

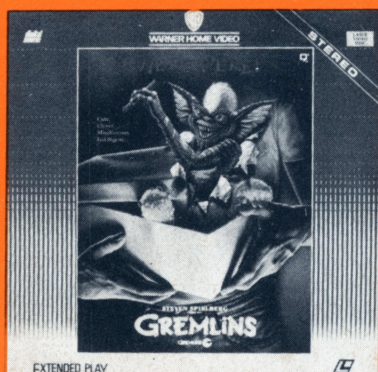
LASER DISC REVIEW

JUNE 1986

ISSUE 7 £1.25

The magazine about LASERVISION

Interacting with PIONEER's PX-7 Computer
GREMLINS in the works? - New



WARNER titles
& other disc
news - 20cm discs



at last! • The latest from Japan
Looking at the US Space Discs • 25 Reviews
PIONEER's CLD 900 LaserVision and CD Player



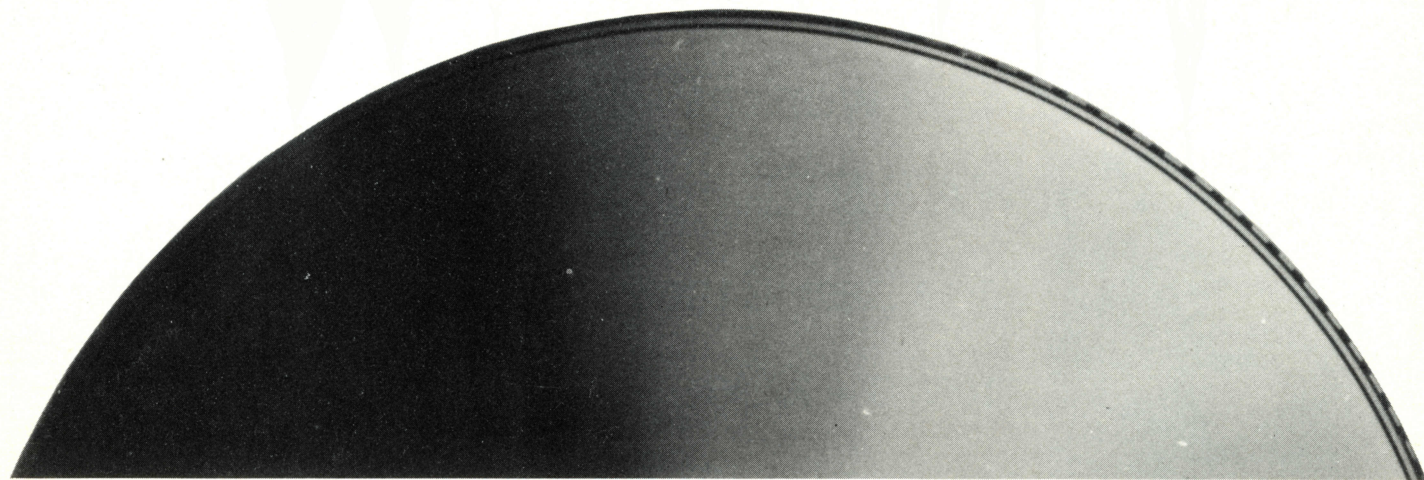
EQUIPMENT NEWS & DISC REVIEWS



**The World's Best
Music Stores.**

You want it, the chances are we've got it at the HMV shop Oxford Street.
"Kelly's Heroes" is just one of our Laserdisc selection, which is (we modestly mention)
the biggest selection in the UK. Call in or phone us with your order now on 01-629 1240.

We've even got Telly Savalas on Laserdisc.



CAMBRIDGE VIDEO

Telephone (0223) 213042

8 SEYMOUR STREET
CAMBRIDGE
CB1 3DQ



For all your LaserVision and C D requirements



All
new WARNER
titles stocked - GREMLINS
- POLICE ACADEMY I & II
GREYSTOKE - ROCKYS -
plus RETURN OF THE JEDI
NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET
BREWSTER'S MILLIONS -
MASK and more

- ALL NEW TITLES AVAILABLE ON RELEASE DATE
- EXTENSIVE BACK CATALOGUE SERVICE
- PLAYERS AT COMPETITIVE PRICES
- MAIL ORDER FOR UK AND REST OF WORLD
- TELEPHONE ORDERING SERVICE
- ACCESS AND VISA ACCEPTED

**** ENQUIRE ABOUT QUANTITY DISCOUNTS

SEND OR TELEPHONE NOW FOR LISTS

JUNE 1986

ISSUE 7

EDITOR & PUBLISHER Philip Parr
DESIGN & LAYOUT .. Gillian Tilbrook
CONTRIBUTORS Keith Arnold, Ken Barnes, Marc Comfort, H.T. Swaep, Dwight R. Decker, Peter Moverley, Tony Wells, Steve Keaton, Chris Murden

LASER DISC REVIEW is published quarterly and covers all aspects of LaserVision and the related fields of video and audio. Every effort is made to produce as accurate and informative a publication as possible and the contents are printed in good faith, but responsibility cannot be accepted for others' errors or facts that may have changed during the production of this issue. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the magazine itself. LASER DISC REVIEW is copyrighted and may not be copied or the contents reproduced without consent. © 1986

ISSN 0267-9671

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

Tel: 01-351 4535

- * Single Copy Prices -
UK £1.25
Europe £1.25
Elsewhere £2.00 (Air)
£1.25 (Sea)
* Subscriptions (4 issues) -
UK £4.00
Europe £4.50
Elsewhere £7.25 (Air)
£4.50 (Sea)

Your subscription has expired if there is a cross in this box.



Payment may be made in cash or by cheque, PO, Bankers' Draft, IMO, or by transfer to GIRO - 55 521 2009. Please make all payments out to "Laser Disc Review". Overseas readers are reminded that writing out a cheque in £Sterling is NOT acceptable and currency conversion must be executed through your bank or postal service. The latter tends to be the cheapest. We are presently able to accept US bank cheques made out in US\$. Remit \$8.00 for a sea-mail subscription, \$12.00 air. All other US\$ cheque payments must include an additional \$2.00 over the conversion to cover the extra bank charges. Please specify the first issue of any new subscription. LASER DISC REVIEW welcomes correspondence, but if you require a personal reply please include an SAE. Allowance should be made in the length of time taken to reply. Letters depending on the production schedule of the magazine.

FROM THE EDITOR

It is unfortunate that there should be such a large proportion of this issue given over to discs and players only available in the NTSC format, but the reality is that it is this aspect of LaserVision that is currently undergoing the greatest expansion, with mouthwatering quantities of discs and exciting new developments in players. Some of the latter will no doubt filter through to us in time, but essentially, the PAL scene is frustratingly held in limbo waiting the arrival of a combined LV/CD player in the style of this issue's reviewed PIONEER CLD900.

Once the technical problems have been overcome and the standard for digital audio on LV decided we look to be in for an exciting period of growth in the LV market over the next couple of years. PHILIPS have been characteristically guarded over what is to happen, until Xmas anyway, when reports in the Financial Times and the Dutch press revealed definite plans for a combined player in the £400 price range - a price that has been similarly quoted in Germany, a country that has only recently endured an embarrassing cessation in LaserVision activities. LDR doubts whether this new player is likely to appear before 1987 although one might expect to see some pre-production samples before then. PHILIPS will still have a new player this year to tie in with the Domesday project but this will be an LV only machine to cater specifically for interactive applications. As can be seen from Japanese Report, SONY, HITACHI and YAMAHA have all recently jumped into the domestic market with combined players so, along with long-time market leaders PIONEER and their new CLD-7, there should be quite a choice of manufacturers' products available when the PAL digital standard has been determined. Whether any of these companies will be able to deliver PAL models sooner than 1987 is a matter for conjecture.

