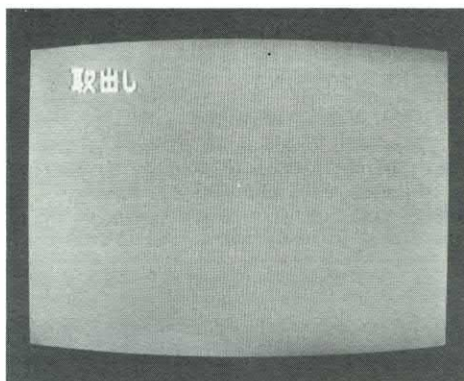
*Return To Oz* was recently released



simultaneously in two versions. One in Japanese and in cropped TV format, the other in wide-screen with sub-titles. There is a fairly steady release of films in widescreen in Japan. *Star Wars* has just seen its third release, this time in full scope widescreen and CAV, Digital Sound with sub-titles (¥14,800). *The Hunger* has also been a widescreen, CAV release with Digital Sound - even though it is only a mono film. Volumes 4 & 5 of the *SPX Museum* series are dubbed in Japanese and deal with horror effects and model-making.

## 日本の報告

scan buttons are quite nice. But here again the the forward scan button lost its correct spring-tension after a week of use and became a bit 'hot', responding to the slightest caress - intentioned or otherwise. (And we thought all this Japanese technology was invincible!)



The SONY produces some rather spidery screen graphics for the time/search/programme etc displays. It is the only player, though, that manages to display the entire 10-entry programme sequence simultaneously. Other players start scrolling the entries off-screen once you've got past the first few inputs.

The frame store facility is something that is difficult to do without once you've experienced it. It would be nice to have enough power to hold a full

two-field picture and there are all manner of control improvements one could visualise at such time as several seconds of picture storage become economically feasible. But that's for another day.

There is a slight psychological dissatisfaction arising from the frame store in scan mode. It gives the false impression of being slower than it, of course, is. One misses the rapid picture jumping of conventional LV scan. Maybe the passage of time will change such a perception. (The frame store cannot be switched out of circuit.)

The SONY player feels well-made and there is a certain assuredness to its operation. It makes some interesting (albeit subdued) clunky noises when changing between certain functions and even in play is not the quietest of machines, giving off a fairly high-pitched whine that is audible across a small room and can be distracting with discs where the volume content is low. Speed-wise it's pretty pokey and manages to search a complete CAV disc side in 5 seconds. CLV takes a second or two longer. A specific chapter search is quicker on CLV than with one by time. The two speed side scan gives 20 second and 160 second side rates approximately. An LDR special timing is of side change - the amount of time it takes to disengage at the end of side one and recommence playing on side two - and this came out to 25 seconds, pretty much on a par with other front-loaders we have timed.





# YAMAHA CLV-1

The first thing that strikes you about the CLV-1 as you delve into the packing to retrieve it is that they've put the wrong piece of equipment into the box - they've put a CD player in by mistake. It's just too small to be anything else. The width of the drawer gives the game away. But it is a CD player too. It has a nice, solid-feeling case, a mixture of metal and plastic and.... Hey! There aren't any ventilation holes! What sort of technology is this?? (Thinks... no electronics, no heat.... another problem solved.) Of course there are electronics, but this must be YAMAHA doing their large scale chip integration thing again. Just over a year ago YAMAHA introduced their first LV player and it measured 435 x 116 x 410mm. This CD & LV player measures 340 x 108 x 400mm (W x H x D). In fact, the height measurement is deceptive as the CLV-1 has some fairly tall feet that raise it well off the shelf. The actual height of the player body is only 90mm.

The CLV-1 is the first combination player to come from a manufacturer other than PIONEER. It is the cheapest, the smallest, and boasts the best performance specs - 425 line horizontal resolution, 45dB video S/N. YAMAHA, in the manner of many Japanese companies, give their products Europeanised names. They call it 'Mr SMART'. This stands for 'Sound & Movie Art'.

The front panel is very simple. There is only an on/off switch and a drawer control. The illuminated panel signifies LV/CD, TV/Disc, and Play/Load status in separate windows. The main window puts out all the usual time/frame displays and registers programme repeat. There's a Digital Sound light that comes on with CDs or digital LVs.

The rear panel has one video and two sets of audio outputs - a pair for auto digital (there is no switching option on this output) and a pair for analogue, plus unusually, an extra mono output. There is also an 8-pin I/O computer port and some antennae connections.

Pressing the open button, as with the SONY, causes the drawer to push itself fully out and again it is the type of drawer that drops the disc down on to the spindle. The drawer has the usual cut-outs for the three disc sizes - 12, 20 & 30cm. After a disc is loaded, a slight push sets the drawer pulling back under its own power and play engages automatically. There is a little window in the drawer flap that allows you to see

in. There is green light in the machine to make a bit of a feature of this. It doesn't do much for CDs because the light is set too far forward to strike them, but with a full size disc it can produce a nice effect in a darkened room. Again you can see if your videodiscs are suffering any appreciable warp. YAMAHA suggest anything more than 1mm of warp at the disc edge (when placed on a flat surface) should require the disc to be flattened under weights before playing.

At this stage you begin to appreciate the design approach. The disc is in and playing - video, audio, or both - and there need be no more complication than that for the casual user. There are all manner of control options available should you want them, and these are on the remote. To its credit, it was possible to work out most of the basic functions without understanding the legends (again in Japanese). The remote is sensibly laid out. The inability to work through the instruction book may mean some features were missed. (The instruction book is comprehensive and well-illustrated, with brief caption-type instructions that look as though they convey their message clearly).

The electronically-generated screen displays on the CLV-1 are extensive. The machine, which basically follows all the control functions offered on the PIONEER models, is however more informative on-screen and does offer some embellishments control-wise.

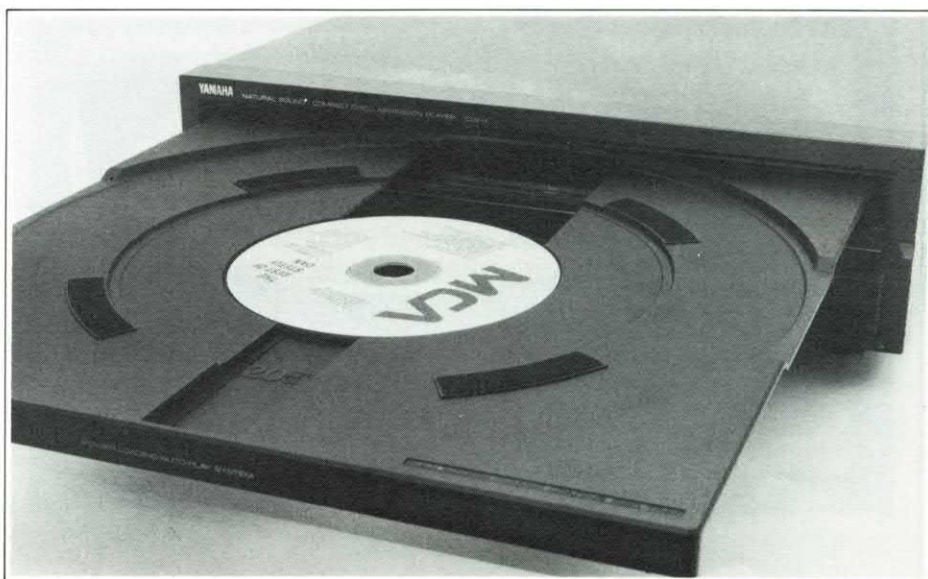
On switch-on you get a machine

identification ("Yamaha CD/LV System") and there are Start, End, Side ID, Disc Type, CX On, etc, etc displays plus those for the Programme and Search functions. The basic screen blank on which the information is displayed is a pleasant grey and the digits are white on black inset blocks. Additionally the digits change colour to define the current status even more precisely. In multi-speed, for example, the frame readout is in green letters. When you press still they change to mauve. In normal play they are in yellow. Once you know the colour scheme there is no confusion about what the player is doing.

Programing the player needs to be done either before play or by first putting the machine into stop (the disc stays in the player but disengages). It does not appear to be possible to programme it while a disc is in play.

In search, if you are in still frame, the player goes straight into play after finding the keyed-in frame, something of a break with convention. But, if after you have keyed in your search frame you press the still button instead, lo and behold, the player jumps to it and stays in still. They've thought of everything. If you are in multi-speed, as long as you press the multi-speed button after the frame is entered the player will

[ Below: As with the SONY player the YAMAHA CLV-1 ejects the drawer-tray fully out under power - and likewise retracts it without manual assistance. ]





find the frame and then continue playing in the same mode at the same rate. If you press the reverse multi-speed button it will go into reverse play after executing the search. (If all this sounds a trifle complicated the important thing to remember is that with the YAMAHA you don't just key in your frame/time and then press the search button. All the motion controls (Pause, Still, Multi-Speed etc) double up as search buttons and put the player into their own mode after the command is executed. While the player is not excessively endowed with remote control buttons, each button performs several functions. It would be quite easy to fill a page or two defining all the permutations offered. It's that comprehensive.

The LED readout on the front of the machine reads out elapsed time on CAV discs instead of a frame count. That is unless you command it to do otherwise. (Great! No more dividing frame numbers by 1800 to ascertain the playing time - the player does it for you.) One nice control function with CAV discs is the still button that, like a computer keyboard, goes into repeat if kept depressed. Usually to still-frame through a disc it is necessary to push the still button each time you wish to advance a frame and this is a bit tedious after twenty or thirty prods. On the CLV-1, keeping your finger on the still button sets the player off on an automatic frame advance (or reverse) at about a 1/8 speed rate until you take it off again.

With suitably endowed CDs the player will go as far as to do index searches. You can key in a track and then the index and the player will locate that part of the track.

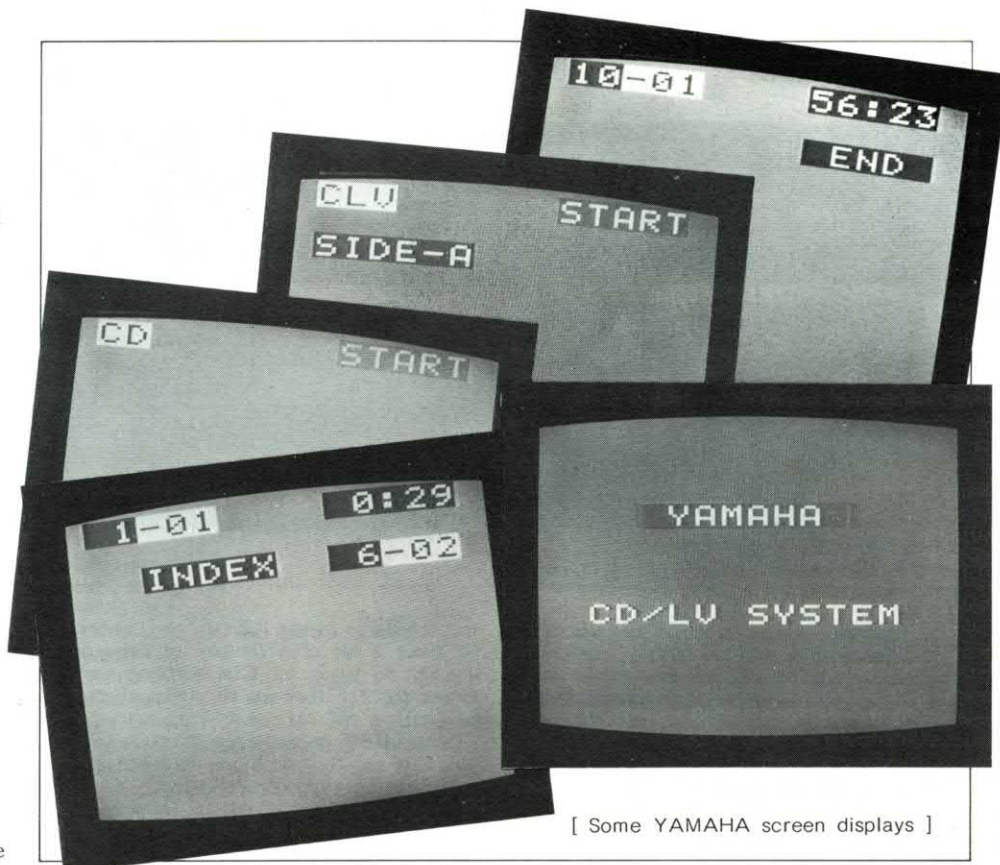
#### PERFORMANCE

The clarity and resolution is the best so far seen on an NTSC machine. Most of the Japanese manufacturers now quote picture specs for their players (they didn't used to) and there is an obvious element of one-upmanship involved here. The 370-line LD707 showed marginal improvement over the 350-line LD700 & CLD900, and the 400-line players such as the SONY continue the trend. The 425-line YAMAHA is a clear winner in resolving the fine detail you find in people's hair and similar picture content. The player extracts detail in discs thought already to have revealed their maximum information. The trade-off is a greater awareness of disc blemishes

- dropouts and spots - but not to a menacing degree. Japanese pressed discs were less affected by being so ruthlessly 'unmasked'.

The CLV-1 shows especially good colour purity. There is a sparkle and transparency to the colour rendition not observed on any NTSC player previously. NTSC colour (on disc anyway) has a tendency to be slightly pastely compared to PAL, but the CLV-1 is noticeably better in this respect. Response to heavy reds has been seen better on other players. Some people find the break-up of reds especially distracting, but providing you can accept a degree of turbulence it is passable in this area. Overall the CLV-1 would make you dissatisfied with the clarity of your existing NTSC machine.

The player is reasonably quiet in use, but one does notice the tracking noise (a fairly high frequency 'ticking') during quiet programme content. We've heard quieter PIONEER players.



[ Some YAMAHA screen displays ]

Where we did have real trouble with the player was with the sound, and it is not possible to say whether it was a sample defect or a design fault. Sound reproduction on CDs and digital LV discs is perfectly satisfactory, but analogue LV discs often suffer a persistent breakthrough of what sounds like the noise of the tracking optics leaking into the audio output. It doesn't happen on all discs, or all through others, but it is consistently in the same parts of discs on subsequent plays. Interestingly, the player also causes interference on an adjacent FM tuner and there would appear to be some screening fault hereabouts.

Access times are fairly typical. Search on CAV discs runs to about 6/7 seconds, CLV up to 15 seconds. A side scan takes a little under 30 seconds - a reasonable compromise. The disc changeover time is about 25 seconds. The remote, considering its complexity, is above average in convenience and used left-handed (as is the Editor's wont) all the most-used functions fall within the arc of the thumb's travel. Some raised horizontal ridges (to separate the main blocks of buttons) would have made it's use in the dark easier still.