Now CD has acquired an apparently unstoppable momentum and is becoming a regular high street consumer product (as

opposed to being just an enthusiast interest) PHILIPS see the market ripe for a multi-use player that could attract CD users upwards. The 'CD with video' disc, as yet only in the discussion stage but potentially capable of carrying 20 minutes of audio - the last five minutes of which having accompanying video, means that there will be a ready market for CD players that connect to a TV display. Anybody in the market for a new 'video ready' CD player is bound to be drawn to a multi-use machine that does the whole job - CDs, video CDs, 30cm LV discs, 20cm LV discs (they're coming!), LV discs with Digital Sound - the variations are endless. (LDR would like to see some long-playing CD format audio-only discs - if 8mm can do it, why not LV?) The appeal of a multi-use player will be irresistible and the boost to the LV player market will do much to raise the demand and for video software, thereby greatly increasing the quantity of new releases.

In the first issue of this magazine we pinned our hopes for the future on a multi-use LV/CD player. The realisation of that hope is almost too exciting for words.

Providing we can still come up with the words, a bit of new technology in use for the first time this issue should make them more legible. LDR 7 was prepared on an MSX computer (aided by a TASWORD MSX word-processing programme) and typeset on a BROTHER daisy-wheel printer (all except Dwight's piece - but then we don't all have laser printers yet!) and you will hopefully notice some improvement in the appearance of this and future issues.

Till then.

EDITOR

CONTENTS

LETTERS

Surround Sound, Conical Warps, CAV, Cuts & Deletions	5
WHAT'S HAPPENING	
Amusement Trades, HDTV Demo, Disc News	7
JAPAN REPORT	
Marc Comfort brings the latest news	10
PIONEER's PX-7 COMPUTER	
The Review	11
Chris Murden's Software Program	13
PIONEER's LD 707	
A new NTSC player	15
PIONEER's CLD 900	
The LV/CD player	16
LETTER FROM AMERICA	
Dwight R. Decker looks at the US Space Discs	18
THE REVIEWS	
Introductory ramblings	21
25 Discs - From Rambo 2 to Romeo & Juliet	22
THE LASER CALENDAR	Rear Cover

Laser Sound & Vision

UNIT 1, BRITLAND ESTATE, 90a NORTHBOURNE ROAD, EASTBOURNE, SUSSEX BN22 8QB. Telephone (0323) 640911, Evenings 763303

THE MUSIC DISC PEOPLE

SAME DAY DISPATCH

WE ALSO MAIL OVERSEAS

PHONE FOR FREE LIST



IMPORTED DISCS
IN STOCK

TINA TURNER - Queen Of Rock'n Roll(CAV)
THE BEST OF REGGAE SUNSPASH Vol 2(CAV)
BOB MARLEY - Live At The Rainbow
QUEEN - We Will Rock You
CHARLES AZNAVOUR - An Evening With(CAV)
EDDY GRANT - Live At Notting Hill(CAV)
KINKS, STRAY CATS, DAVE EDMUNDS,
BONEY M etc - Hot Super 20 (Compilation)

WE STOCK ALL MUSIC DISCS

RELIABLE VIDEOS

820 PERSHORE ROAD SELLY PARK BIRMINGHAM B29
Telephone 021 471 2428

LASERDISC STOCKIST 500 DISCS ALWAYS IN STOCK

- ☐ SAME DAY DISPATCH FOR DISCS HELD IN STOCK
- ☐ YOU CAN ALWAYS PHONE THROUGH TO CHECK AVAILABILITY OF TITLES
- ☐ ACCESS & VISA CARDHOLDERS CAN ORDER DIRECTLY BY TELEPHONE
- ☐ WHY NOT SEND LARGE SAE FOR FULL CATALOGUE OF TITLES
- ☐ WE CAN ALSO MAIL DISCS OVERSEAS
- ☐ DISCOUNTS FOR LARGE ORDERS
- ☐ THERE IS ALWAYS A NEED FOR ANY OF YOUR UNWANTED DISCS TOO - SEND DETAILS

WE ALSO SELL MACHINES

PHILIPS

VLP 600 £184

VLP 700 £225

PIONEER

LD 700 £499



PLUS DELIVERY CHARGE

OPENING TIMES - 11am - 8pm 7 DAYS A WEEK

New Releases



Letters

From: David Radisic, Essex

Would you know if all (or some of) the entries for Computer Graphics '85 (the computer animation show) will ever be put on a CAV laser disc in the UK or anywhere else? This is one disc I would pay double, or even triple, the normal price for as no other medium could show the effects as well as LV. The sort of thing I'm talking about is the *Smarty* ad on ITV, *Max Headroom* on C4, and other animation effects used in films such as *The Last Starfighter*. All this, and more, was part of CG '85 and I think it is perfect for laser disc.

From: Keith W. Lloyd, Oxfordshire

With regard to surround sound - prior to DOLBY Stereo in the 1950s, some films which were made in CINEMASCOPE carried four-channel magnetic soundtracks. Two of films I have identified on LV are *Gigi* and *Guys & Dolls*. Anyone equipping themselves for surround sound would be strongly recommended to acquire them.

Secondly, on the HDTV front, at the exhibition I attended last Autumn I was informed that telecine machines were already in existence for the transfer of 35mm film stock. Also, from what I was able to gather, some of the Japanese companies, notably PIONEER, are already proceeding with plans for HDTV discs and players. Apparently the high density of information storage necessary will restrict playing times to 30 mins per side. It seems fairly obvious that the Japanese giants require ongoing new product to export, and HDTV in disc form for overseas territories looks like the target. After seeing the demonstration I must conclude that 35mm film stock transferred to it will retain its quality. HDTV on standard monitors is reasonably impressive but comes completely into its own when used in conjunction with a video projector and large 5:3 ratio viewing screen. The demo was with a conventional 175mm tube-type projector but laser-driven projectors should eventually come to be manufactured for HDTV.

As far as existing LaserVision players go - I have found the PIONEER LD700 that I recently purchased to be a first-class performer. Mention has previously been made in LDR of the LD700's picture quality - an observation I can fully endorse. But, in addition, the sound situation also improves in relation to my previous PHILIPS VLP700 machine.

From: John N. Park, Cleveland

Before the euphoria of the latest releases dies down (and the excitement over the new WARNER titles) I'd like to register my sheer anger at the latest price rises imposed by the new distributors. LV set out to provide a cheap and affordable way of collecting film titles. So with this in mind I got rid of my VCR and decided to invest in disc. Prices were on average £17.95. I assumed that when the system began to gain ground prices would drop.... and so they did.

The latest price rises have shattered my interest in the system. Who is going to pay £29.99 for a double disc? This year I was going to upgrade my PHILIPS player to the new PIONEER. At today's disc

prices that is out of the question. The disc machine will now take second place and I plan to buy a VCR instead. I enjoy classic films. Unfortunately LaserVision doesn't yet cater - will it ever - for these tastes. On the other hand TV does. In future my disc purchases will be very limited.

From: Pat Olsen, Yorkshire

I have finally (4 months wait) received my MARANTZ DOLBY Decoder. It's really great and adds an extra dimension to DOLBY films. The MINIM unit I bought a year ago is a washout. When I used to try it on DOLBY MP films I used to spend more time listening to the back speakers than watching the film - and then couldn't make up my mind whether I was hearing anything. When I spoke to MINIM on the phone before I bought it they made out it would decode the DOLBY MP signal but it only does the job it was made for - decoding UHJ matrix information on certain audio records and creating ambient sound. But that's not DOLBY MP is it?



On *The Empire Strikes Back* I notice I get a moire effect coming and going in certain scenes, like wavy lines. I've never had any trouble like this before.

From: H.V. Challis, Norfolk

Have just received *Empire Strikes Back* and am appalled by the atrocious quality of this disc which only has its sound to recommend it. The picture is streaked with noise and curly patterns appear every now and then. I've seen better '30s colour films than this for quality and certainly don't intend paying £20 for such a shocking piece of work.

From: Christian Webb, West Yorkshire

Having finally reached the point where I now own a copy of *Empire* (that's one crossed off the list....many more to go) and having the joy of seeing the elapsed time counter change to a one hour display on side two, I have a couple of observations to make. Throughout both sides the wriggle crosstalk effect is evident - and not necessarily on dark scenes. Also the special effects in the battle scenes seem to be shown up by the disc. Quite clearly visible are the shaped areas continually encircling the model fighters. Even in the cinema this effect did not show up. P.S. My newly acquired *Murder By Decree* also has wriggly crosstalk lines through-

out the whole of side two, getting progressively worse towards the end. It totally destroys the enjoyment of such a good film. Let's hope we can put a bit of pressure of PHILIPS to avoid further such appalling examples.

From: Andre Corteil, Belgium

Concerning *Empire Strikes Back* my disc is giving me headaches. There is crosstalk all through both sides and on some parts of the soundtrack there are "cracks" modulated with the sound. I have a VP720. I tried it on a VP500 and it was no better so I decided to send it back to CAMBRIDGE VIDEO but they advised me all the copies they had received had the same symptoms and a replacement was unlikely to be any better - though they did offer to change it for another title. I already have two other long discs - *Video Rewind & Monty Python Vol. 1* that give my player no problems so the fault would appear to be elsewhere.

These are three of the letters received about 'The Empire Strikes Back'. The magazine inclines to the view that there may be as much at fault with the original master tape as with any problems in disc manufacture. As Andre Corteil points out, long discs do not necessarily cause trouble. There may not be much that can be done to improve 'Empire' now, but Christian Webb's letter highlights one aspect of the crosstalk problem - the significance of which is only just becoming apparent.

The introduction to the Review section in issue 6 commented on the increased incidence of crosstalk wriggle in the more recent pressings - since when even more wriggly discs have come to light. The fact that Christian's 'Murder By Decree' exhibits the wriggle only on one side indicates conical warping. Flattening the problem disc (refer to player instructions or see 'Warp Factor' in issue 3) cures the fault on most occasions.

What has caused the increase in conical warped discs may well be down to the change to injection-moulded pressing in the UK. The emphasis PIONEER and US laser fans have always made on the ability of players to play warped discs now makes more sense since we have changed to the same method of disc manufacture used in Japan and the USA. The greater temperature variations encountered during pressing look either to cause greater warping at the time or leave the disc liable to a longer settling in period after manufacture.

From: L.G. Watts, Kent

Your proposal for a machine with two laser mechanisms in order to play both sides of the disc I find interesting but I see a problem. If you wish the player to continue un-interrupted from side one to side two, or run the two lasers in tandem using both sides of the disc, then side two will have to be recorded in reverse direction - thereby making it incompatible with other discs/players.

Incidentally, when using an NTSC player

and monitor in this country, what happens as we are on 50Hz and they are on 60 - do we get a shimmer as on PAL.

The play from the inside - out configuration would remain and a switch-over code incorporated at the end of side one to get the second laser into motion, and on CLV, re-adjust the rotational speed. Initially one would expect the changeover to be visible and may be a little ungainly, but it would certainly be quicker than at present and a lot more sophisticated than the getting-up-out-the-chair-and-striding-across-the-room-approach. The current method hardly seems compatible with the hi-tech image of lasers. With the continuing advance of electronics one would expect affordable memory devices and synchronised cross-fades could reduce the changeover period to a mere eye-blink. And of course, having a play-both-sides machine really does open up the possibility of some truly unique interactive software - say simultaneously run views of a concert, group views on one side, close-ups of soloists on the other - or drama presentations seen from more than one person's viewpoint.

As regards using NTSC in this country, or vice versa. The assumption is that the mains voltage will be correct on the equipment or altered by the use of an external transformer. Given the correct power supply there are no problems. On the flicker question, some people are more sensitive to the 50Hz TV flicker than others, but 60Hz is definitely better, and significantly, given as one of the reasons for choosing it as part of the HDTV standard being proposed. In the computer field, where intense exposure to video displays is more common, even higher field frequencies are sometimes used.

From: Philip Mee, Derbyshire

Have just discovered my first 'properly mastered' CAV disc - Harry Carpenter's Videobook Of Sport Vol 2. Displaying any still-frame from this disc results in a perfectly steady picture, unlike some of the other CAV discs I've come across. As you correctly pointed out in issue 6, this effect will require some extra tape preparation. Each pair of interlaced frames which go to make up one complete frame contain the same information. Hence you do not get the effect whereby the serving tennis player, for instance, appears to have two right arms holding two rackets in different positions during the stroke. However, this does give rise to an increased amount of flicker due to the inbetween positions (the second interlaced frame) being 'left out'. Try watching any fast moving scene - the table-tennis on this particular disc - and you tend to get the impression that you are watching full speed slow motion rather than the real thing.

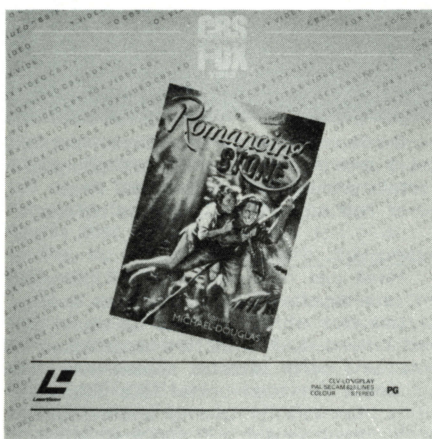
In my opinion this makes properly mastered CAV discs undesirable. I am not saying CAV discs should be done away with - it's just that, in most cases, the 'improperly mastered' ones are preferable. They are also one video process nearer to the master tape. These two factors might help explain why CAV discs seldom appear to be as good as CLV ones. Am I right in thinking that mastering in this abbreviated fashion does not require the extra tape preparation and consequently we could have any side under 36 minutes in CAV at no extra cost? While on the subject, I would also like to see combined CLV/CAV discs where the running time permits.

I have some views, admittedly personal ones, on audio. Please keep LV free from horrible digitally-encoded sound. Yes, I belong to the LINN etc school although I do not own anything nearly as grand. Just by listening to a well-cut analogue LP it is possible to tell whether a digital or analogue tape machine has been used. Digital sound, whilst sounding very hiss-free and 'correct', has a special ability to take all the life out a recording.

Properly recorded LV sound, when played back using good equipment is just about as good as we are going to get having none of the stylus/groove disadvantages. Let's not spoil it. The two sound carriers reproduced from disc are at frequencies of 683KHz and 1066KHz for the L & R channels. The lower of these two represents seventeen times the sampling rate employed on CD (44.1KHz). Wonderful! Mind you, I am not against the production of a combined LV/CD player if this helps LV on its way.

CX and DOLBY encoded discs play back with excessive high frequencies if the correct decoder is not available in the machine. This is the same effect as playing a DOLBY encoded audio cassette with the NR switched out - it produces a very brittle treble. VP600 & 700 owners should be aware of this. It is interesting to note that none of the current LV players have a DOLBY decoder built in - although, at a guess, engaging CX reduction, where available, will produce a reasonable result.

On the subject of cuts in films - the rear of issue 3 stated that a tape fault had been discovered on *Gwendoline*. If you play side two of the disc it becomes apparent that PHILIPS gave up waiting for the replacement, cut out the faulty sections, then remastered what was left! Looking at this title as a whole - what could it possibly have contained that caused such ruinous cuts to be made? A couple of sequences on side two could be run in the opposite order without any further adverse affect on continuity! On a more serious note - where has the "The" gone from the front of the sleeve



of *Romancing The Stone*. Lastly, I have just seen a TV commercial for *Rambo* - saying that it was now out on video. Both VHS and BETA got a mention. Not Laser-Vision though.

Just to clear up a few points about noise reduction. There is no DOLBY noise reduction finding its way on to disc. DOLBY A (as well as other NR systems) is used in the various production stages but does not end up on the disc, although its benefits do as far as reductions in hiss levels of the source material is concerned. The DOLBY that *does* exist on disc is only the DOLBY MP Surround Sound information that crops up (with varying degrees of success!) on some stereo

films.

CX noise reduction, in the form it appears on LV (which seems to deviate slightly from the CBS standard), has so far caused little in the way of compatibility complaints. It would be interesting to hear from readers who can cite any specific examples.

'Gwendoline' - It should be noted that some cuts were made in this film before video release.

From: John F. Clerkin, Lancashire

On the list of December releases I noticed to my horror that *Wild Geese 2* is 105 minutes long, yet the videotape is 124 minutes. This means that 19 min-



utes has been cut from the disc release. I was going to buy the film - but not now. I hope this is not the start of things to come.