#### A FINAL WORD

In spite of the sound problem with the CLV-1 (and maybe the desire for it to be a little quieter) it is difficult not to be over-awed. Even its bugs don't prevent almost an air of exhilaration arising from playing with it. If anyone had any doubts about making a combination player enough of an attractive and marketable proposition to interest the average punter (rather than the enthusiast) they would be dispelled by exposure to this machine. It seems YAMAHA already have the basic CD-Video product. It only requires slight modification to play the new clip discs. What's taking the others so long...?

[ Left: Doesn't this just say everything? No doubt they'll get even smaller yet! ]





# U.S.A. REPORT

New on the market is PIONEER's LD-838D LV player - which turns out to be the export version of the LD-8200D that we mentioned in the Japanese Report last issue. This player, retailing at \$550, is pretty close in performance specs and operational controls to the CLD-909 - but without the ability to play CDs. It has Digital Sound, though, and fills a gap in the lower price end of the US LV market. Dimensions are 420(W) x 102(H) x 402(D)mm and weight is 9.2kg.

IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT, up till now only an LV software supplier, are promising to come into the hardware market with the Imagevision player - a badge engineered LV machine from a non-PIONEER source. IMAGE are becoming suddenly very active in putting out new discs and have scheduled about 25 titles over the last three months. Their discs are being pressed now by 3M and titles range from *Sleuth* to *Plan 9 From Outer Space*.

PIONEER is talking of bumping up the maximum playing time of Digital Sound CLV discs to the full 60 minutes. The current situation is that putting the digital soundtrack on the disc has meant trimming the maximum playing time by 5 minutes, and recent releases such as *Indiana Jones & The Temple Of Doom* ended up being a 3-sider as a result. (*Indiana Jones* was a 'cheap' \$29.95 videotape release in the US, the LV disc ended up at \$39.95 because of the extra side.) Now that Digital Sound involves no compromises in playing time there will be a gradual move by PIONEER to issue all LV discs in digital.

PIONEER has lately been running full page ads in consumer magazines just showing some of the discs available in the LV format. The most recent concentrates on the digital discs and promises "Now over 100 titles on Digital Sound LaserVision". Some of PIONEER's previous advertising deserves a mention. A couple of years back PIONEER was using singer Ray Charles to endorse the videodisc product. Sample ads showed the bespectacled blind star's face reflected in an LV disc with the accompanying blurb proclaiming "The first video system I see anything in" before going on to enthuse about the superior sound quality of the videodisc over the normal sound output of domestic VCRs. In another, Uncle Ray advises "How to pick a video system with your eyes closed". After, again, going on about the sound quality the ad continues "the video experts were floored by the picture. They tell me nothing else even comes close".

As in the UK some software companies maintain an erratic commitment to the LV format. Both DISNEY and CBS/FOX have reputedly been hesitant about future LV releases but the former has, after a

period on non-activity, returned with some mouthwatering goodies. *Sleeping Beauty* and *Pinocchio* are scheduled for issue, *Pinocchio* having already been in the US LV catalogue, but this time a new DOLBY Stereo version is being issued in both CLV and CAV formats. *Sleeping Beauty* will also be a CAV/CLV option.

## RECENT LV RELEASES

(Note: In an attempt to harmonise with terminology used in Japan, Digital Sound discs are now identified by the abbreviation "Di". In future we will probably use the "DS" abbreviation for DOLBY Surround and dispense with the "MP" term we have been provisionally using.)

## JANUARY

**FILMS** - INVADERS FROM MARS, A BOY AND HIS DOG, SLEUTH, REFORM SCHOOL GIRLS, KRONOS, PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE, THE HEARTBREAK KID, CARMEN(Subs), TWELVE CHAIRS, CINDERELLA, RAN, LABYRINTH, NEVER TOO YOUNG TO DIE, AMERICAN ANTHEM(Di), SWEET LIBERTY, WINCHESTER '73(Dual Audio), 9 1/2 WEEKS(Di), APRIL FOOL'S DAY(Di), BLUE CITY, ECHO PARK, LADY JANE(Di), YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES(Di), DESERT BLOOM, HARDBODIES II, THE KARATE KID II, GUN FURY, LAST RESORT, UNDER THE CHERRY MOON(Di).

**MUSIC** - HOROWITZ IN MOSCOW(Di), KENNY & DOLLY/REAL LOVE(Di), MOTOWN TIME CAPSULE: THE 70's, ATLANTIC STARR(JR), JOE

JACKSON/BIG WORLD SESSIONS(JR), GRP ALL STARS/LIVE FROM THE RECORD PLANT(Di), LEE RITENOUR/LIVE(Di), WINDHAM HILL IN CONCERT(Di), BILLY JOEL/VIDEO ALBUM Vol 2(Di), THE ROD STEWART CONCERT VIDEO(Di), GODLEY & CREME/HISTORY MIX(JR, Di), THAT WAS ROCK(B & W).

**OTHER** - MERCEDES BENZ: 100 YEARS(CAV, Di), SPACE ARCHIVE Vol. 6: ENCOUNTERS(CAV), GARY SHANDLING/25th ANNIVERSARY, STEVEN WRIGHT/LIVE.

## FEBRUARY

**FILMS** - CREATURE, ANDROID, THE LIFT, TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE II, FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN(CLV/CAV), HOWARD THE DUCK, RUNNING SCARED(Di), A FINE MESS, OUT OF BOUNDS, CLUB PARADISE(Di).

**MUSIC** - SWEENEY TODD, LENA HORNE/THE LADY AND HER MUSIC, DER ROSENKAVALIER, PEGGY LEE/THE QUINTESSENTIAL(Di), PETER TOSH/LIVE, MOTORHEAD/ANOTHER PERFECT DAY(Jr), DIANA ROSS/VISIONS(Jr), ARGERICH/FRIERE(CAV,Di), THOMPSON TWINS/INTO THE GAP LIVE.

**OTHER** - ROBIN WILLIAMS.

## MARCH

**FILMS** - LIQUID SKY, STREAMERS, WHEN NATURE CALLS, HAMBURGER, SUSPICION, JOURNEY INTO FEAR, ALIENS, BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, MAN OF LA MANCHA, SHORT CIRCUIT, HALF MOON STREET, NAME OF THE ROSE, WHAT COMES AROUND, PSYCHO III(Di), TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, TOUCH OF EVIL, EXTREMITIES, TOP GUN(Di), THE ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN(1985), ABOUT LAST NIGHT, ARMED AND DANGEROUS, ARMED RESPONSE, EARLY FROST, STAND BY ME, THE AMBUSHERS, THE GODDESS, WOMAN OF DISTINCTION, DESERT HEARTS, SHANGHAI SURPRISE.

**MUSIC** - KYOTO VIVALDI/FOUR SEASONS (Image), ALABAMA/GREATEST VIDEO HITS(Di), NATASHA(Di), MOTOWN/LAST RADIO STATION, DENNIS DE YOUNG/THREE PIECE SUITE(Jr), BOBBY McFERRIN(Di), LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD(Di).

**OTHER** - LADY IN ALASKA(Image nudes), ROLLING IN THE SKY/SNOWBIRDS(CAV,Di), TOUCHE ROSS/VIDEO TAX GUIDE 1987, BEST OF SPIKE JONES VOL.1, WORLD SERIES HIGHLIGHTS 1986(CAV), ELVIS MEMORIES, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/BORN OF FIRE, NAT. GEO./GREAT WHALES, NAT. GEO./RAIN FOREST, NAT. GEO./SECRETS OF THE TITANIC.

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# CAT

BLUE HAWAII  
BLUES BROS, THE  
BRAINSTORM  
BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY  
CABARET  
CAT PEOPLE  
CHINATOWN  
CLASH OF THE TITANS  
COMPANY OF WOLVES, THE  
DEATH WISH  
DIRE STRAITS/ALCHEMY LIVE  
DRACULA  
ELVIS: ON TOUR  
ELVIS: THAT'S THE WAY IT IS  
ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ  
ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK  
EXTERMINATOR, THE  
FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, THE  
FLASHDANCE  
48 HOURS  
FRIDAY 13TH PART II  
GALLIPOLI  
GREASE  
HEAVEN CAN WAIT  
HENRY V  
HOWLING, THE  
HUNTER, THE  
ISLAND, THE  
JAMES LAST/LIVE IN LONDON  
JAWS  
KATE BUSH/THE SINGLES FILE  
KELLY'S HEROES  
LOVE STORY  
LUCKY LUKE/DAISYTOWN  
MISSION GALACTICA: THE CYCLON ATTACK  
NIGHTHAWKS  
1941  
OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN/LIVE  
OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN/PHYSICAL  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA  
ON GOLDEN POND  
ORDINARY PEOPLE  
PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT, THE  
POPEYE & FRIENDS IN OUTER SPACE  
RACCOONS ON ICE & CHRISTMAS RACCOONS  
RACE FOR YOUR LIFE CHARLIE BROWN  
ROUGH CUT  
ROXY MUSIC/THE HIGH ROAD  
SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER  
SEA WOLVES, THE  
SMOKEY & THE BANDIT  
SMOKEY & THE BANDIT II  
SOLDIER BLUE  
SOPHIE'S CHOICE  
SOUND OF MUSIC, THE  
STING, THE  
10 TO MIDNIGHT  
THING, THE  
TOM & JERRY I  
TRADING PLACES  
2001  
VINCENT VAN GOGH/PORTRAIT  
WARRIORS, THE  
WHO DARES WINS  
WILD GEESE, THE  
XANADU  
XTRO

## Never Released

At one time or another titles have been set for LV disc release but have never appeared. Those listed here have either been mentioned in PHILIPS catalogues, or sleeves are known to exist. In addition, there are probably that many titles again that have appeared in independently produced lists or are just pure rumour. Therefore, to simplify matters, if a title is not on the current list or in the deletions list then it didn't get released.

CASABLANCA (WARNER)  
DAIN CURSE, THE (EMBASSY)  
DOLLY PARTON/IN LONDON (PIONEER)  
EVIL THAT MEN DO, THE (PRECISION)  
FUNHOUSE (CIC)  
GRAF SPEE & BATTLESHIP BISMARCK (BBC)  
HALL & OATES/ROCK'N SOUL (PIONEER)  
KEY, THE (EMBASSY)  
KONTAKTE: GERMAN COURSE (BBC)  
MINK DE VILLE (POLYGRAM)  
OFFICER & A GENTLEMAN, AN (CIC)  
PALE RIDER (WARNER)  
PARASITE (EMBASSY)  
PARTNERS (CIC)  
PAUL YOUNG/VIDEO SINGLES (CBS/FOX)  
POLICE, THE/SYNCHRONICITY (PIONEER)  
SUDDEN IMPACT (WARNER)  
10CC/LIVE (GUILD)  
TERMS OF ENDEARMENT (CIC)  
39 STEPS, THE [1978] (RANK)  
TRINITY IS STILL MY NAME (EMBASSY)  
UNHINGED (CBS/FOX)  
WAR GAMES (WARNER)  
WEST SIDE STORY (WARNER)  
WHAM/THE VIDEO (CBS/FOX)  
WINTER OF OUR DREAMS (POLYGRAM)  
WORLD AT WAR (THAMES)

The new PHILIPS/SDC list is a definite improvement over what has gone before. For one, it's up-to-date with deletions, it has prices, and it's even been expanded to include discs with DOLBY Surround (wonder where they got that list from?). Unfortunately, the cover is a bit of an embarrassment, unless of course that rumoured combi player we've been expecting for so long from PHILIPS is not quite what we thought and in fact is going to be a VHS/CD combi.

Some corrections to the list are in order. The Ed did make a special trip across London one recent Sunday morning to cross-check the proposed catalogue, and it ended up pretty near correct given the rush nature of the exercise. Unfortunately some 15 or so errors have crept in between then and the finished list so, with Tippex and blue pen, readers are advised to make the following amendments.

CANNONBALL RUN - delete A  
FIRST BLOOD - add D  
FRENCH CONNECTION I - delete D  
NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN - add D  
PRIZZI'S HONOUR - add D  
SAHARA - add S  
SWORD & THE SORCERER - delete D  
UNCOMMON VALOUR - add D  
EDDY GRANT/LIVE - add D  
ELTON JOHN/CENTRAL PARK - add A  
MEETING OF THE SPIRITS - delete S  
- add A

VIDEOHITS - add S  
WHO/KIDS ARE ALRIGHT - add D  
ACADEMY OF ST MARTINS - add S  
GREASE II - delete S  
SPINAL TAP - add D  
WEIRD SCIENCE - delete D, S  
STARFLIGHT ONE - delete D

## Deletions

These discs are presently listed as deleted. Some are for contractual reasons, others are not considered worth re-pressing at present - though they could conceivably re-appear at a future date.

ABBA  
ABBA/THE MOVIE  
ABSOLUTION  
AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON, AN  
ANIMAL HOUSE  
APOCALYPSE NOW  
ASTERIX THE GAUL  
ATLANTIC CITY  
BBC CHILDREN'S FAVOURITES  
BEST OF BENNY HILL, THE

# UP



# ALOGUE

## Should Have Been Stereo

The titles below are known to have been made originally in stereo, but have appeared on disc in diminished mono condition. In the case of older film titles there could be many more that were originally made in stereo. STARFLIGHT ONE and SWORD & THE SORCERER have been included in this list now as their stereo condition is definitely wanting. Those marked DS should have been DOLBY Surround.

BARRY MANILOW/LIVE AT THE GREEK  
BIG RED ONE, THE (DS)  
BLUES BROS, THE  
BLOW OUT (DS)  
BUTCH CASSIDY & THE SUNDANCE KID  
CAPRICORN ONE  
CLASS REUNION (DS)  
EL CID  
ESCAPE TO VICTORY (DS)  
EXTERMINATOR, THE (DS)  
FIRESTARTER (DS)  
GOLDENGIRL (DS)  
GREASE II (DS)  
INFERNO (DS)  
ISLAND, THE (DS)  
KILLING MACHINE, THE (DS)  
MAD MAX II (DS)  
MANITOU, THE (DS)  
MR BILLION (DS)  
MY FAIR LADY  
1941  
NORMA RAE  
OKLAHOMA  
PATTON  
SEA WOLVES, THE (DS)  
SHOGUN ASSASSIN (DS) (Dutch)  
STARFLIGHT ONE (DS)  
STAYING ALIVE (DS)  
STRAW DOGS  
SWORD & THE SORCERER (DS)  
THING, THE (DS)  
TORA, TORA, TORA  
URGH! A MUSIC WAR (DS)  
WEIRD SCIENCE (DS)

## Cut Discs

Listed below are LV titles that have suffered cuts or are incomplete. Some films have been edited in different or even extended versions and so the disc need not be considered inferior. Reliable information on cuts in films (especially) is hard to come by and readers are invited to write in with evidence/information of other abbreviated titles.