From: N. Maue, Essex

Could there please be a much longer warning of deletions? I would prefer at least three months advance warning.

From: Brian Stephens, Tyne & Wear

Steve Keaton's review of *The Empire Strikes Back* states that all the film is on the disc, apart from some opening credits. It is some time since I saw the film at the cinema but I was aware of at least one cut. When Darth Vader's fleet followed the Millennium Falcon into the asteroid belt there was a scene of Vader talking to 3D images of the commanders of the other ships. One of the ships is destroyed by asteroids so the 3D image of the commander of that ship breaks up and disappears. The scene with the 3D images is included - but not the break up of the doomed commander.

Regarding *Starflight One* - the assumption that this is a TV movie is correct. Quite a few American TV movies end up on the British cinema circuit. Feature length episodes of *The Six-Million Dollar Man*, *Spiderman*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and of course, a number of *Battlestar Galactica* have all polluted our cinemas.

From: Ian McTegart, Merseyside

Thanks to all those who help make LDR the best magazine in Britain. Please mention in issue 7 if LDR is going monthly.

Only the best in Britain! - What about the rest of the world?...Hmm (Ed desperately searching for excuses).... Well, it's like this. LDR can only really reflect the existing market and maybe make some idealistic pointers toward the future. Until the LV market grows (and with it, hopefully, subscribers to the magazine) a more frequent publication would not be economic. Besides, it takes three months to type the damn thing!

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

ESPRIT

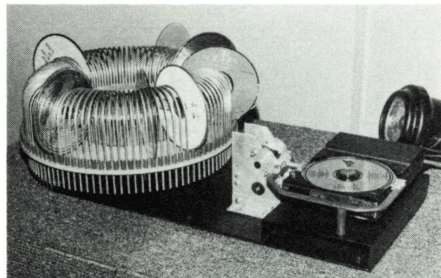
With the Domesday project now under its belt, BBC ENTERPRISES is teaming up with NEDERLANDSE PHILIPS BEDRIJVEN, LOGICA UK, and THE SOCIETE EUROPEENNE DE PROPULSION to develop an interactive videodisc based information system incorporating a greater level of user-friendliness than with existing retrieval methods. LV-ROM discs (LV discs carrying encoded computer programmes and information) will be able to combine analogue still and moving pictures with digital text and data, and later, sound accompaniment to still frame images is envisaged (like the SONY and EECO formats previously developed). This LV project is being funded by ESPRIT - The European Strategic Programme for Research and Development in Information Technology.

AMUSEMENTS

In January the Amusements Trades Exhibition was held at London's Olympia. We arrived and thought we'd come to the wrong place. It wasn't the fact there was no sign on the exterior of the hall indicating what was to be seen inside, but seeing as the show's field of interest is primarily gaming machines, jukeboxes and fairground rides, we assumed we'd be elbowing it with a collection of spivvy looking gents in gold waistcoats and painted-lady ties. The reality turned out somewhat different and we found ourselves thrusting a path through a collection of neat pinstripes that would have done any City rush-hour scene proud.

Exhibitwise it was disappointing not to see anything particularly novel on the video jukebox front. TAITEL were showing THORN EMI's VHD jukebox, confusingly called the VJB (video jukebox). By laser standards the picture displayed was unremarkable but a vast improvement on some of the tape based units on other stands. (Funny, they never look that bad when you're actually in the boozier!)

The Yorkshire MITRONICS company [Mitronics Ltd., 9 Riverside Way, Ravenshorpe Industrial Estate, Ravenshorpe, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire WF13 3LN. Tel: (0924) 493170] were showing a couple of interesting disc handling devices of relevance to LDR. A disc insertion/removal device was on display coupled to a stripped-down PHILIPS VP500 (if that's possible!) for video library use. This particular development originates from a requirement by BRITISH TELECOM for the Westminster area Cable TV network where



[Above: The 100 disc CD caddy hooked up to a SONY D50 player.]

subscribers will be able to select LV discs from a central library through an optical cable link without the trouble of having to step out to the local video rental shop. Once you have sel-

ected your programme from the bank of 102 discs you can sit back to view it on your cable-connected TV. It's a two-way system and it's possible to pause and otherwise control the disc with the cable franchise supplied remote.

For Compact Discs MITRONICS have developed a 100 disc Carousel-type caddy that will be marketed for commercial juke box type applications, but there is potential for a domestic storage unit as well.

VARTEK LTD [Unit 32, Alexandra Way, Aschurch Industrial Estate, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire GL20 8NB Tel: (0684) 296770] were showing an LV disc based Customer Information Unit complete with touch-screen. The exhibition display was a GENERAL MOTORS car sales disc that responded with great speed as you touched the index displayed on the screen. The UK version is based on either a PIONEER LD1100 or LD700 coupled to a THORN TX9 monitor. The information unit drew little response from the passing crowds - presumably because no-one realised what it actually did.

Most people could figure out what STATUS GAMES *Casino Strip* console did.



Again based on a PIONEER player (LV1000) with a dedicated computer interface, *Casino Strip* uses specially commissioned video footage that is displayed on the top screen with the gambling options shown on another screen lower down. In the eighteen months STATUS have been making the unit they have developed 7 discs (number 8 is on the way), each of which features eight separate characters in a variety of sex fantasy situations - "Fly the blonde stewardesses, make the French maid, heat up with the fireman..." yes, that's right, fireman. Two of the discs feature all male characters, presumably for lady gamblers, but then maybe that's being sexist.

There is no plan to market the discs separately for existing domestic player owners - just when you were getting interested in interactive video! - as the population of players in the US is still considered too small (the units and discs are all on NTSC). However, the complete console is now available in the UK for not much over two thou and is likely to prove popular if the crowd it attracted at the show is anything to go by. [Status Games UK Ltd., York House, 284a Oxford Road, Gomersal, Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire Tel: (0274) 871400]

HDTV. UPDATE

SONY BROADCAST have been quite active in promoting the HDTV format (see last issue). The day after the Amusements Trades show the Ed was down in the World Trade Centre at Tower Bridge for a demo of the proposed new TV system. On a 3m diagonal projection screen the assembled crowd was treated to viewing three experimental videos originated on SONY's HDVS system (HDVS is SONY's name for their HDTV equipment). The first two videos were specially commissioned pieces designed to show the format operating under worst-case conditions, the third, an assemblage of scenic/wild-life pieces by NHK Japan, concluding with some distant glimpses of the '84 Olympics, including Lionel Richie's rendition of *All Night Long* at the closing ceremonies.

Picture quality bore little comparison with conventional video and SONY's claim that the HDVS system could replace conventional 35mm film photography looks a reasonable sales pitch to be making. Opinions generally were extremely favourable and the Ed appeared to be out on a limb in having any reservations about what was seen. Apparently the projector was enjoying a temporary malfunction and producing a rather dark picture (nobody else seemed to notice!) This may have accounted for a certain dullness observed in the highlights - or it could have been intentional in order not to show those rather raw spots sometimes cropping up on video. Reds and greens did not come up quite as well as one would have liked. Essentially though, one got the impression of looking at a large photographically-originated picture that appeared devoid of any visible line structure and remarkably free from any dropouts and blemishes. The definition was very good but the resolution of fine detail was not as great as one might have expected on such a 'perfect' picture. It would have been nice to have seen some conventional video projected on to the screen for comparison purposes or possibly some 'live' material that would presumably come closer to the system's full bandwidth (the HDTV format is quoted at 30MHz, the HDTV recorder at 20MHz - SONY's HDV-1000 recorder is an upgraded BVH-2000 C format machine run at double speed with a filing-cabinet size box of extra electronics). However, as an indication of what might end up one day as a level of picture quality achievable in the home HDTV looks very promising. The fact that the demo tape was already down to a fourth generation copy shows the format to be already reasonably robust.