There is a secondary list of titles that are 'under suspicion' - confirmation one way or the other on these would be especially welcome.

AIRPLANE II (One brief music cut)  
BLADE RUNNER (Longer version, + 4', exists)  
CAPRICORN ONE (Cut to fit one disc)  
CHILDREN OF THE CORN (Censor cuts)  
EAGLE HAS LANDED, THE (Originally 134')  
EL CID (Originally 180')  
GREYSTOKE (Different versions exist)  
GWENDOLINE (Censor cuts)  
INDIANA JONES (9 Censor cuts)  
KAGEMUSHA (179' version exists)  
LEGEND (Special shorter home video version)  
MAD MAX (Censor cuts - 48')  
MR BILLION ('Bad language' mutes)  
NIGHT THE LIGHTS WENT OUT IN GEORGIA  
(Listed 115')  
PRODUCERS, THE (Brief edits - see review)  
ROLLING STONES/VIDEO REWIND  
(Short cut to fit it one disc side)  
SPETTERS (Listed at 112', runs 103')  
STARFLIGHT ONE (Originally 155')  
STRAW DOGS (Originally 118')  
STAR TREK II (Two brief censorship cuts)  
U2/UNDER BLOOD RED SKY (Cut for disc by 6')  
URGH! A MUSIC WAR (Cut for disc from 124')  
VANISHING POINT (Listed at 107')  
WILD GEESE II (Cut for disc by 19')  
WHO DARES WINS (Cut for disc, listed 120')

These are under suspicion - CODENAME  
THE SOLDIER, COMMANDO, HIGH RISK,  
HUMUNGOUS, LAST AMERICAN HERO, REVENGE  
OF THE NINJA, ROAD GAMES, TIGHTROPE,  
YOUNG WARRIORS

## Video Reasonably-Nasties

These titles have been re-certified under the Video Recordings Act, 1984 and have either been passed with cuts or have not even been submitted for certification. The LV discs are now technically illegal products and may not be handled by way of sale/trade within the UK.

BREATHLESS  
EXTERMINATOR, THE  
GWENDOLINE  
JULIA  
KILLING MACHINE, THE  
LIANNA  
MOSES THE LAWGIVER  
QUEST FOR FIRE  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA  
REVENGE OF THE NINJA  
SAILOR WHO FELL FROM GRACE WITH THE  
SOLDIER BLUE [SEA, THE  
STREET OF THE DAMNED  
WARRIORS, THE

The listings on these pages are not definitive and amendments and additions from readers would be most welcome.

THE FAN and ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK appear to be erroneously listed with longer running times than should be the case - the disc versions are believed complete.

# DATE

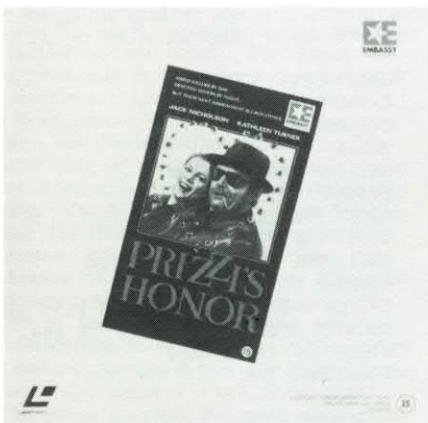


# DISC REVIEWS

## Prizzi's Honour

EMBASSY ELV 1855 £24.95  
CLV/CAV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1986 124mins (3 sides) Rated 15(V)

**Starring:** Jack Nicholson, Kathleen Turner, Robert Loggia, John Randolph, William Hickey, Lee Richardson, Michael Lombard, Anjelica Huston  
**Music:** Alex North  
**Director:** John Huston



This is good. In fact it's probably the most durable, repeatably viewable film to find its way onto disc since *Witness*. It takes a couple of viewings to catch all the subtleties of the intricate plot - concerning Charlie Partanna (Jack Nicholson), hit man for the powerful Brooklyn Mafia family, the Prizzis, and the beautiful Irene Walker (Kathleen Turner) with whom he falls rapturously in love. Unknown to Charlie, Irene is a professional killer herself and one of her most recent jobs just happens to have involved a long-time Prizzi employee. Blood is thicker than water, but in this case honour is seen to be thicker still, and the unravelling of the strands that lead the two of them to be out for each other are thoroughly involving to watch.

All the cast is excellent; Nicholson is entertainingly over-the-top; William Hickey quite superb as the wily old Don of the Prizzis. There is also an outstanding performance from Anjelica Huston as Maerose Prizzi - cut off by her father for 'jilting' Charlie. The 'reconciliation' scene between father and daughter (Side two: 0.10 - 0.14) I could watch a dozen times over.

There is a lot of attention to every detail of the production. It is a good script, well directed, well photographed, and well cut. I find the side divisions thoughtfully arranged, including the end of side one where the action continues for some three minutes after a 'natural' fade - these final minutes do complete the episode and propel the plot forward, and it looks as if someone actually thought about it.

It isn't an ultra widescreen film and, for once, the aspect ratio discrepancy so commonly obvious in video presentations didn't bother me. In short, *Prizzi's Honour* is a very satisfying movie to watch and have in one's collection. It has a substance and solidity about it, laced with an elegant tongue-in-cheek humour.

[ ALAN BELL ]

**The Disc:** Meriting lead position in this issue's reviews, on account of the CLV/CAV presentation, *Prizzi's Honour* - as a disc - has some good and bad points. In respect of the picture the colour is a little pale and the image a trifle grainy and contrasty. In isolation it looks quite pleasant - it is fairly sharp and detailed - but one doubts it actually looked quite like this as a film. That, then, is a matter of taste.

The sound is less controversial. There are a couple of modest defects that will distract some readers. The track is in reasonably clear optical stereo (mostly the music - it's not an 'eventful' stereo track), but there are occasional thumps and creaks - probably less than a dozen in total - throughout the movie. In addition, the right audio channel on part of side one (c. 0.18 - 0.28) has some sort of faint voice print-through that sounds like you are picking up a stray radio transmission on your system.

The best part, of course, is the last CAV side. This isn't the sort of title that we'd have originally picked to break the mould, so to speak. We asked first for "a Bond" (ignored), and then for side two of *Legend* (too late, the side-splits had already been done). *Prizzi's Honour* just happened to be the first title to come along with a short third side and it isn't really the sort of action/effects type movie that cries out for CAV. That said, it's a guarantee that there are at least two points on side three that you'll use the still/slow-motion buttons. So it's worked out well after all. And besides, in spite of the comments about the image, doesn't the film look pretty in still frame? - the grainy effect is better than in real time!

## Indiana Jones & The Temple Of Doom

CIC-PARAMOUNT LVH 2185 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1984 112mins Rated PG(V)

**Starring:** Harrison Ford, Kate Capshaw, Amrish Puri, Roshan Seth, Philip Stone, Ke Huy Quan  
**Music:** John Williams  
**Director:** Steven Spielberg

The image quality on *Indiana Jones & The Temple Of Doom* is a bit of

an improvement over *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. Tonally it is very similar, but there is less noise than in the earlier transfer. It may not appear too promising in the smoky, opening night-club scene, but as soon as the first close-up shots around the table occur the difference can be easily detected. It's still not as sharp and detailed a transfer as the LV disc is capable of reproducing, but at least it's not a step backwards. That was the inevitable fear when it became apparent that a quantity of cuts was to be made for the benefit of the British censor which might have involved some unwelcome generation loss to achieve.

The sound is more detailed and energetic in the treble region this time round.

It's quite an exciting film. The publicity for the American release suggested (in small letters at the bottom of the ad) that the movie "may be too intense for younger children", but UK tots will no doubt find this version, with its nine cuts, more palatable. The cuts are certainly not clumsily done, though the continuity does become a little confused in places on side two. (The cuts were made in conjunction with LUCASFILM in Hollywood. The film wasn't just chopped up here without referring back to the makers, as is often the case.)



Sometimes the film is confusing because there is just too much going on on the smaller screen, but in spite of the fact that the magazine has never had a kind word to say about the picture quality of any LUCASFILM transfer, they do always manage the transition to the TV format in as complementary manner as could be imagined.

The end of side change is intensely annoying, coming as it does right in the heat of the action. A minute later is the obvious edit point - where Indy pulls his hat through the door and the stone crashes down - and there is plenty of room on the side for it to



have been done this way.

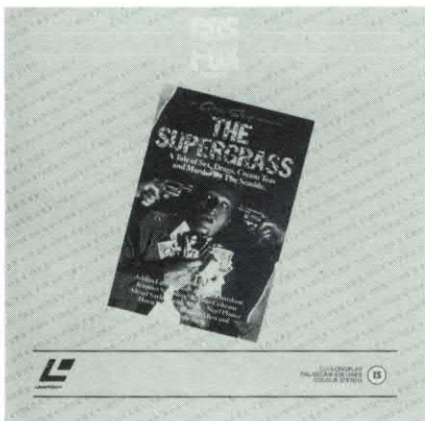
There is little need to tempt folks to buy the disc by recounting details of the plot, because by the time this appears, most everyone the slightest bit interested in the title will probably already have it.

## The Supergrass

CBS/FOX 3039-70 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1985 103mins Rated 15(V)

**Starring:** Adrian Edmondson, Peter Richardson, Jennifer Saunders, Robbi Coltrane, Alexei Sayle, Keith Allen, Nigel Planer, Dawn French, Ronald Allen  
**Director:** Peter Richardson

There is a rather unfortunate moment early on in this Michael White/Comic Strip presentation where the slow-witted Constable Collins (Michael Elphick) - who has just arrested Dennis Carter (Adrian Edmondson) - justifies to a disbelieving fellow officer his impending sixth visit to the cinema to see *ET*. All the previous viewings are written off for being "not with Dolby Sound". *The Supergrass* is indeed with Dolby Sound, but there is the distinct impression of it being something of an afterthought to what must have started out as just another in the series of Comic Strip TV shorts. The image has the strained look of a 16mm production about it. One of the more obvious economies involved was to dispense with a full lighting crew. There are unfortunate hue variations in the middle of certain scenes too. The end result is no worse than many made-for-TV productions - but it doesn't quite have the look of a first-league feature either.



Our hero is Dennis, the supergrass. He is a bit of wally - you can recognise the tell-tale signs. He lives in a pre-fab in Battersea and in his roll-neck sweater and trousers that stop a few inches short of his boot-tops (which he obviously reckons looks the business) has a hard time getting folks to take him seriously. He is prone to shoot his mouth off in order to attract attention, and in desperation to win over a disinterested girlfriend concocts a fanciful story about his involvement in a drug-running operation in Devon (from where he's just returned from being on holiday with his mum). Choosing to do this in the local boozer, within earshot of P.C. Collins, results in the boys in blue believing every word of it and financing Dennis on a two-week freebie back to Devon to catch

the rest of the gang, as part of the deal for turning Queen's evidence.

For Comic Strip devotees the extended episode works quite well. The editing is a little leisurely but the film is not padded in any way. It concludes rather raggedly, with odd strands of the plot not fully resolved and a rather unnecessary confrontation with a boat, but most everything that's meant to be funny is.

Uncompromisingly 'British' films are a pretty rare occurrence - especially on disc. *The Supergrass* is such a film, and while not everyone's cup of tea, makes a welcome change from the general flow of new releases.

## A Chorus Line

EMBASSY ELV 2183 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1985 112mins Rated PG

*A film musical with music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Edward Kleban. Choreography by Jeffrey Hornaday. Directed by Richard Attenborough*

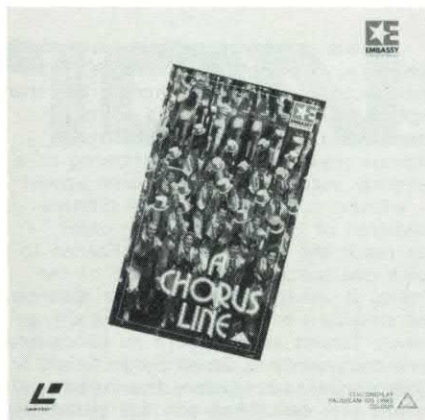
Set almost entirely within the confines of the auditorium of a New York theatre, *A Chorus Line* is not at first glance the most cinematic of subjects for a big musical film. Neither does its director immediately spring to mind as the most likely candidate for the job. The result is an entirely satisfactory one, however. At least half an eye must have been on potential TV/video sales as although this is a wide screen presentation it has transferred astonishingly well to the smaller dimensions of the home screen.

The story concerns an audition being held for the chorus line of a new show. The hundreds of initial applicants are whittled down in fairly short order to the final sixteen - from whom eight are to be selected. Actually there are seventeen hopefuls on stage; Cassy, a former soloist who has been 'resting' insists on taking her place alongside the others. She used to live with the choreographer and it is because of this he lets her audition, but we can be sure that their former relationship will not automatically win her a place.

We get to know a good deal more about the individuals concerned when the choreographer (Michael Douglas, most effectively cast against type) insists that they bare their souls - explaining their reasons for choosing their perilous careers, and going into their backgrounds and their hopes. This plot device is intended to draw the audience into the film and, by and large, it works. The episodes vary from a few lines of mumbled reminiscence to full-blown production numbers with virtuoso dance routines. Some numbers are, to put it kindly, over-sentimental, but they are presented with such conviction by the performers that even if we do not find the sentiments credible, we believe that they themselves do. At least a couple of the songs are candidates for instant replay. The big ensemble *One* is the best known part of the score, but it by no means eclipses the rest - which deserves to be better known. I understand there is at least one song appearing in the film which was not in the stage version. If this is indeed the case, the addition

certainly blends well.

This is a disc which would have benefitted tremendously from the incorporation of chapter stops, and it is most disappointing that the facility has been omitted. (*A Chorus Line* and *Sweet Dreams* were both scheduled to be chaptered.) I suppose it would be feasible to go through it, noting the time code for each number, but it is not quite the same thing is it?



The picture quality is, at first sight, satisfactory - without being outstanding. There is a degree of video noise - but not enough to be seriously annoying. The colour is a little pastelly and the definition about average. The soundtrack is clean and apparently undistorted, but some of the sustained notes are a little strained and there is a certain dullness apparent. You do tend to notice an element of hiss. In conjunction with the picture none of this may intrude, but it does become noticeable with the disc used in audio-only mode. From reports, the US disc well justified its release with a digital audio track. Were such an option available in PAL the exercise would not be worthwhile.

[ PAUL RONCHETTI ]

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## MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS Series 2

*Conceived, Written & Performed by:*  
Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry  
Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones,  
Michael Palin  
*Animations by:* Terry Gilliam  
*Producer & Director:* Ian MacNaughton  
*Flower Arrangements by:* D.P. Gumby

Trends in humour often appear revolutionary. Re-appraisals benefitting the perspective of hindsight more often than not show evolution to be a more apt assessment. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* grew from a cult following to a comedy success of international appeal - without suffering the usual dilution required of British humour in order to reach the wider market. Forced to pick one special characteristic of the series it would probably be the absence of structure to what was essentially a revue format show. Where no punch-line or conclusion was deemed beneficial, or indeed could be written, the sketch would just end. "And now for something completely different" maintained the pace for the more alert viewer who was saved the traditional (and usually foreseen well beforehand) conclusion that slowed the pace of conventional humour.

But that is not to suggest that all the shows were carelessly compiled. Elements introduced early on in a programme (and apparently dispensed with) would unexpectedly re-appear later on (often bizarrely out-of-context), and the controlled re-viewing afforded by these video releases shows some of the more complex productions to be most meticulously thought out.

Anarchic aspects of the series owe much to radio programmes such as *The Goon Show*, and the lapses in taste to the likes of *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again* (in which Cleese was a dominant member - with a noticeable penchant for sick humour that became doubly effective when TV viewers were allowed to see what a straight, respectably-suited gent he appeared to be).

The formless style of TV comedy was arguably most successfully pioneered by Spike Milligan during his long series of *Q* shows that were magnificently shambolic and foreshadowed the *Python* disapproval of the formally-ended sketch. Milligan's shows were really nothing less than surrealist happenings, with the various components of an anticipated sketch put together in front of the camera (without the slightest hint of anything so mundane as a script being in existence) and the cast members allowed to get on with it - whatever it might have been.

*Monty Python* was more disciplined than that - but it helped if the viewer could let go of reality sufficient to enjoy the often ludicrous juxtapositions.

In these four discs, containing the second series of shows (the first series has not been released in any form, the third series is only available on tape), it is the videoed studio sequences that still have the most impact and convey the spirit of the show most effectively. The picture quality on these segments is surprisingly good and the master tapes appear to be in better condition than many other

of the more recent BBC titles that have come out on disc. There are variations in the quality of the video segments - some are fractionally duller and grainier - but all are more than acceptable. There are some isolated tape defects that are only to be expected on videotapes of this vintage (yes, 15 years is quite a long time in electronic recording technology), but their intrusive effect is so slight as to hardly warrant any more of a mention than that. But while the video sequences are remarkably clear and sparkly looking, history is once again let down by the BBC's extensive use of 16mm film for the location recording, thereby leaving large chunks of the programmes looking dull, unsharp and grainy in comparison. The mixed video/film sketches show poor continuity as a result. The other drawback of the filmed location sequences is that the discipline of filming a series of shots - that may not be performed in the correct order - diminishes the intensity of the performance. Rarely are the members of the cast seen to be reacting with one another in the manner of the studio sketches, where visible beads of perspiration and changes in the colour of the complexion help convey the involvement of performance before a live audience. The audience reaction is nicely recorded and one is not distracted by overloud, forced laughter. Only in some of Terry Gilliam's animation does the audience reaction cause distraction. (The animation is another area where the narrow-gauge film stock diminishes the visual impact.)

The shows are presented in the correct order and (seemingly) complete. To be honest, such an overpowering compilation probably limits the appeal of the discs to die-hard fans. Contrary to rosy nostalgic imaginings, not all *Monty Python* shows were achingly funny, and there are several episodes that only have ten strong minutes out of a thirty minute total. There is a lot to be said for offering condensed compilations of highlights for the average punter - preferably in addition to these completist issues.

There are lots of favourite sketches that do not occur in these 13 shows - no *Lupins*, no *Norwegian Blues*, no *Hairdressers Ascending Everest*, nor even a *5 Minute Argument Sketch*. The discs are similarly bereft of *Ann Elk Presenting Her Brontosaurus Theory*, the *Lumberjack Song*, the *Upper Class Twits Obstacle Race*, and the essential *Whicker Island*. What does appear in the discs is listed below with the aid of an approximated description of the main sketches - in the vague but well-intentioned hope that memories will be triggered sufficiently to recall the contents. The sketch names given are not the "official" ones, although these are used where available. Unfortunately there are no Chapters on the discs and, as far as can be made out, only the last disc benefits from the seconds-encoding that might make it that more accessible when a future generation of domestic players shows up able to exploit this feature. The pressings are from the end '85/early '86 period and (if the review copies are typical) are all good clean pressings. Even though several of the disc sides run to 60 minutes they suffer no problems with crosstalk. (The programmes are all

presented on disc in sequence with credits and unbroken in any way.)

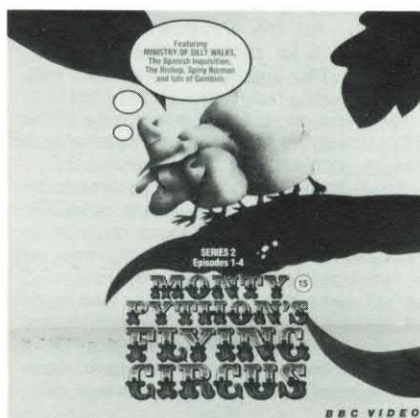
If it was a case of recommending only one disc for the less committed purchaser the first one is undoubtedly the strongest and should be acquired before contemplating any of the others. Apart from the fact that it contains many of the funniest sketches (as well as some of the best-known - not necessarily the same thing!) it also contains four programmes and therefore wins out on the basis of sheer value for money. The second disc is the weakest and subsequent dabbings should favour either discs three or four.

And now for something completely detailed.....

### Ministry Of Silly Walks

Episodes 1 - 4

BBC VIDEO	BBCL 7005	£19.99
CLV	COLOUR MONO	
1970	120mins	Rated 15



#### Episode 1 (15/9/70)

**Face The Press** - Minister For Home Affairs debates with a small patch of brown liquid. **New Gas Cooker Sketch** - Mrs G. Pinnit takes delivery of her new gas cooker. Remember the never-ending queue of gas men? This dissolves into Cleese's **Ministry Of Silly Walks** that is much shorter than one recalls. The silly walk routine was later worked into one of the *Fawlty Towers* episodes. **Ethel The Frog** - The Doug & Dinsdale Piranha brothers story. Spoof documentary on lives of East-End villains.

#### Episode 2 (22/9/70)

**Learning To Fly** - Extended sketch with Terry Jones taking flying lessons from Graham Chapman. Jones ends up flying plane that is hi-jacked and sketch concludes with hi-jack of Luton bound single-decker bus. **Ewan McTeagle Profile** - Scottish poet McTeagle (Terry Jones) has devoted his life to perfecting his work based on the theme "Will ya' lend us a quid. I'm expecting a postal order any day now". **Psychiatrist Milkman** - Eric Idle plays psychiatrist milkman. **It's In The Mind** - The phenomenon of deja-vu. Ties into the previous milkman sketch. Both are somewhat over-extended.

#### Episode 3 (29/9/70)

This is the **Spanish Inquisition** show, a wonderfully silly idea. Palin, Jones and Gilliam (whose facial expressions are magnificent) turn up 'unexpectedly' throughout the show in their bright red cardinal's garb and totally out of



context with whatever is going on at the time. Includes famous torture scene - "Poke her with the soft cushions, Biggles". **Door To Door Joke Salesman** - Idle is spivvy joke vendor flogging novelties - "Guaranteed to break the ice at parties". **Wuthering Heights, The Semaphore Version** - More inspired lunacy. Trailer for forthcoming **Julius Caesar On An Aldis Lamp** too. Show concludes with **Old Bailey Court Scene** with charades in progress. When the final punch-line "I didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition" occurs the robed trio are on the other side of London and rush frantically to Court (on a bus), arriving just after the final credits have rolled and the screen has gone blank, Palin blurting out an exasperated "Oh, bugger" at their tardiness. (Picture quality on this show a little on the dull side.)

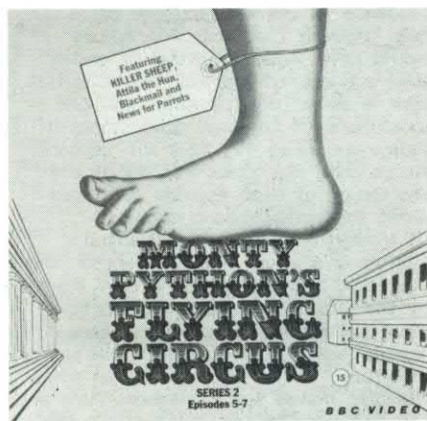
#### Episode 4 (20/10/70)

Several **Gumbies** present in this show. **Architect Sketch** - Does freemasonry help architects win contracts? Some manic Cleese trying to convince council officials of the merits of his abattoir-for-houses design. **Shady Insurance Dealer** - Palin offers low-cost, no-cover insurance. Is brought to book by the Bishop. **The Bishop** is spoof of a TV crime series with the American-voiced Bishop (Jones) as fleet-footed combatant of evil. From C Of E Films. **A Poet In Every Home. At The Chemist.**

### Killer Sheep

Episodes 5 - 7

BBC VIDEO BBCL 7042 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1970 88mins Rated 15



#### Episode 5 (27/10/70)

**Blackmail** - Excellent spoof of TV show with Palin as slimey host confronting viewers on the air with their sexual indiscretions. "No, sir, we don't morally censure you, we just want the money". **Royal Society For Putting Things On Top Of Other Things** - What it says. **School Hall Drama - Seven Brides For Seven Brothers. Butcher Sketch** - Idle plays insulting butcher. **Boxing with Ken Clean-Air System** - Filmed bio of British boxing no-hope (Cleese).

#### Episode 6 (3/11/70)

**L.F. Dibley, Film-maker** - Terry Jones as amateur film-maker who has had all his best films (*Rear Window*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *2001, Finians Rainbow*) stolen by more well-known directors. Starts off with Dibley's 'original' version of

Lindsay Anderson's *If. Dung* - With every third title ordered from the book-of-the-month club you get 3cwt of dung. Cleese delivers it in the middle of Palin's swish dinner party. **Super Super** - Eric Idle in cruel satire of superficial David Frost-type media personality. **Election Night Special** - The Silly Party make great gains.

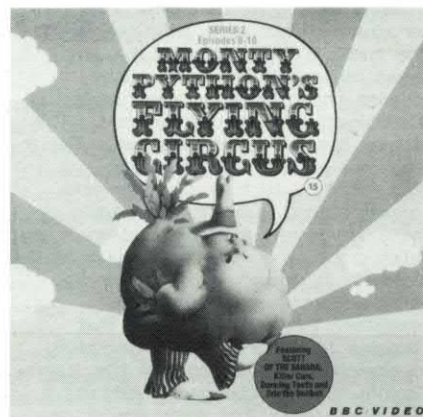
#### Episode 7 (10/11/70)

**The Attila The Hun Show** - Done TV sitcom style. Nice idea but lacks impact being shot on cheap film stock. **Strip Politics** - Terry Jones plays Secretary Of State For Commonwealth Affairs who does striptease while explaining the current policy on agricultural subsidies. Splendidly done. **Westminster Sex Scandal** - Interviews with House Of Commons groupies. **Killer Sheep** - Not totally successful blend of animation and live action. Has nice bunch of news broadcasts for various animal groups, read by Palin. **News For Parrots** leads into screwy adaptation of *Tale Of Two Cities* (adapted by Joey Boy) that, regrettably, only lasts a few seconds. **Village Idiots** - Documentary send-up justifying the role of the village idiot in present-day society. **Test Match Report** - From the commentary box, or is it the bar? **Open The Box** - Spoof quiz show. Cleese as host, Jones as batty old woman who only wants the star prize - a blow on the head. (This show only just over 27 minutes long.)

### Scott Of The Sahara

Episodes 8 - 10

BBC VIDEO BBCL 7043 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1970 90mins Rated 15



#### Episode 8 (17/11/70)

**Archaeology Today** - Michael Palin as smarmy discussion programme host obsessed by the physical height of his guests. Cedes to **Flaming Star**, a spoof Hollywood archaeology musical. **Marriage Registry** - Idle wants to trade in last week's wife. **Mr Snivelling Little Rat-Faced Git** - Jones as unfortunately-named party guest. **Hank & Roy Spim, Mosquito Hunters. Judge Drag Sketch** - Palin & Idle as gay judges. **The Life & Gloves of Ludvig Van Beethoven** - Inspired sketch of Cleese as demented composer ("Sod the sugar-bowl") struggling in rat-infested abode.

#### Episode 9 (24/11/70)

**Naughty Bits** theme runs through show. **Bruce Mania** - Bruce, Bruce, Bruce & Bruce welcome pommy Michael to

Woolamaloo University's Philosophy Dept. **Plastic Surgeon Sketch. Army Drilling** - Derbyshire Light Infantry demonstrate 'bad-temper' marching, followed by the 2nd Armoured Division's 'camping it up' close-order drill. **Verifast Plane Co** - Palin & Idle running dodgy airline. **Batley Towns-Womens Guild Re-enact Historical Tableaux** - Everyone a punch-up. **Murder Enquiry** - Stage play skit.

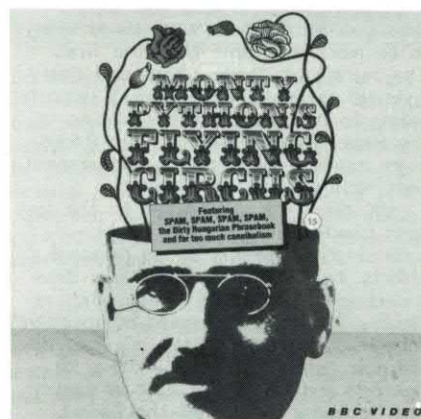
#### Episode 10 (1/12/70)

**Film Review** - Extended send-up of TV film review show. Eric Idle introduces the new Longeur avant-garde work, followed by the location report from Devon where **Scott Of The Sahara** is being shot. This is a long filmed segment of variable merit but still funny for Palin's hand-to-hand fight with the stuffed lion. **Eric The Halibut** - Another filmed sketch with Cleese at the Post Office attempting to buy a licence for his pet fish.

### Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam

Episodes 11 - 13

BBC VIDEO BBCL 7044 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1970 90mins Rated 15



#### Episode 11 (8/12/70)

**Conquistador Coffee Campaign** - Cleese & Idle discuss reasons for failure of advertising campaign. **Exchange & Mart Job Interview. Dead Body** - Send-up of '30s stage play where plot details are obsessively tied to intricacies of the British Rail timetable. (Play's author is Neville Shunt). Leads into **Late Night Line-Up** skit. **Crackpot Religions** - A coiffeured Eric Idle does religious hard-sell. **How Not To Be Seen** - The art of camouflage.

#### Episode 12 (15/12/70)

**The Hungarian Phrase Book** - Series of sketches revolving around court proceedings against publisher of phrase book with wrong (and insulting) translations. **World Forum** - Karl Marx, Lenin, Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung discuss burning issues of the day, which mostly turn out to be questions on football. **Ypres 1914** - Send-up of cliched war drama. **Overacting Hospital. Flower Arranging With D.P. Gumby** - Only 30 seconds long unfortunately. **Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam** - Another gem, again hardly five minutes long but stands test of time supremely well.

#### Episode 13 (22/12/70)

Show theme of **The Royals Tuning In. Coal Mining Dispute. Bird Watchers' Egg Collecting. Insurance Sketch** - The



Royals tune in at this point. With Reginald Bosaquet. **Intensive Care Unit** - Rather weak film sketch of bandaged patients forced to endure military-style discipline. **Adrift In A Lifeboat**. **Funeral Parlour Sketch** - Cleese comes to enquire about mother's burial, or possibly eating her. This is an interesting closing few minutes. There is a substantial drop in picture quality throughout this sequence that suggests it might have been left out of later repeats and only resurrected for video from a secondary source. The scene is in excellent bad taste but the intrusion by the supposedly offended audience looks like a put-up job, even though some do seem to be taking it seriously.

## Spies Like Us

WARNER PEL 11533 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1985 98mins Rated PG(V)

**Starring:** Chevy Chase, Dan Aykroyd, Steve Forrest, Donna Dixon, Bruce Davison, Bernie Casey, William Prince, Tom Hatten

**Director:** John Landis

Whether it would hold true for subsequent viewings or not, the second time you watch *Spies Like Us* is likely to be more enjoyable than the first. The pairing of Chevy Chase and Dan Aykroyd promises more than it initially seems to deliver, but this updating of the Hope/Crosby *Road* pictures (Hope even makes a brief cameo appearance) does have some good moments.

UK disc fans missed out on the last John Landis film *Into The Night* - surprisingly so seeing as his previous efforts *Animal House*, *The Blues Bros*, *American Werewolf In London* and *Trading Places* have proved comparatively popular. (Needless to say, all four discs are now deleted!) In *Spies Like Us* Aykroyd and Chase are cast as two civil servants roped into the Secret Service to serve as (unknown to them) expendable decoys in a plot by some miscreants in the Military to provoke a US/Soviet nuclear confrontation.



Dan Aykroyd had a hand in writing the story, contributed to the screenplay and is the more engaging of the two characters. His delivery of great long lines of semi-technical jargon devoid of punctuation and breathing spaces is something of a trademark, and the device is well in evidence here. He also has a gift for just looking effortlessly stupid when the occasion demands. Chevy Chase, on the other

hand, is presented as something of a heel - his underhand attempts at cheating in the Service entry exam (a rather overdone scene in itself) would hardly make an audience warm to the character - and he doesn't have enough slapstick to lighten the image. From the comfort of their Washington desk jobs the two naive spies are whisked off to the deserts of Pakistan before making their way to the snowy Russian wastes where their goal, a mobile ICBM launcher, lies waiting to be captured.

The film is full of humorous touches that could easily be missed by the casual viewer. The fleetingly-seen emblem on the Russian police car portrays a grizzly bear grasping a phallic-looking piece of local architecture in a rather suspect manner. And when the action transfers to their bleak log-cabin outpost, the internal wall decorations are seen to consist solely of film posters for *Dr. Zhivago* and *Reds*. The movie also continues the trend of *Into The Night* in introducing a lot of film personalities in bit parts - Michael Apted, Constantin Costagavras, Terry Gilliam, Ray Harryhausen, Larry Cohen etc. Even B.B. King, whose music featured heavily in *Into The Night*, turns up in person this time to utter a few lines of dialogue.

*Spies Like Us* shows signs of being a well-budgeted film that has failed to perform in quite the manner anticipated. One listing gave the running time as some ten minutes or so longer than the disc, and there have even been suggestions that stereo prints of the movie did exist in the US. (The US disc is the same mono version as the PAL one - the same length too.) Certainly there are some well-defined sound effects that confuse the ear into thinking the film is in stereo (the clashing swords of the Ninja attackers, for example) but it is definitely mono. The audio is from an optical track and shows reasonable dynamics with touches of sibilance in some passages. It's enjoyable at modest volume. The picture quality is only average. There are some scrappy reel changes (evidenced by such as the dramatic colour/contrast jump in the middle of the exam scene) and now and again you catch sight of a mesh patterning on the picture. It doesn't prevent the disc being watchable but there is a consistent lack of fine detail that becomes frustrating when attempting to observe fringe aspects of the frame. Tonally, though, the image exhibits a nice open feel. The snow scenes on side two tend to be the most pleasing picture-wise.

## Police Academy III

WARNER PEL 20022 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1985 80mins Rated PG(V)

**Starring:** Steve Guttenberg, Bubba Smith, David Graf, Michael Winslow, Marion Ramsey, Leslie Easterbrook, Art Metrano, Tim Kazurinsky, Bobcat Goldthwait, George Gaynes  
**Director:** Jerry Paris

It doesn't usually pay to see other magazine reviews before committing pen to paper - for fear of ending up just regurgitating something you'll have already read. This time, though, it

would only be fair to admit to being made aware of the theme in *Police Academy III* from such a source. Otherwise any semblance of a plot would have probably gone unnoticed amidst the formless chaos.

The twist is that former adversaries, gang-leader Zed and put-upon shopkeeper Mr Sweetchuck (Tim Kazurinsky - who is remarkably reminiscent of '60s TV character Hiram Holiday), become fellow recruits in Lassard's Academy Of Police Etiquette & Deportment. To add an extra bit of tension, the City has decided that it no longer needs two police training schools and either Lassard's outfit or that of the scheming Mauser (Art Metrano) has to go.



Some characters have been dispensed with and a few new ones added. The story is possibly a little thin and the production somewhat patchy, but the movie shows definite improvement over *Police Academy II*. Art Metrano was the best addition in that one and is similarly appealing here. The movie is let down by a rather dull chase sequence at the end and one can't but help thinking that *Police Academy* would have made a better TV series than a bunch of movies. As it is this film is down to 80 minutes and one looks forward to some good stunts in *Police Academy V*. This will probably fit on both disc sides in CAV if the shortening of each episode continues along the established pattern.

If anything, picture and sound quality is a slight improvement on the first disc and the image is only marred by the subdued presence of the fine mesh patterning effect that makes some scenes look a little grainy on larger monitors. To all intents and purposes the disc makes for a pleasant view and the film is a better follow-up to the original movie than the last outing.

## The New York City Ballet

SPECTRUM 790 140 1 £15.99  
CAV COLOUR STEREO  
1974 107mins (4 sides)

**Featuring:** Karin von Aroldingen, Jean-Pierre Bonnefous & the New York City Ballet  
**Music by** Tchaikovsky, Bizet, & Brahms  
**Costumes by** Karinska  
**Choreography by** George Balanchine

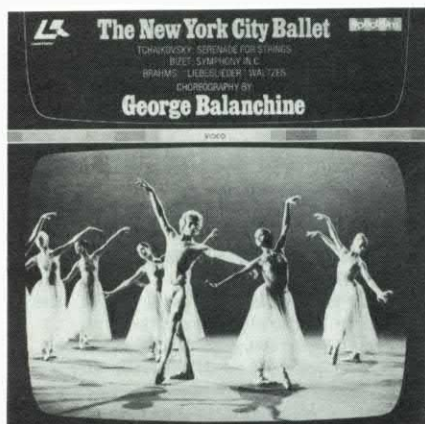
The discs are a compilation of three one-act ballets illustrating the choreographic art of George Balanchine. Balanchine was born into a musical Russian family in 1904 and studied music at the same time as he was a



student at the Imperial Ballet School in St Petersburg.

In 1921 he joined the State Ballet but his musical training was to greatly influence him in his choreography later. He was a gifted dancer but when he was 20, in 1924, he left Russia to join Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes as ballet master and dancer. Injury, however, soon forced him to abandon dancing in favour of choreography. In 1928 he created *Apollo* - to music by Stravinsky - and his choreographic reputation was further enhanced. In 1933 he was invited to start a ballet school and company in America by the influential Lincoln Kirstein. He staged *Serenade* (which is included on these discs) and also worked on Broadway and in Hollywood. In 1946, in association with Lincoln Kirstein, he started Ballet Society - which was to become the New York City Ballet.

Balanchine is a master of the classic style and the New York City Ballet is still the only authentic performing company staging his creations, although he allows other companies to perform his works as well.



#### Serenade (Side 1 - 31')

The music here is Tchaikovsky's *Serenade For Strings In C* with the third and fourth movements transposed and the ballet was the first that Balanchine created in the US in 1934. Originally this plotless ballet was based on a series of exercises for his first group of students, to show them the differences between work in the practice room and actual performance. The music was the immediate inspiration for the work, which includes many of the incidents that occurred in the class as the ballet was built up. The piece is in three sections and there is no set. *Symphony in C* (Side 2 - 30')

In 1947 Balanchine created this ballet for his debut at the Paris Opera while he was guest choreographer there. When he returned to New York the original title *Le Palais de Cristal* was changed to *Symphony In C* when it entered the repertory of the New York City Ballet in March 1948.

In 1855 Georges Bizet was still a student. He wrote the *Symphony In C* just after he had won the music section of the Prix de Rome scholarship, but it was not performed till 1935. As one would expect the music is exuberant and tuneful, and although the ballet has no plot, each movement of the symphony is treated to a different balletic sequence. Again the entire ballet is danced on a plain stage with a blue-grey background and no set or

props. The precision and verve of the company is well-illustrated in this particular ballet.

#### Liebeslieder Waltzes (Side 3 - 23')

Brahms composed two sets of liebeslieder waltzes for a quartet of voices and a piano duet; on side three the waltzes are from *Opus 52* (1862) and on side 4 *Opus 65*.

Here the setting is a 19th century drawing-room with sofas and chairs set against the perimeter wall. The singers and pianists, in period costume, are placed on the stage right. Four formally dressed couples listen to the music but soon the infectious lilt of the waltz overcomes their reserve and they begin to dance. The women are dressed in long satin dresses and low-heeled shoes and the men in evening dress. Decorum is preserved but the choreography catches the lilt and emotional nature of the music admirably.

#### Neue Liebeslieder Waltzes (Side 4 - 23')

The second set of waltzes is danced on the terrace with the women in three-quarter length tulle dresses and ballet shoes and the dance treatment becomes more fast-flowing and balletic in nature. In their lighter costumes the dancers can now express the exhilaration and swirl of the waltzes. As the music ends the dancers return to the drawing-room, now dressed in their formal attire, and gently applaud as the curtain falls.

This compilation is a good representation of style, combining precision in training with a strict neo-classic temperament inherited from Balanchine's Imperial Ballet School traditions.

The disc can be recommended - with some reservations - for none of these ballets appear elsewhere in the PAL LV catalogue. The material is not particularly recent - 1974 on the disc labels and sleeve, but it says 1977 on the title sequence! The picture tends to be rather contrasty in some sequences, lacking fine detail in such as the dancers' costumes. This may be the result of programme origination on 16mm film or the side-effect of the correlation process if originated on video. The picture is, however, pleasantly watchable and the disc does produce perfect still frames. (I have to confess that the CAV facility is not a feature I use on this type of programme material. In this instance, use of the slow-motion/still-frame just seems to accentuate the picture's lack of definition.) The stereo soundtrack sounds rather artificial with a background mush that pumps up and down with the volume. The disc pressing is an earlyish 2P effort and adequately blemish-free, especially when considering the dark nature of many of the backgrounds. [ TONY WELLS ]

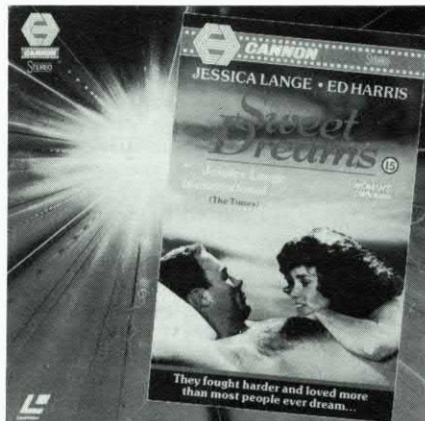
### Sweet Dreams

CANNON TLY 90 3734 1 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1985 110mins Rated 15

Starring: Jessica Lange, Ed Harris  
Director: Karel Reisz

While the music here is an integral component it is not essential to be disposed towards country and western to enjoy this bio-pic of '50s singer Patsy Cline. There is plenty of drama on offer too. Picking as a starting

point her failing marriage (that is too dull by half in comparison to her nights out on the road singing while the old man stays home model-making), the movie only deals with the last few years of her life - till the fatal plane crash that ended it. Seeing as that event occurred before C & W music came to mean that much in the UK might account for the name of Patsy Cline being not that well-known to some readers.



Following the parting of the ways with husband no. 1, Patsy takes up with the somewhat more exciting Charlie Dick - whose approach to life, if only by contrast, is a better match for her own ambitions. It would be easy to fall into the trap of perceiving Dick as an exploiter and all-round bad influence, but as portrayed the two personalities seem well-suited.

Having Jessica Lange and Ed Harris in the lead roles might suggest the expenditure of a bigger budget than actually materialises on screen. The period feel is adequately (if modestly) re-created, but is let down by some rather uninspired photography. Some of the trouble may lie with the video transfer - which is only second-drawer and lacking in definition and shadow detail - though the slightly gritty end-

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result does almost give everything a sort of documentary reality. The audio is from a clean optical track but the stereo is only used sporadically in the non-musical portions of the film.