It might be a bit optimistic to expect a similar convenient halving of disc playing times to accommodate a new HDTV disc format, but some thought does appear to have been given to providing some domestic carrier medium in the future. That doesn't mean it's time to throw out all our existing discs in preparation for a new TV format next year - it's likely to be some time before HDTV, if it comes to be accepted as a world standard, can be comfortably squeezed on to disc without reducing playing times to an impractically short duration. However, when that day comes the reality of the home cinema in an undiminished form will be that much nearer. Meanwhile discussions continue as to whether to adopt HDTV as the worldwide broadcast standard too.

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

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

SOFTWARE NEWS

The addition of the WARNER HOME VIDEO catalogue has to be the big news. There have been several WARNER on/off rumours in the past (one of which related to the postponed French LV launch last year) but this time it's for real and discs should start to appear from April onwards. There have been a few changes from the original release batch - AC/DC - Let There Be Rock and Red Dawn have been pulled and replaced by the latest James Bond film *A View To A Kill* and the Bogart favourite *Casablanca*. Other changes involve the addition of *Mad Max 1*, *Rocky 1*, *Rocky 2*, *Never Ending Story*, and *Police Academy II*. The full list is in The Laser Calendar and those films which were made in STEREO are marked - but to be on the safe side, check the sleeve on release. The only other possible worry is over *Sudden Impact* which is understood to have suffered some cuts due to the Video Recordings legislation and might appear in this 'revised' form. There's certainly more than enough in this first WARNER release to stretch people's purses and it's encouraging to see a couple of titles for fans of older classics too - if these sell in sufficient quantity it will undoubtedly help press the argument for more old classics on disc.



Classics on disc inevitably brings us to MGM/UA HOME VIDEO who have been approached under the new LIGHTNING & GOLD arrangement but so far remain uncommitted. Even the Ed had a go at them and they said "We have nothing planned at the moment - but that's not to say we won't be releasing more discs". The latest information is that they might give it a bit more thought in April.

The recent video release *The Last Starfighter* would have been a good choice for disc judging by reader response, but the rights to this title are held by HERON whose competitive position in the wholesale market with L & G makes the film difficult to negotiate for. HERON have also been involved (with POLYGRAM - a PHILIPS associated label) in acquiring PRECISION VIDEO's catalogue which may have an effect on the availability of their disc titles. *The Evil That Men Do* looks like being a casualty of these changes at PRECISION.

Now that WARNER have been sorted out thoughts obviously turn to RCA. In spite of what might appear to be a slight sensitivity over competing (historically speaking) disc formats, the reason we have not seen any RCA LV discs

would seem more a matter of money than corporate rivalry. (RCA are very active in LV in the USA). We nearly did get *Ghostbusters* last Xmas, so let's hope future negotiations prove more fruitful.



THORN EMI have had a steady stream of releases since going with disc. *Amadeus* was, of course, the title that many people were waiting for but apparently the film's producers have declined to permit a disc release. Strange - considering that *Amadeus* is a Digital Sound release in Japan and also scheduled for disc release in the US. Another omission has been *Brazil* which was originally passed over for disc release, but L & G were reconsidering it by January, and only the fact that it would work out to £24.99, being a three-sider, seems to have scuppered it again. *A Passage To India* has been confirmed and has only been held up due to the need to request a new mastertape - the original one proving unsatisfactory.

Carmen and *The Nutcracker* are the last ARTS INTERNATIONAL discs from the 40-title batch that PHILIPS originally negotiated and there is no news as to whether L & G will continue the series. ARTS INT have more titles available (*Andrea Chenier* - in two versions, *Don Carlo*, *Attila*, *Albert Herring*, *Il Trovatore*, *The Coronation Of Poppea*, *Higgledy Piggledy Pop*, *Natasha*, and a collection of Christmas Carols) but all 'specialist' programmes seem to be suffering a bit at the moment due to doubts as to whether they can generate a guaranteed minimum sales figure. There are moves behind the scenes to make sure there is some desirable material available in time for the combined LV/CD player but one hopes things aren't going to dry up completely in the meantime.

CIC's *Partners* is still in limbo and may not finally appear. *Mask and Brewster's Millions* should be out by the time you get to read this. Those copies of *Apocalypse Now* that showed up a little unexpectedly, while the disc was being considered for re-pressing, were apparently stumbled across unexpectedly at Blackburn, and it is presently undecided whether the re-press will still go ahead. This whole topic of maintaining a full back catalogue and whether to delete titles is still uncertain, but any cheap disc is bound to be a good buy for obvious reasons. But going back to CIC and that other sought-after double *The Blues Brothers* - this is even o/s on video-cassette due to some music copyright dispute and unlikely to be available again on disc till it's resolved.

That mention of putting side 3 of a suitable three-sider into CAV nearly came to pass on *The Return Of The Jedi* as a means of adding to the value of this just over two-hour title. There was even talk of doing the whole thing in CAV (on 4 sides) but the likelihood of delaying the release might work against either possibility. No doubt it will have been sorted out by the time you get to read this.

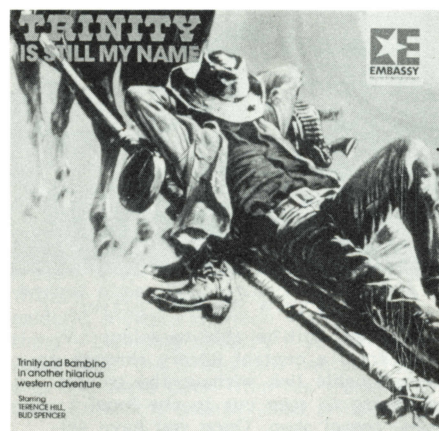
The sleeves of the next trio of PIONEER discs have turned up - it's just the bits inside we're waiting for. When they arrive, they arrive.



THAT SURVEY - A reader wrote in to complain that his five titles didn't show up in the WWWOL list - the reason is that no-one else wanted them too! The whole idea of compiling a list was to suggest titles that would translate into sales - immediately - otherwise they won't get released, no matter how wonderful they might be artistically. One aspect of the survey we didn't let on about was that we sent out a dummy order list of titles to a handful of dealers so L & G could cross-check the WWWOL votes with likely potential dealer orders. No stone left unturned, eh?

With disc sales being concentrated into the hands of comparatively few dealers your requests for future titles, as the new video releases occur, is probably best conveyed to them as the most immediate way of getting new titles selected. However, do continue to mention title wants in any letters to LDR - even if your letter is about something else it always pays to jot down any current wants somewhere where there's room. It helps keep us all working to the same end.

COLLECTORS' NEWS



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

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

These two sleeves from the unissued *Trinity Is Still My Name* and the 1978 re-make of *The 39 Steps* turned up in a dealer's showroom along London's Tottenham Court Road recently. Unfortunately, neither title ever got to be issued.



You may recall reader Gordon M. Plummer's letter in which he reported finding Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* on side 3 of his copy of *The Wild Geese*. It seemed likely that PHILIPS may have been using odd bits of programme material such as this as test pieces in the run up to the Laser-Vision launch but it transpires that POLYGRAM had actually scheduled several Chaplin titles for disc release although none appeared (bar *The Great Dictator* in Germany). *Modern Times* was certainly one that was test-pressed and sleeves prepared but, along with the others, cancelled at the last moment.



Another sleeve oddity relevant to this issue is this original sleeve for *The Seduction* which was made (we have a copy) but, by the time the disc got to be released, EMBASSY had changed their overall design format and new sleeves had to be prepared (see page 22).

SPACE PALS

The Dutch space discs detailed last issue are now released - we hope to carry a review next time. They are bilingual, Dutch/English and in CLV. You can get them direct from the label - VIDEOSCREEN, PO BOX 426, 3430 AK NIEUWEGEIN, THE NETHERLANDS. The price is fls-69 but you had best write first to ascertain mailing charges etc. VIDEOSCREEN can also supply other Dutch LV discs, both on their own and other labels.

GERMANY NOW

The arrival of 1986 sees us past the planned cessation of LV activity in Germany, but we don't really know what is happening with existing disc stocks. LDR has found many German-manufactured discs to be poorly pressed and we have had lots of faulties on the ATLAS & POLYGRAM labels, so caution is advised in picking your way through the catalogue. Most of the CBS/FOX discs are pressed in the UK and, apart from a defective *Krieg Der Sterne* (*Star Wars*) we got, look to be a bit more reliable. All the MIKE HUNTER discs appear satisfactory pressings but one reader has failed to receive any response from them since sending his money off for a disc. It would seem advisable to make letter/phone contact before ordering anything.

Most German discs still available should be obtainable from - AV REPORT, KURFURSTENDAMM 71, 1000 BERLIN 31, WEST GERMANY, but again, write first before sending any money.



[Dubbed into German, except the songs, this is 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'.]

UNMETRIC

Although nobody will probably care too much what they will actually be called, "8 inch" discs are being planned for the very near future - a provisional target date for June has been set, but don't put a cross on your calendar just in case. Blackburn have produced a test run and when titles and licensing agreements have been sorted out a preliminary launch of ten titles is planned, possibly spread over two months, with follow-up discs appearing on a monthly basis when suitable titles become available. Don't expect a flood of discs though.

A provisional list made mention of the likes of Dire Straits, Madonna, Beatles (RSG) etc but these may change closer to the time as the format is likely to be more topically oriented than full-size discs - understandably so. Prices are being described as "attractive" - nothing can be fixed until royalty rates are determined. Expect something less than £10. The format is essentially for 20 minute programmes as maximum in order to keep the discs single sided - it starts making economic sense to go to a full size disc for longer material, rather than run the 8"ers double-sided. Anything that runs that short - children's programmes for example - could end up on the smaller discs.

WE'RE SURROUNDED

MARANTZ quoted Mid-March for the next shipment of RV353 DOLBY Surround Decoders which will come as good news for the many frustrated readers who have missed out on earlier (and small) supplies from Japan. Such is the demand for this unit that, in mid-January, a local dealer quoted us a price of £235 for the one sitting in his window!

Late February, NEC were giving a launch for their AV-300E Audio/Visual amplifier with remote control and built-in DOLBY Surround Decoder. NEC, while being a large Japanese company with the bulk of their interests in computers, business systems, satellites and telecommunications, also receive about 10% of their turnover from home electronics - a sector which they plan to devote increased attention in future.

As described in issue 5, the AV-300E is a stereo 60W amp, switchable to a four channel 30W mode. In this configuration the unit makes the most of the DOLBY Surround and the other two modes - Hall Surround for reverberation enhancement on concert recordings, and Matrix Surround, more suitable for larger outdoor events and general ambience effects. The amplifier is due to be sold with a self-powered subwoofer unit that doubles as a TV stand (although it didn't look to be quite up to taking larger 50Kg+ sets). There are two video inputs for disc etc, two video in/outs for VCRs (with dubbing facilities and image enhancement), two TV outputs, a set of audio in/outputs, and pre/main amplifier connections for ancillary processors or the use of alternative power amplifiers if you need more watts.

One nice thing about the launch demonstration was that NEC used a disc of *Rambo 2* (played on a LD700 - the only non-NEC item in the equipment rack. NEC do support disc in Japan but are not presently anticipating getting into producing PAL hardware until the software catalogue increases) as well as some hi-

Sidewinder Video

VIDEO MAIL ORDER SPECIALIST

ALL OUR VIDEOS etc ARE BRAND NEW
VHS/BETA/V2000 TAPES FROM £14.95
LASERVISION DISCS FROM £ 9.99

OUR LATEST VIDEO CATALOGUE LISTS
OVER 7000 TITLES..... £ 1.75

IF YOU PREFER: PLEASE ASK FOR ONE
OF THE FOLLOWING FREE LISTS.....
*VHS/BETA/V2000 CASSETTES.....
*LASERVISION DISCS.....
*TV GAMES/EDUCATION etc.....
*AUDIO COMPACT DISCS.....

PLEASE INDICATE LIST REQUIRED

SIDEWINDER VIDEO(R)
17 CHURCH LANE
SUTTON COLDFIELD
WEST MIDLANDS
B76 0BJ

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

Japanese Report

From Our Correspondent In Japan
MARC COMFORT

Greetings from digital laser disc land. New combined LV/CD machines were promised for March delivery by SONY, YAMAHA and HITACHI. Meanwhile, PIONEER's new CLD-7, a much slimmer combined player nearer the size of the LD700, appeared out of the blue at the end of January and lists for ¥ 158,000, only ¥ 10,000 more than the LD7100 (LD707) which is now already being quite heavily discounted for such a recently introduced model. The claim for higher 370+ line resolution is being quoted on all the newbies. By the beginning of 1986 the number of Digital Sound releases was already up to 125.

mitsubishi have a new 37" tube TV set that sells for ¥ 720,000. Sales of bigger sizes of TVs have enjoyed a greater proportionate increase in Japan over the last year. All the new SONY Trinitron and Profeel TVs are FST models. Most new Japanese sets are now FST.

The December release sheet lists well over 60 new discs - *White Christmas*, *The Wiz*(DS), *Romeo & Juliet*(CIC), *Days Of Heaven*, *Robin & Marian*, *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, *Roman Holiday*, *Man Of La Mancha* plus another batch of WARNER titles. Foreign films in original language were *Le Dernier Metro* and *Une Belle Fille Comme Moi*.

The music titles included a 176 minute Maria Callas 1959-62 retrospective listing for ¥12,800 as well as a 110 minute

single disc of the opera star at a hefty ¥ 14,800. Other discs were *Prince & The Revolution - Live*, a 23 minute Sade Caver, a 51 minute DS *Beethoven Eroica*, *Eric Clapton - Live*(DS), *Lee Ritenour & Dave Gruisin - Live From The Record Plant* (DS), *Heavy Metal Rock Superstars* (Black Sabbath, Gary Moore, Krokus, Ozzy Osborne, Motorhead etc - 70 minute compilation), *Billie Holliday - The Long Night Of Lady Day*, *Jazz Vocal Collection Vol. 2* (Nat Cole, Connie Boswell, Betty Clooney etc-60'), *The Sound Of Jazz* (a 57' Count Basie, Thelonius Monk, Red Allen compilation), *Big Band & Combo Special - Solitaire* (Duke Ellington, Les Brown, George Shearing, Charlie Barnet etc - 59'), and a new Ventures disc on the PONY label. There's also a 2-disc, 4-sided CAV of the 1985 Motor Cycle Grand Prix that lists at ¥ 8,800.

In February (the January list didn't show) the films included *Marathon Man*, *The Day Of The Jackal*, *The Odessa File*, *The Eyes Of Laura Mars*, *Spider Man Strikes Back*, *Paris Texas*, *Bullitt*, *Who Will Love My Children* and *Carmen*(DS). Foreign films were *Hostonateu* (Autumn Sonata), *Viskningar Och Rop*(1972), *YOL* (1982), *Baisers Voles*(1968), *Les Deux Anglaises Et Le Continent*(1971), and *Madchen In Uniform*(1931).

Music titles included *Talking Heads* (DS), *Manhattan Transfer*(DS), *J.S. Bach - Der Orgel Meisterwerke*(DS), *The GRP All-Stars Live From The Record Plant*(DS),

Otis Redding on RSG, *The Sounds Of Motown*(RSG), and an Ashford & Simpson 'Jr'.

Both *Rambo 2* and *2010* are wide-screen - *Rambo* subs in picture, *2010* subs under picture. Another MGM/UA release is *Motown - 25 years*, a 128 minute ¥ 10,800 double. A surprise new release is *Santa Claus -The Movie*!



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

fi videocassettes to put the AV-300E through its paces. The opportunity to get hold of the remote, after the main demo, and play around with the front/rear balance did much to underline the well-conceived design of the amp. This brief description could not really do justice to it. Expect to see supplies arriving in May (we asked for confirmation of this!). The price is £479 for the amp + the subwoofer, £599 to include all five speakers. NEC outlets aren't thick on the ground at present so if you want to find out where you can see & hear a demonstration you'd best get in touch with NEC to ascertain the address of your nearest dealer. NEC(Home Electronics Division), 164-166 Drummond Street, London NW1 3HP. Tel: 01-388 6100.