Some care has been taken with the music. Patsy Cline's original records are used throughout and Jessica Lange competently manages to lip-synch each one. There are, however, only a few full songs performed - mostly it's just brief excerpts. Many contemporary hit records by other artistes crop up as incidental background and the attention to detail shown towards the main music is defeated to a degree when Acker Bilk's *Stranger On The Shore* and Elvis' *Can't Help Falling In Love* show up several years too early. Given the fairly specific time-scale involved (and the fact that every now and again its passing is delineated by a date superimposed at the base of the picture,) such lapses are annoying and attract attention to other 'out-of-time' prop details that would have otherwise probably gone unnoticed - the errors with the musical instruments for example.

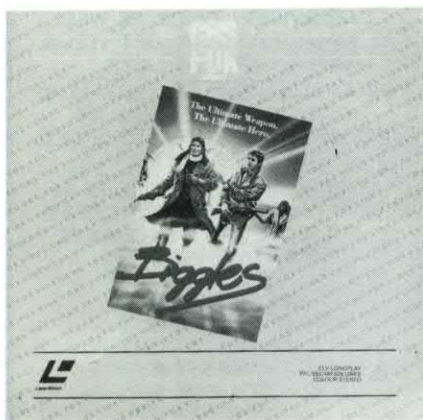
In reality the film might not have been primarily targetted at such a discriminating audience (the HOME BOX OFFICE contribution to the production suggests a level of cable-TV pre-sales being involved), but in order to earn a recommendation to the more general disc buyer the quality of the image would need to be that bit more impressive, for otherwise the appeal of the disc stands and falls on content alone.

## Biggles

CBS/FOX 3789-70 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1985 89mins Rated PG

**Starring:** Neil Dickson, Alex Hyde-White, Fiona Hutchison, Peter Cushing  
**Director:** John Hough

Some may feel *Where's Biggles?* to be a more appropriate title. While the story-book character does fill his share of screen time little of the air ace's personality creeps through. Some confused time-travel showing a rather improbable WWI secret weapon (that would have been equally improbable had the movie been set in WWII), combined with the rather obvious marketing decision to work an American (or at least the very American-sounding Alex Hyde-White - son of... ) into the



proceedings, makes for an uneventful ninety minutes worth at the end of the

day.

The disc (typically!) looks and sounds pretty good. The stereo is interesting throughout and the film-to-video transfer clear and crisp. It doesn't quite reach the heights of *A Nightmare On Elm Street* or *Give My Regards To Broad Street* - the darker scenes are bit muddy and there isn't the same level of resolution - but it'll do. Something a little unusual is a slight orange cast to the picture which doesn't look like it should be there and maybe corrupts the integrity of the colour somewhat - though this might depend on the colour balance adjustment of your monitor.

## The Pirate Movie

CBS/FOX 1185-70 £4.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1982 99mins

**Starring:** Kristy McNichol, Christopher Atkins, Ted Hamilton, Bill Kerr, Maggie Kirkpatrick  
**Director:** Ken Annakin



The sleeve, the cinema trailer and Christopher Atkins and Kristy McNichol heading the cast give the impression of just another juvenile romance movie. Well, *The Pirate Movie* is a romance, but surprisingly it is a lot more than that.

Essentially it is a musical, a sort of re-make of Gilbert & Sullivan's comedy *The Pirates Of Penzance*, whose musical score is greatly used - with additional songs by Terry Britten.

Here, though, the story is told through the dream of the common everyday girl, Mabel, who travels back to the late nineteenth century when battling pirates were still at large and treasure lay buried beneath the sea. Only romantics dream - and they will know that special universe where everything is possible and the most illogical events become logical.

The result is a joyful light-hearted comedy, rich in detail and full of catchy melodies - *Hold On and Pumpin' And Blowing* even enjoying some record success in their own right.

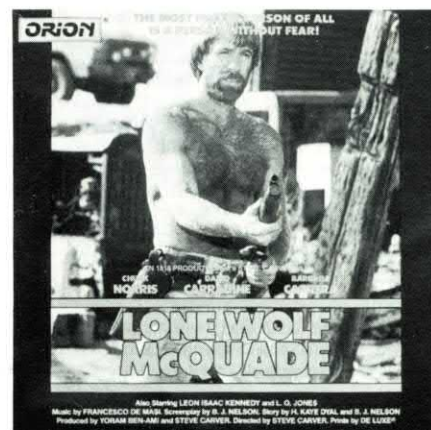
*The Pirate Movie* is an Australian film and the transfer to disc is better than many CBS/FOX titles of U.S. (and often NTSC origin). It adapts well to the TV format and also contains a good number of outdoor scenes which reproduce well - though it copes well with the few dark scenes too. And don't be misled by the mono labelling of the sleeve - it is in good stereo.

[ HANS KRISTIAN PEDERSEN ]

## Lone Wolf McQuade

RANK-ORION LVRK 0197 £9.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1983 102mins Rated 18

**Starring:** Chuck Norris, David Carradine, Barbara Carrera, Leon Isaac Kennedy, L.Q. Jones  
**Director:** Steve Carver



Somewhat erratic and humourless piece about Texas Ranger, J.J. McQuade (Chuck Norris), out to put a stop to a large-scale gun-running operation.

McQuade is a sort of post-Western, loner character and detailed attention to the plot is particularly ill-advised if the escapist value of the movie is to be maintained. Action sequences abound, and while the shootin'-an'-a-fightin' is more than generous in quantity, it's no grosser than in the many cowboy movies it seeks to emulate. As a result, the 18 rating is barely warranted.

**The Disc:** Several RANK-ORION titles previously reviewed have been a notch down from RANK's own transfers. While this is adequately sharp, the colour is a little odd and comes up a mite rustily-hued. There is a slight grainy veiling that is, fortunately, only likely to show up on larger screens. Many of the close-ups look O.K., and in fact, the disc turns out to be fairly watchable as long as the action is found to be sufficiently engrossing.

The audio is definitely too hissy and the music regularly goes into overload. Rather perversely, keeping the volume low enough to temper this over-modulation also prevents the hiss from being too much of a distraction. But is this the correct way to be going about such matters?

## Death Hunt

CBS/FOX 1124-70 £6.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO  
1981 97mins

**Starring:** Charles Bronson, Lee Marvin, Andrew Stevens, Carl Weathers, Angie Dickinson, Ed Lauter  
**Director:** Peter Hunt

Up in the Yukon, where Mounties go to get their men (and when you could say that too - without it having a somewhat different connotation), the itinerant trapper (Charles Bronson) is being pursued by the man from the R.C.M.P. (Lee Marvin). It all starts over a sick dog. The movie is based on a true story - though it looks the kind of true story to have received quite a bit of embellishment in the hands of one-time James Bond director,



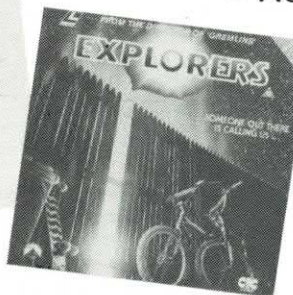
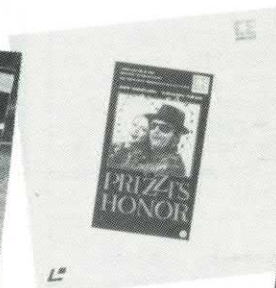
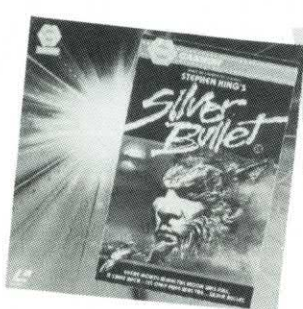


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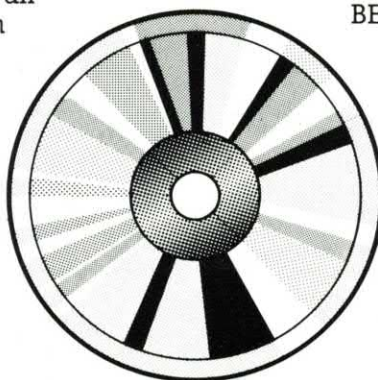


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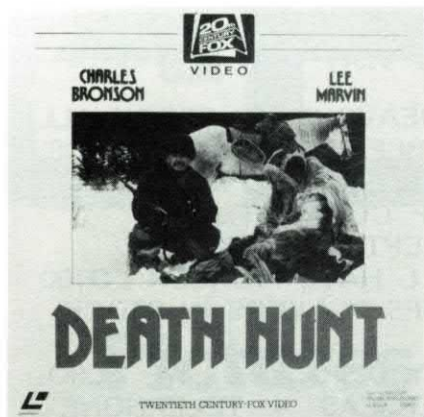
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Peter Hunt. Setting two 'likeable' stars such as Bronson and Marvin at odds with each other makes rather light of the whole piece (though it is more violent than the previous film). Their own personalities are always likely to transcend the roles they play, no matter how villainous the part. When the chase is finally resolved, however, the casting is seen to have been considerably more perceptive than it first appeared.

**The Disc:** Readers not fortunate enough to be in possession of a VCR may cherish a disc such as this that is the closest so far in simulating the restricted bandwidth feel of the lesser formats. The video transfer is a pretty cheap affair, with some veiled, texture effects on the lighter scenes. The onset of mild jerky movement hints at an NTSC conversion. At about 0.42 someone switched on an enhancer of some description that puts in a bit of sorely-needed edge definition which lasts till the end of the disc. You might adjust to the lo-fi image once you realise that peering deeply into the glassware is not going to reveal anything more than skimpiest level of fine detail, but pity the poor newcomer to LV who might rush out and make this their very first disc purchase. (Come to think of it, they could do worse - with *Buck Rogers*.)

Oh yes - the sound. It is stereo, and quite clean - the balance tending to favour the vocal track at the expense of 'natural' background ambience. Even the outdoor scenes sometimes sound like they were recorded indoors. There is some slight hiss but the audio is still better than the picture deserves.

## The Producers

20th CENTURY FOX 4058-70 £6.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1978 84mins

**Starring:** Zero Mostel, Gene Wilder, Dick Shawn, Kenneth Mars, Estelle Winwood, Christopher Hewitt  
**Director:** Mel Brooks

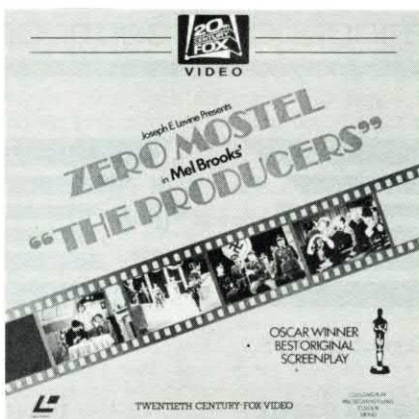
If I was about to be marooned in outer space, complete with in-flight LV player and could only take with me one comedy disc, it would undoubtedly be *The Producers*. This hilarious romp has become something of a cult movie and I've watched it many times, still finding it extremely funny. I would even go so far as to state that it's the funniest film I've ever seen. Now I realise that humour is a very personal thing but I've yet to see another Mel Brooks film which I would give a second viewing.

Reading these comments there will, of course, be those familiar with the film who will ask such questions as - "Don't you think the performances are perhaps a little O.T.T.?" or "Don't you find the plot somewhat improbable?" or even "Don't you find that the flippant treatment of the infamous Third Reich is in bad taste?"

My answer to all these questions would be "Yes!", but I would add that surely all these outrageous points contribute towards the overall brilliance of the piece.

The plot concerns an ageing Broadway producer (played with great comic gusto by Zero Mostel) who is down on his luck and is visited by his young accountant (Gene Wilder giving his usual neurotic characterisation). Whilst auditing the books the accountant theorises over a somewhat preposterous but clever way of making a big profit out of a surefire theatrical flop and the two men form a partnership to exploit the idea. I leave you to watch the film to witness the way things finally blow up in their faces.

The two stars are greatly assisted by some excellent supporting players. Secondary roles are played by Kenneth Mars as the crazy Nazi playwright Christopher Hewitt as the camp theatrical director and Dick Shawn as LSD, the pop-singing hippy. As I write, I also call to mind some beautifully played cameo roles - such as the sexy Swedish secretary, the concierge, the theatrical director's very private secretary.... and the singing Hitlers.



I noted that short cuts have been made in the scenes in the bar and where the conspirators are undertaking a little sabotage. There seems no apparent reason for this. Fortunately the cuts are of minimal significance and do not detract from the overall brilliance of this first Mel Brooks film.

[ KEITH ARNOLD ]

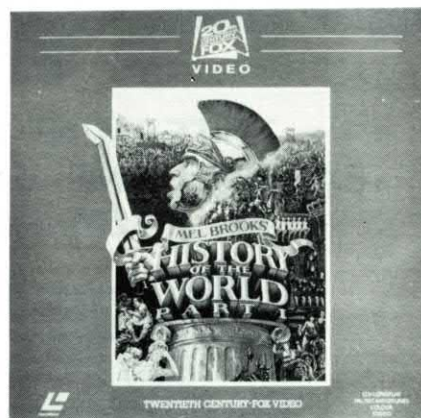
**The Disc:** This is slightly crisper than the average for one of FOX's older transfers though the colour is a little strangely hued. There is some slight herringbone patterning visible intermittently that is distracting to a certain extent. The audio is pleasantly bright but some low-level hum intrudes now and again.

## History Of The World - Part 1

20th CENTURY FOX 1114-70 £13.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO  
1981 88mins

**Starring:** Mel Brooks, Dom DeLuise, Madeline Kahn, Harvey Korman, Cloris Leachman, Ron Carey, Gregory Hines, Pamela Stephenson, Spike Milligan, Sid Caesar, Mary-Margaret Humes, Shekya Greene

**Writer, producer, director:** Mel Brooks



Unmistakably Mel Brooks, *History Of The World* is very much comedy in the theatrical revue style transferred to the cinema screen. Some of the timing is a little slow and many of the jokes exhibit origins earlier than the historical cameos in which they are employed. The usual retinue of Brooks' players is in evidence, and being made in England, some familiar British faces crop up in bit parts. There is possibly not the wit here of the previous movie - everything is double-underlined - but it has its moments.

**The Disc:** The transfer is very soft and diffused and the disc is to be avoided by those sensitive about the quality of picture they are willing to watch. The sound is better than it need be to match it and there is a reasonable amount of stereo in evidence.

## The Best Of The Kenny Everett Video Show - Vol. 1

THAMES VIDEO 90-6207-5 £6.99  
CLV COLOUR MONO  
1977 110mins

According to the introductory speech from the star, the disc comes from the second series of shows. In near on two hours there are no visible joins and the compilation is well put together. Kenny Everett has some good characters in his repertoire - Sid Snot, Marcel Wave, Angry of Mayfair - and none of them had been overplayed at this stage of the game.