USA NEWS

***** The *Knowledge Disc*, a co-production of GROlier ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING & ACTIVENTURE is an \$89.95 one-sided LV disc that contains the text of the 20 volume *American Academic Encyclopaedia* in a series of still frames - 9,000,000 words and 32,000 entries. If you want the photographs too you'll still need the books - but at \$350 the price is a little higher. In case you were thinking this sort of storage application called for a CD-ROM, this is available for \$199 and is being offered with a player at a package price of \$1,395 ***** *Ghostbusters* due for re-release in CAV ***** IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT, the premier label for XXX-rated discs, have been releasing an

increasing number of single-sided discs at a new low price of \$34.95 ***** A further low price disc is *Burns & Allen Vol. 1* that lists at \$19.95 ***** The University of Delaware has released a 4-disc CAV music teaching aid - \$295.00 [Continued on page 20, column 3]

DEALER NEWS

DH AUDIO VISUAL in Edinburgh are to produce a tape on interactive video in conjunction with a local educational establishment lecture programme. It will last for around an hour and readers interested in obtaining a copy should send £6-00 (incl. P & P) to DH AUDIO VISUAL, 16 Lochrin Buildings, Edinburgh EH3 9NB. Tel:(031) 229-5960 specifying format - VHS or V2000.

Another local dealer to make themselves known to LDR is RAWLINGS RADIO, 15 Bennett Road, Bournemouth BH8 8QG. Tel: 34659. They are an independent dealership - the only listed suppliers of LV discs in the Dorset area - who also carry players and several ranges of TV & Hi-Fi. Local dealers wishing to be mentioned in this column should send brief details of products carried for inclusion next time.

SMALL ADS DISCS FOR SALE

***** Loretta Lynn, Adam Ant In Japan, Rod Stewart, Toyah, Xtro, Exterminator, Jaguar Lives, City On Fire, Vice Squad, The Seven-Ups - £5 each plus P & P. C. Harvey - 021 554 7529.

***** *Apocalypse Now*, *All That Jazz*, *Atlantic City*, *Blue Max*, *Black Marble*, *Death Valley*, *Dracula*, *El Cid*, *Fog*, *Exterminator*, *Kagemusha*, *55 Days At Peking*, *Last American Virgin*, *Fall Of Roman Empire*, *Island*, *Omen*, *Silver Streak*, *Wild Geese* - all £20 each. *Blues Bros*, *Blue Hawaii* - £50 each. *Philips VLP600* - £80. Tel: Andy 01-691 8376.

NTSC DISCS FOR SALE

NTSC LV discs available from stock, including many of the latest Digital Sound releases. Phone Roby between 9.00-4.00 for details - 0334 74564

READERS' CONTACT

These readers have expressed the desire to get in touch with fellow LV owners:

***** I. Simpson - 81 Union Street, Portadown, Craigavon, County Armagh, N. Ireland BT62 4AE.

***** Horst Strube - Bleichstr 7, 7320 Goeppingen, West Germany. Would like to communicate with owners in the UK and Sweden.

***** Michel Declunder - 62 Rue Henri Ghesquiere, 59160 Lomme, France. Michel is an NTSC owner with an interest in space discs who would like to get in touch with other enthusiasts in France and mainland Europe.

The SMALL ADS column is an ideal way for readers to dispose of unwanted discs and communicate with others. This is a free service at present. List details briefly and separately from any other correspondence. Next deadline-30th April

Pioneer's PX-7

Computing can be fun?

Although much is made of the interactive potential of LV, little of it permeates down to the domestic user. PIONEER UK have had their PX-7 computer on the market for a few months now and it seemed a good idea to see how it could enhance the use of a disc player.

The computer comes in two parts. The 'works' are housed in a 420mm wide box, the front of which has a 13-pin DIN socket where the keyboard lead is inserted. The main unit is surprisingly heavy, and even though the keyboard is feather-weight light, the PX-7 weighs in at very nearly twice the usual 3.0Kg or so other MSX computers run to. The rear panel contains 15 sockets, about half of which will need using. The idea is that the computer comes between the disc player and your audio and video components. This way everything is brought under unified control. Among the 'system control' ports, the 8-pin DIN socket marries with the matching I/O port on the LD700. (You need the non-supplied JC-303 lead for this). The older disc player, the LD1100 does not have this 8-pin socket and an alternative means of connection is stipulated - from the mini-jack/2 socket on the PX-7 to the Control jack socket on the player. In both cases the computer is essentially taking over the command role normally managed by the I/R remote (which becomes mostly inoperative when the computer is switched on).

It's unfortunate that the keyboard couldn't have had I/R control over the main unit too. The keyboard's captive lead is only 1.5 metres in length and presents installation problems. In some respects this harks back to a topic raised in issue 2 - where to position the components in your A/V system. Adverts and brochures normally show a monitor display sitting in a rack with all the other components around it. If you put your PX-7 into this sort of arrangement you end up sitting about a metre away from your display. Our first attempt at organising things had the PX-7 on top of the monitor - that meant the cable hung down and cut one's view of the screen in half! Obviously, underneath or to one side is better - but you're still too close. This would not normally be a problem in a conventional computer set-up where sitting on top of the display is the done thing - but the PX-7 is conceived as a home entertainment unit and kneeling on the floor halfway between your TV and the your comfy sofa does not seem ideal. Given the quietness of the LD700, the best advice would be to ignore the photos in the adverts and organise your components near your viewing position, leaving just the speakers to be arranged around your TV.

THE MSX STANDARD

As you may have gathered, the PX-7 is an MSX computer. On page 3 of the manual it says "MSX is an open-ended

system standardised throughout its full range of manufacturers and models and represents the final step towards the dream of perfect compatibility". Anyone who has dabbled in computers will no doubt appreciate the desirability of such an ambition. A computer is of little use in isolation, and it can be a veritable nightmare trying to assemble a group of components into a working system. MSX offers a way out of computer tangle and one looks forward to seeing the system develop. As things are, most of the existing MSX units look decidedly underspecified in relation to many UK & US models. But, the system is upgradable, so purchasers of the PX-7 should find that future advances do not make the unit obsolete. Most significantly, the MSX format enables other manufacturers' MSX compatible hardware to be hooked up, so significantly increasing the range of peripherals beyond that of conventional 'closed' systems. We've already seen photos of MSX video-still printers and programmable data backs for CANON 35mm cameras and there's no doubt more to come. Most of the Japanese majors are committed to MSX, as is PHILIPS, although they have so far chosen not to release any units into the UK market. As far as computer-aided disc control is concerned, the future would seem to lie with IBM compatibility in professional applications and MSX for the domestic user.

As it is the PX-7 does quite a lot.



[Above: The PX-7, showing the front cartridge slot. There is also an additional rear expansion slot.]

Beyond its application as a disc-player controller it will also be of interest to VCR users who may wish to flash up their original productions with some titles and various fades and wipes. This latter aspect is made somewhat easier to implement with the addition of the PX-TB7 Graphics Tablet that further enables you to 'draw' directly on to the TV screen and apply the results to your recordings (or LV disc stills).

One particular application that looks like being given low priority at present is the ability to control some CPE discs (Computer Programme Encoded) - specifically some of the arcade game variety. These exciting real-action games discs were, one suspects, the main motivation for PIONEER to produce a computer such as the PX-7 in the first place. At one time these interactive games were seen as being the salvation of LaserVision, but experience elsewhere would tend to indicate otherwise. There are 8 discs presently available in Japan and, so far, PIONEER have not even introduced them (and the PX-7) into the USA where no additional expenditure on producing the software would be necessary. We do now have the PX-7 but the complications of transferring the games discs to PAL (which are beyond those of conventional NTSC/PAL transfers as we've been told) seems to have put PIONEER off the idea.

The PX-7 does, of course, have all the usual facilities of an MSX computer though it is a little light in the RAM department at 32K (+16K video RAM). An expansion cartridge bringing it up to the more usual MSX 64K capacity is available for an extra £50. What the PX-7 does have that is presently unique is the ability to synchronise graphics and video images. Usually mixing sources induces a loss of sync and frame roll results, but with the PX-7 this is not the case.