Every now and again you have a song - well, including the Hot Gossip numbers about half the disc is music - and most all of these are the usual mime jobs. Exceptions are Dave Edmunds singing *Trouble Boys* and Kenny and The Pretenders' punk spoof - *Who Needs It?* For the rest - there's Cliff Richard, Thin Lizzy, Darts, a very posey Elvis Costello & the Attractions (*Oliver's Army*), The Pretenders, Bryan Ferry & Roxy Music (*Trash*), Squeeze (*Cool For Cats*), Rachel Sweet (*I Go To Pieces*), David Bowie, The Moody Blues (*Nights In White Satin*), and two (count 'em) from David Essex.

Too little is included from the Video Vaults - a very short excerpt from an early black and white Marilyn Monroe



UNION OIL commercial, and a splendidly tasteless "Buck Off" ad from a barely intelligible Australian liquor salesman. There is too much of the studio technicians' loudly mixed laughter. It's OK when the jokes occur, but otherwise, who needs it?

As the title makes unambiguously clear, everything is video originated, and the image on the disc is crisp enough to reveal momentary lapses of focus in the programme itself. Apart from the times the picture struggles to cope with some large expanses of white background - that make the picture a little contrasty - what you see is otherwise very close to the standard expected of broadcast originated material. Isolated audio buzzes crop up in some scenes but the sound, considering it's age, is good.



Finding this disc over the last year or two has been a difficult task, but the passage of time tends to enhance the contents - especially the musical clips. If you ever thought you might have wanted it, expectations will be fulfilled. (In spite of a previous report that the disc was being "re-pressed", this copy purchased at the HMV Shop, London last November was, in fact, still the original pressing.)

## Revolution

WARNER PEL 11532 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1985 117mins Rated PG

**Starring:** Al Pacino, Donald Sutherland, Nastassja Kinski  
**Music:** John Corigliano  
**Director:** Hugh Hudson

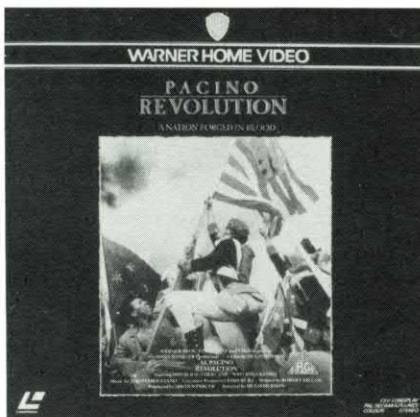
When a movie, particularly a big, 'much heralded' movie gets slated I get curious. I just know that there has to be something worth seeing in it. Peering into the confused, noisy and gloomy opening moments of Hugh Hudson's latest epic, my heart sank. I kept telling myself - "they're wrong, it's going to get better". Two hours later I knew they were right. It doesn't get better. It doesn't get anything. Given the vast sweep of the revolution, if you intend to isolate three people within the canvas you must give them some depth, some motivation and preferably - if you are trying to link them - some dramatic interaction. You have to make people care about them.

I don't at this moment know (without referring to the film) whether Al Pacino plays Ken Dobbs or Dogg's Knob, and I don't give a damn. He's a victim of circumstance from beginning to end -

even when he's supposed to be a hero. Nastassja Kinski turns up from time to time, behaving like a rather unattractive rebellious adolescent, gets killed (apparently) in the seventh reel, only to re-appear some time later.

The thing meanders through time and place much as the characters meander through the frames, and much as the camera meanders around them. It's shot in something called System 35, which must be some form of lightweight, large-format movie camera. It appears to be a cross between hand-held and Steadicam. Mostly it's annoying and weakens the image. Quite often it just adds to the general confusion. The only time it works is in the long closing shot where Pacino is looking for the (resurrected) Kinski - if there had been any plot or any real characterisation this could have been a great end to a movie - instead it is merely an exercise in technique.

Some competent small order players are present but have nothing to flesh out. Stephen Berkoff (a Brit officer) barks in iambic pentameter, Richard O'Brien as a foppish cavalryman goes way over the top - but as he alone represents the corruption of George III and his court (which precipitated the whole debacle) - one can hardly blame him. Annie (Eurythmics) Lennox has a couple of lines in the opening minutes.



On the good side, well, King's Lynn looks very good as New York, but it is a bit hard to swallow when it becomes Philadelphia a few months later. A few shots stand out, mainly tracking shots of the various battles. The music is dire, but the sound is absolutely superb. The minimal, but quite vital dialogue (often dubbed as it turns out), is frequently unintelligible. [ALAN BELL]

**The Disc:** Owners of *Greystoke* will find this transfer similar in character. It is dark but adequately crisp. There are some outdoor scenes whose muted and quite unique colour hues demand special praise.

We are not happy about the actual disc pressing - side two, the shorter side, exhibits an all-over crosstalk patterning that appears to be in the disc master. Exact confirmation of the cause of the fault was not available in time to relay it here, but it is an unfortunate and distracting defect (causing some density loss in the image too) and will prove bothersome for readers using larger screen monitors.

Time compression of the end credits has taken place (notice how they jump every few frames) in order to fit the film on to one disc, and this presumably accounts for the contradictory timing,

## Manon Lescaut

ARTS INT 04 AI 022 £23.99  
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO  
1983 129mins (3 sides)

**Featuring:** Kiri Te Kanawa, Plácido Domingo, Thomas Allen, Forbes Robinson & Robin Leggate with the Royal Opera Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli



The premier of *Manon Lescaut*, which was to become Puccini's first major international success, took place in 1893 - just 8 days before that of Verdi's last opera *Falstaff*. In 1894 Bernard Shaw commented that Puccini looked to him more like Verdi's heir than any of his rivals. Although it was to be a number of years before Puccini overtook the likes of Leoncavallo and Mascagni, Shaw's comment turned out to be truly prophetic.

The opera opens in eighteenth century Paris when the young poet, Chevalier Des Grieux (Plácido Domingo), first sets eyes upon the beautiful Manon Lescaut (Kiri te Kanawa), who is being taken to join a convent by her brother (Thomas Allen). The two young people have a brief but joyful meeting and finally elope together as the curtain falls on the end of Act I.

After an enforced separation, the lovers re-unite, only to be torn apart once more when Des Grieux' rich rival for Manon's affections denounces her as an abandoned woman, and she is sentenced to deportation to America. In a wonderfully moving aria Des Grieux pleads with the ship's captain to allow him to join up as a cabin boy. He succeeds and they set sail.

The tragedy draws to its conclusion with the lovers wandering aimlessly in the barren wastes, having left New Orleans the victims of jealousy and intrigue. They are both utterly exhausted and the curtain falls with Manon dying and the grief-stricken Des Grieux collapsing at her side.

Gotz Friedrich's Covent Garden production attracted some stiff competition for tickets from opera buffs and, judging by this LV disc set, their enthusiasm was mostly justified. However, we live in a less than perfect world and two basic faults present themselves when viewing the performance in conditions of domestic comfort.

A blatant production error in Act I was to attempt to disguise some attractive young ladies as male students - it simply doesn't work. Dame Kiri's performance came in for some adverse criticism from the national press, and



while it's a workmanlike and professional reading, one would have wished to hear a more dramatic and forward tonal quality in the voice to match her exalted partner.

Thomes Allen is first-rate. His assured tone and manly bearing make his interpretation of the role a major contribution to the performance. What can one say about Domingo's performance - other than to comment that he fully justifies his international superstar reputation with his compelling stage presence and vocal technique. Would that we could have an LV set of his recent, enormously successful Covent Garden rendition of *Otello* - but alas it seems that it is too expensive a business to record such events these days.

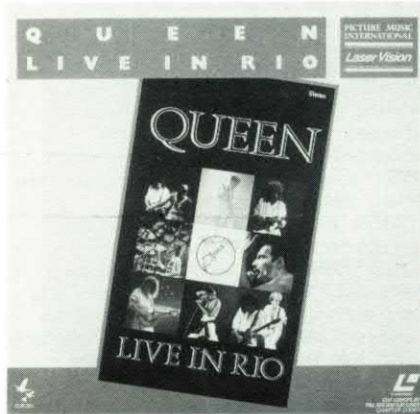
Opera-lovers already appreciative of *Manon Lescaut* will derive great pleasure from this enjoyable performance. A word of warning to collectors who have enjoyed *Turandot*, *Tosca*, or *La Boheme* and are contemplating widening their Puccinian horizons. The work most surely contains many fine sections - not unlike the later works - but there are equally some longueurs which don't advance the plot one iota and cause the attention to wander. As typical examples I would name the choral sections in Act I and the madrigal group in Act II. The disc, of course, has chapter stops which makes for easy selection should the viewer wish to opt for the highlights. The recording is sourced from a BBC telecast that has transferred excellently to disc, demonstrating just how good LV can be. (Review copy was a German pressing.) [KEITH ARNOLD]

## QUEEN - Live In Rio

PMI MLP 99 1079 1 £14.99  
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO  
1985 60mins

Side 1: Tie Your Mother Down/Seven Seas Of Rhye/Keep Yourself Alive/Liar/It's A Hard Life/Now I'm Here/Is This The World We Created?/Love Of My Life/Brighton Rock/Hammer To Fall/Bohemian Rhapsody/Radio Gaga/I Want To Break Free/We Will Rock You/We Are The Champions/God Save The Queen

From a concert recorded in Rio de Janeiro 12/1/85.



Even though there are times when the programme looks like it was transmitted via a satellite link all the way from Brazil and you have to share the performance with a quarter of a million other folks, *Queen/Live*

*In Rio* still comes over as a direct and committed concert disc. The vastness of the open-air stadium does not diminish the disc's appeal in more intimate domestic surroundings.

The heavily-produced roster of Queen records would not seem ideally suited to live performance, but apart from some additional keyboard/guitar fill-in from Spyke Edney, the group manages respectable versions of most all the numbers. Only in the middle of *Bohemian Rhapsody* are they forced to vacate the stage and let a backing tape carry them through the intricate middle part of the song.

It's the first 30 minutes or so that is the best part of the disc (which runs comfortably past the 60 minute elapsed time point), culminating in the audience participation during *Is This The World We Created?* and *Love Of My Life*. Sometimes these things turn out corny and contrived but not so here.

The Disc: Video originated, in NTSC, and by necessity converted to PAL video for release here, the resulting picture lacks crispness, but is watchable in its documentary context. It's really only the long-shots that suffer - when the stage is well lit and the performers are in close-up there is little to actually complain about. Some of the camera work is a bit rough and ready, with some energetic switching between angles that doesn't really bring much to the overall presentation. Maybe even TV producers and cameramen can become excited too. The sound is authentically live and achieves a good balance between the group's sound and the audience's reactions. The recording quality is clear and pleasantly compatible with the visual image.

The disc does have a significant flaw of which potential purchasers should be made aware. At about the 18.50 point there is a jump in both picture and sound that crops up on all the copies of the disc we know about. It only lasts about one second but it is definitely not a player fault (in case you were thinking that might be the trouble with your copy). PMI insist that there is no break in the tape master so the suspicion must be the fault is in the disc mastering, though we have been unable to confirm this.

## TINA TURNER - Live Private Dancer Tour

PMI MLP 99 1085 1 £14.99  
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO  
1985 54mins

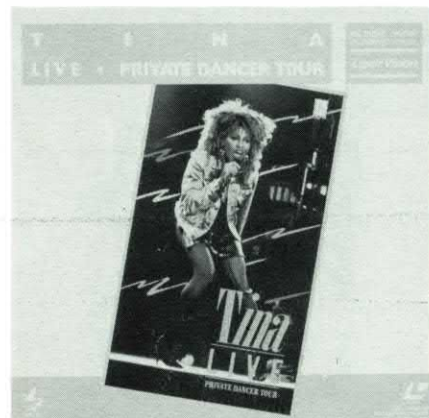
Side 1: Show Some Respect/I Might Have Been Queen/What's Love Got To Do With It/I Can't Stand The Rain/Better Be Good To Me/Private Dancer/Let's Stay Together/Help!/It's Only Love (with Bryan Adams)/Tonight (with David Bowie)/Let's Dance I (with D.B.)/Let's Dance II (with D.B.)

This makes for an interesting comparison with the Queen disc. Tina Turner's *Live - Private Dancer Tour* is an expensively filmed (35mm) production with too-perfectly mixed sound that fails to achieve the immediacy and impact of the other title. The disc will be more appealing to those who have no particular liking

for live concerts and prefer music presented as pop videos.

The film-to-video transfer is not perfect though. It is hard to believe the programme has been sourced from 35mm film at first glance. The picture is very noisy and has some moments of colour streakiness. The overall tonality is somewhat compressed. The disc will produce the best picture with minimal monitor contrast and by adjusting for a slightly pale, misty level of brightness. It's very sharp though.

It's sharp enough to be able to tell it's 21.23 on the distant clock display at stage right as Tina launches forth into her first number. (You do need to view the closing credits to ascertain the place - Birmingham's NEC.)



The songs in the show are all new Tina. There is no SUE, and no PHILLES. Ann Peebles' *I Can't Stand The Rain* and Al Green's *Let's Stay Together* show a Memphis origin that is something of a throwback to earlier times. Of course, the Al Green song was the hit for the rejuvenated singer. Rejuvenated here refers to chart success it should be made adequately clear. In fact, it is the band who look as though they should be pensioned off. If you close your eyes they manage to make the correct noises though. Whatever one might say about the absent Ike's misdeemeanours with his nasal cavities, his abilities in picking a band that could blow were beyond question.

Some welcome rough edges creep in with the appearance of Bryan Adams, to be followed immediately after by David Bowie. Those puzzled by the apparent repeat of *Let's Dance* should be advised that while *Version II* is the anticipated song, *Let's Dance - Version I* is a briefer rendition of the '62 Chris Montez hit of the same name.

Other than the reservations about the 'perfectness' of the actual production, which some may indeed find appealing, it is only the noise on the picture that might detract from the disc's desirability, and this is only likely to be of significance for readers watching their discs on larger expanses of glassware.

## Explorers

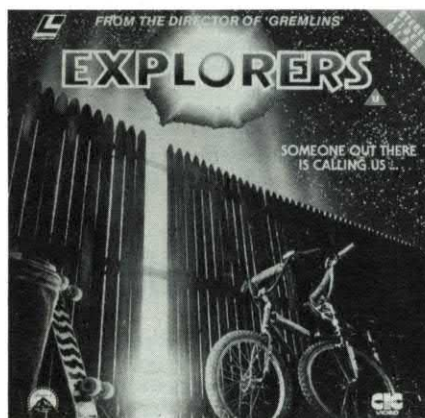
CIC-PARAMOUNT LVH 2177 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1985 105mins Rated U

Starring: Ethan Hawke, River Phoenix, Jason Presson  
Director: Joe Dante

The amount of lead-in CIC put on



their discs gets longer and longer. Normally, the sensible thing to do is just to scan through until (in this case) the PARAMOUNT logo judders into view. This time though endure it - the whole 50 seconds - it makes the opening moments of the film-proper even more of an audio treat. *Explorers* has one of those detailed, energetic and involving stereo soundtracks that you wish there were more of. The other bonus is the modest black strip top and bottom of the screen that leaves enough of the original movie aspect ratio without wasting too much precious TV screen area.



Foresaking its usual pre-video cinema run - after a less than spectacular cinema debut in the US - the film is obviously aimed at the young market, yet it has some adult appeal. It offers the most plausible manner in which anyone not old enough to be a real astronaut might make it into space. Improvisation combines with invention to transform a circuit diagram dreamed by one of the trio of young explorers into a junkyard spaceship fit to embark on a unique voyage of extra-terrestrial discovery.

There is a light-hearted conclusion to the endeavour that some may feel detracts from the original concept, but most would find the film enjoyably consistent and lacking either the action-packed excesses of such as *Gremlins* or the gushing sentimentality of *Goonies* - two films with which one is bound to make comparison. Director Joe Dante has supposedly re-edited the original film and trimmed a couple of minutes off the running time to suit it more to home viewing (and if one was to make any major criticism it would be that another ten minutes could have gone with it to tighten things up a'piece), but the 105 minutes this disc runs for would seem to contradict that information. The US disc is only listed at 107 minutes. When taking into account the PAL transfer loss, it should have been closer to 110 minutes.

The quality of the picture is OK. The tonality is pleasing and only suffers from so much of the action taking place in subdued light. The image quality is similar to that on *Beverly Hills Cop*. There is a slight amount of grain to the picture and one wishes it was a mite sharper, but many readers would probably be mystified by comments such as this and be well-pleased with the disc as it is.

The only significant flaw does relate to an aspect of the content. At an early stage of the film one of the

heroes invites another over to his house to view a newly acquired tape of *This Island Earth*. Surely, in the context of this particular movie (and in order to sustain street cred) we should have expected him to utter "my new disc of *This Island Earth*"?

## KATE BUSH - The Whole Story

PMI MLP 99 1143 1 £14.99  
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO  
1986 55mins Rated E

*Side 1: Wuthering Heights, Cloudbusting, The Man With The Child In His Eyes, Breathing, Wow, Hounds Of Love, Running Up That Hill, Army Dreamers, Sat In Your Lap, Experiment IV, The Dreaming, Babooshka, The Big Sky*

If you are fortunate enough to own a player that has a chapter search facility then it becomes a worthwhile exercise to dial up chapter 8 before playing the disc straight through. The reward is a startlingly crisp close-up of Kate Bush that momentarily suggests the singer has turned up to look through a window in your lounge you never realised was there. If you have a big TV - where as a consequence the head appears several times larger than real life - the effect can be almost menacing.

*The Whole Story* goes some way to putting right the recent omission of the *Hounds Of Love* collection from the disc release schedule. (Because we're not allowed to have the Juniors till we promise to go out and buy a new combi player.) This disc is a bit of a video hits compilation that duplicates some of what has gone before and so may make it a marginal purchase for some, but seeing as *The Singles File* is now deleted it may fill an inconvenient gap for others.



The videos fall into two categories. The best ones are undoubtedly the 'mini-movies' - *Cloudbusting*, *Hounds Of Love*, *Experiment IV*, and to a lesser extent, *Running Up That Hill*, *Army Dreamers* and *The Big Sky* - which are sufficiently well thought out as to sustain interest beyond an initial view. *Cloudbusting*, which features Donald Sutherland, is arguably the best of the bunch. The time for simply-shot studio videos done against a plain background may have passed - there is only so much detached miming one can endure.

It's unfortunate that convention dictates women may only be photographed with a generous dollop of

Vaseline smeared across the camera lens. Is this not surely sexist? One would hope it might in future be seen so as the technique is never as good on video as it is on film and makes some of the videos look a bit streaky on the disc when played on one of the older LV machines. Only those with such as an LD700 are going to see these soft-focus numbers at their very best. In general the package is nicely prepared from a variety of sources. The picture quality varies, obviously, but all are OK and some are very good. The sound is uniformly excellent, with an element of detail to set the disc apart from the pack.

## Legend

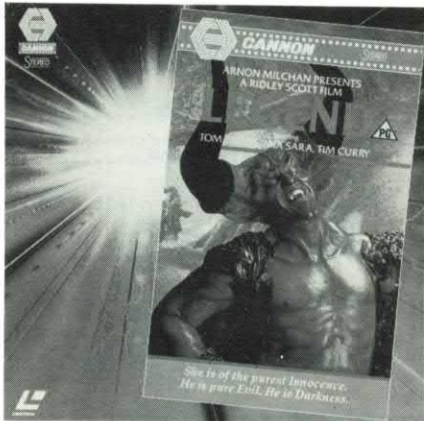
CANNON TLY 90 3651 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1985 90mins Rated PG(V)

*Starring: Tom Cruise, Mia Sara, Tim Curry, David Bennent, Alice Playten, Billy Barty, Cork Hubbert*  
*Music by: Jerry Goldsmith*  
*Director: Ridley Scott*

I do feel sorry for poor old Ridley Scott. Almost every film he directs receives poor studio reaction and is hacked to pieces in an effort to create a more commercially viable version. This, I feel, is a great pity as Scott is one of our most talented and original directors and this kind of interference must be a source of constant irritation to him. I don't know why 20th CENTURY FOX took such exception to *Legend* in its original form as it suffers more as a result of the imposed cuts than did either *Alien* or *Blade Runner*. Still, I suppose we are more fortunate than the Americans who have had the original Jerry Goldsmith score replaced by one from Tangerine Dream. (The Tangerine Dream version is the one that found its way on to NTSC disc in the USA.)

*Legend* introduces us to a fantasy world where the equilibrium between the two forces of darkness and light are maintained by the existence of two unicorns. Tim Curry is Darkness, who reigns over the minions of the night and is anxious to kill the unicorns in order to plunge the world into everlasting chaos. Representing goodness and purity we have a princess (Mia Sara), Jack (Tom Cruise) and various other elves and faeries.

Stunningly photographed in Scott's usual painstakingly-detailed manner the film is a triumph of production design. The forest sets are superb and





incredibly realistic (despite being burnt down in mid-production and having to be re-built from scratch) making the film appear as if it was shot on location - although no such locations exist. Rob Bottin's make-up and special effects are up to the high standards that he has previously set himself on *The Thing*, *The Howling* and *Explorers*. (I particularly enjoyed Meg Mucklbones, a hideous, cackling swamp-creature.)

The acting performances vary. Tom Cruise (calm down ladies) isn't well-suited to his role (although he tries hard) and I can't help thinking that a European actor would have been far more capable of dealing with the rather stagey dialogue. One cannot, however, make such complaints of Mia Sara who makes an admirable princess and breathes real life into the part. But it is Tim Curry who is the star of the show (although he doesn't actually appear on screen until the last third of the film). From his incredible entrance until the end he dominates *Legend* with a performance of power and menace, made all the more remarkable considering that he is buried beneath several layers of lobster-coloured make-up. Not a guy to get on the wrong side of.

Despite the cuts, ninety minutes of *Legend* is better than no *Legend* at all, and if you even slightly enjoyed the similar *Company Of Wolves* or *Blade Runner* I do urge you to consider adding Ridley Scott's latest extraordinary vision to your collection.

**The Disc:** The master has obviously been sourced from a high quality magnetic soundtrack with good stereo imagery and dynamic range that is well up to standard - given the limitations of a non-CX encoded disc (come on Blackburn, we've been waiting for over a year now).

For some reason I became more aware than usual of the picture scanning - perhaps this was due to the spectacular sets and images demanding more room on the screen. The transfer is sometimes grainy - the grain being

on the film print and noticeable where the picture has been cropped. This is a fairly typical THORN/CANNON characteristic. It is generally pleasing, though, and with better colour and definition than the other latest CANNON titles. [ PETER MOVERLEY ]

## Highlander

CANNON TLY 90 4017 1 £19.99  
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP  
1986 111mins Rated 15

**Starring:** Christopher Lambert, Roxanne Hart, Clancy Brown, Sean Connery  
**Director:** Russell Mulcahy



Immortals have been living among us for many years awaiting 'the gathering' from which just one will survive. Only decapitation can finish off an immortal, and there are only a handful around by the time *Highlander* opens in 1985, with the gathering due any minute. The highlander of the title, now known as Russell Nash, was originally called Connor Macleod when he was born in Scotland in 1518. Today he is a New York antique dealer and under suspicion over a headless corpse found in an underground car park. The police believe that this killing is connected with a series of other particularly nasty murders. But Brenda Wyatt, a metallurgist working for the police is fascinated by the weapon used in the car park killing; it is a sword that, theoretically, should not be in existence and she is determined to unravel the secret.

The contemporary story is intercut with flashbacks to Macleod's past life which serve to explain what is happening now. Sean Connery makes a charismatic appearance as Ramirez, Macleod's early tutor. We also encounter Kurgan, that most dangerous of creatures, an immortal who also happens to be a psychopath and is later to rival Macleod/Nash for the prize due to the ultimate survivor.

Clancy Brown is splendidly over the top as Kurgan and Christopher Lambert looks properly enigmatic in the title role. Lambert is an engaging actor, but he doesn't really master the Scottish accent called for in the flashback sequences, and it would have probably been less distracting if he had been permitted to retain his usual voice throughout.

This isn't a film for the sceptical, but great fun if you allow yourself to accept the preposterous plot without asking too many questions. Visually, it is very striking, with lashings of

highly contrived lightning effects and coloured filters. The soundtrack is something of a curate's egg - the dialogue is certainly very intelligible but the musical score is really quite muffled and without the open quality associated with modern stereo recording. It does seem rather perverse to bill Queen's contribution to the soundtrack in large letters on the cover - and then cut off the treble frequencies. (Particularly as the video promos for the Queen singles used great chunks of *Highlander* and punters might have been therefore tempted to buy the disc on the strength of its soundtrack.)

The picture transfer is a fairly typical THORN/CANNON scan job on a widescreen movie. It's from a print, shows grain and sharpness losses when parts of the frame are zoomed in on, but has moments of good definition and colour (although in the latter respect the image often takes on a brownish hue). [ PAUL RONCHETTI ]

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- Issue 5** - Guide to NTSC LaserVision. Player Survey. Summary of all previous disc reviews. Includes Autumn '85 PHILIPS LV list.
- Issue 6** - Looking at future LV developments. Japan Report. 49 disc reviews, including some PAL imports and porno discs.
- Issue 7** - Reviews of PIONEER CLD900, LD707 & PX-7 Computer. Looking at the American space discs.
- Issue 8** - Forthcoming A/V products for '86. Japan Report. Dutch space discs. Dutch catalogue update.
- Issue 9** - Towards a Combination LV/CD Player. Video Recordings Act. Dolby Surround & MARANTZ RV353 review. Includes list of Dolby encoded discs.
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# The Laser Calendar

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 REVOLUTION (S) - WARNER PEL 11532 £19.99  
 POLICE ACADEMY III - WARNER PEL 20022 £19.99  
 THE SUPERGRASS (S) - CBS/FOX 3039-70 £19.99  
 LADYHAWKE (S) - CBS/FOX 1474-70 £19.99  
 BIGGLES (S) - CBS/FOX 3789-70 £19.99  
 LEGEND (S) - CANNON TLY 90 3651 1 £19.99  
 SWEET DREAMS (S) - CANNON TLY 90 3734 1 £19.99  
 EMERALD FOREST (S) - EMBASSY ELV 2179 £19.99  
 PRIZZI'S HONOUR (S, CLV/CAV) - EMBASSY ELV 1855 £24.95  
 A CHORUS LINE (S) - EMBASSY ELV 2183 £19.99  
 CLOCKWISE - CANNON TLY 90 3956 1 £19.99  
 WEIRD SCIENCE - CIC LVG 1193 £19.99  
 EXPLORERS (S) - CIC LVG 2177 £19.99  
 INDIANA JONES & THE TEMPLE OF DOOM (S) - CIC LVG 2185 £19.99  
 BACK TO THE FUTURE [S] - CIC LVG 1204 £19.99  
 HIGHLANDER (S) - CANNON TLY 90 4017 1 £19.99  
 HITCHER [S] - CANNON TLY 90 4019 1 £19.99  
 KATE BUSH/THE WHOLE STORY (S) - PMI MLP 99 1143 1 £14.99

## New LV releases, scheduled for delivery before April

COMMANDO [S,CLV/CAV] - CBS/FOX 1484-70 £19.99  
 9 1/2 WEEKS [S] - CBS/FOX 6162-70 £19.99  
 JEWEL OF THE NILE [S] - CBS/FOX 1491-70 £19.99  
 COBRA [S] - WARNER PEL 11594 £19.99  
 SILVER BULLET - CANNON TLY 90 4000 1 £19.99

## New LV releases, scheduled April onwards

ENEMY MINE [S] - CBS/FOX £19.99  
 ALIENS [S] - CBS/FOX £24.95  
 YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES & THE PYRAMID OF FEAR [S] - CIC £19.99  
 PIRATES - CANNON £19.99 (After May)  
 THE COLOUR PURPLE - WARNER £24.95 (Not before June)  
 EUROPEAN VACATION - WARNER £19.99  
 NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 2/FREDDIE'S REVENGE - WARNER £19.99  
 SHANGHAI SURPRISE [S] - WARNER £19.99  
 A ROOM WITH A VIEW [S] - EMBASSY £19.99

Status in ( ) confirmed. Status in [ ] likely but unconfirmed.

There are plans to re-issue ALIEN as a single disc (when originally pressed the technology did not allow a programme of that length to be put all on one disc). The title is presently out of stock, as is RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK which will most likely be re-pressed some time in the future.

However, these titles have recently been marked up as deletions and there are no plans to re-issue them - STARTING OVER, SHOWBOAT, EVERLY BROS/REUNION CONCERT, QUEEN'S GREATEST FLIX, BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST/BERLIN, THE MIKADO.

The majority of the PIONEER catalogue, after some period of non-availability, has re-appeared - and at favourably reduced prices (mostly £9.99).