GETTING DOWN TO IT

Readers who up to now have only been familiar with unpacking hi-fi and video components will no doubt be impressed by the sheer weight of documentation supplied with the PX-7. There are three A5 size books - an 85 page Instruction Book, a 196 page MSX Basic Reference Manual, and a 27 page P-Basic Manual. And these aren't the usual multi-lingual items - every word is in English (of a sort!). Fortunately you do not need to read all 300+ pages to get things going.

Computers have a language all of their own. In this instance it is called 'MSX BASIC'. Another quote from page one of the instructions - "When you open this manual for the first time, you may have the mistaken impression that operation will be difficult". How right they are! While it didn't take us that long to get the computer to take over control of a disc momentarily, assembling a sequence of commands proved something else again, and a certain amount of study and trial and error was necessary to get anywhere. There are some very brief control commands and examples detailed in the instruction booklet, but delving into the MSX Basic manual for further enlightenment thrusts the novice into an alien world of jargon. This manual is not really intended to aid programming - it is essentially a dictionary of function commands and is common to other computers of the MSX format. Interestingly the copyright notice at the back attributes authorship to SONY, and indeed, the PX-7 manual is an exact copy of the one supplied with SONY's Hit Bit MSX (although the SONY version is more conveniently ring-bound and consequently stays open at whatever page you leave it, unlike the 'self-closing' PIONEER vers-

ion!). With the SONY machine you also get an Introduction To MSX Basic volume that is the documentation that the PX-7 sorely needs. (We have to thank Max, the EAGLE's computer expert for the loan of the SONY booklets.) The SONY book goes quite some way to helping the unfamiliar computer user over the initial hurdles, and anyone new to the field is well-advised to search out one of the independently published MSX guides. (It should be remembered that computers, in general, are incredibly stupid things. They only do **exactly** what you tell them, and then forget it instantly. Every command has to be precisely defined - it's not like having a dog that learns tricks. The computer forgets everything when it is switched off and only succeeds in this world by virtue of its ability to carry out prolonged and tedious instructions without raising a murmur. It also tends not to mess up the carpet.)

In order to control your disc player, PIONEER have incorporated an extension to the Basic language in the form of P-BASIC. Provision is made for the control of 16 "devices", or components, of which only 3 are specifically named - the two models of disc player and the SD-26 monitor. Presumably the long-term plan is to have all the components of an A/V set-up identified and hence brought under the one computer's control. However, you do not have to have the PIONEER monitor to make things work.

Description	Code	Function	Description	Code	Function
A+	48	Repeat A	M+	58	Multi-speed forward (►)
A-	44	Repeat B	M-	55	Multi-speed reverse (◄)
C+	47	Multi-speed up	P+	17	Play (►)
C-	46	Multi-speed down	P@	16	Reject
D+	43	Frame/chapter number display	P/	18	Pause
F+	10	Scan forward (►►)	S+	54	Still; step forward
F-	11	Scan reverse (◄◄)	S-	50	Still; step reverse
L+	4B	Audio 1/left	T+	51	Fast forward: three times normal speed (X►)
L-	49	Audio 2/right	T-	59	Fast reverse: three times normal speed (X◄)
L@	4A	Stereo	X+	45	Clear

ACTUALLY DOING IT

Whereas switching from STILL to PLAY to AUDIO/LEFT etc requires a whole series of separate button-pushes when using the infra-red remote, with the PX-7 it is possible to commit a sequence of such commands to memory for later execution - to be initiated by a single command from the keyboard. Both CLV and CAV discs can be controlled, although the inability of CLV discs to be accessed to anything more precise than minute points (at present anyway) limits their control to chapter stops in most cases. On CAV discs, as well as chapters, you have precise frame location to accurately define your sequences. Programming could vary from playing a series of chapters in a specific sequence (an option that is already partly available built in to the PHILIPS VP 830), to a selected series of still frames from a disc such as *Show '84*. It is possible to go from a moving sequence to a still, and then on to another moving sequence - in real time or otherwise. The inbuilt colour graphics potential of the PX-7 enables you to incorporate decorative wipes and intervals in order to build up a slick presentation. More adventurous users can even get into branching programmes, although it would be unfair to pretend that such exotica could be attempted by the novice within an hour of unpacking the unit.

What would make the PX-7 easier to use would be some additional software - ideally in quick-loading cartridge form. (Software in computer terms means a programme designed to translate the

semi-abstract language the computer works in into a simpler 'plain English' set of operating controls.) Working in Basic involves keying in some fairly lengthy commands just to duplicate simple r/c type functions. For example, engaging play via the PX-7 requires you to key in:

CALL REMOTE (0,"P+")

In itself this is not complicated, but as you can imagine, a relatively short programme will take considerably longer to key in than with the remote control, and consequently, a software programme with an on-screen menu would enable these commands to be abbreviated and made accessible, say with the computer cursor keys, for speedier operation. Working in Basic is really the preserve of the enthusiast and it doesn't quite rest easy that when you have finished using the PX-7 for some programming you resort to the r/c to watch a disc for entertainment purposes.

In order to give this review more computer appeal we handed the PX-7 over to Chris Murden, who understands these things more, and he came up with a little programme (opposite) that does much to answer the criticism of lack of operating software mentioned in the review.

Chris found the PX-7 "easy" to programme but reckoned you really needed the LD700 and the SD26 to get the most out of the computer. Although the manuals were comprehensive they needed a bit of sort-

[Left: This table of codes for the LD700 offers abbreviated letter commands for the player. Those for the LD1100 are slightly different as this player does not have Multi-Speed, Multi-Speed variation, Repeat, Clear, and Stereo.]

ing through to find the relevant information. A knowledge of BASIC does help in this respect. Machine code programming, necessary to get some speed up in operation, is hardly mentioned in the instructions. Chris liked the idea of the integrated A/V + computer system and reckoned the PX-7 fulfilled the role, although the absence of a games disc did detract a little from the concept. At the price, the genlock capability is commendable - it even locks to a video tape recorder in the cue/review mode. The graphics were good but did not fill the screen (you get a black strip top and bottom) and it wasn't as easy to mix the text and graphics as it was with the BBC computer. The keys needed to be **very** positively pushed to make good contact and it was easy to make mistakes in programming as a result of this shortcoming. It would have been nice to have had a microphone-level output to work with a regular cassette recorder, as opposed to just allowance being made for a dedicated data recorder.

The PX-7 sells for £299 - more than many other MSX computers - but none of them offer it's disc/genlock capabilities. It is a unique computer and deserves investigation by anyone with programming ability, or who can put the graphics potential to good use on their home video presentations. There's a unit usually on display at STEREO REGENT STREET, London and you might be able to persuade Roy Mackey at MID-SUSSEX ELECTRONICS to show you the video of Jr's football match did some work on with the graphics tablet.

While it leaves room for adaption, Chris's programme uses the F1 - F5 keys on the computer keyboard to duplicate the r/c functions. Running the programme displays Chap/Frame #, Player, Play, Chap Search, Frame Search at the bottom of the screen, and so to engage Play you push F3. Pushing the space bar alters the display to the F6 - F10 functions(<Scan, Scan>, Audio etc).

```

10 *** DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM **
20 *** FOR INTERACTIVE USE OF *
30 *** PIONEER LD 700/1100 ***
40 **** CHRIS MURDEN 1986 ****
50 'SCREEN1:COLOR 15,1,0
60 CLS:KEY ON
70 L=0:R=0
80 _DEF UNIV(3,&HA8)
90 KEY1,"C#/F#"
100 KEY2,"PLAYER"
110 KEY3,"PLAY"
120 KEY4,"CSRCH."
130 KEY5,"FSRCH."
140 KEY6,"SCAN."
150 KEY7,"SCAN/"
160 KEY8,"AUDIO"
170 KEY9,"STILL<"
180 KEY10,"STILL>"
190 GOSUB 1030
200 DIM N$(10)
210 FOR F=1 TO 10
220 READ R$
230 N$(F)=R$
240 NEXT F
250 LOCATE 4,1,0
260 PRINT"PLEASE SELECT PLAYER TYPE"
270 TIME=0
280 IF TIME<200 THEN 280 ELSE 290
290 LOCATE 4,1,0
300 PRINT" PLEASE SELECT PLAY "
310 _EXTV(A):IF A=1 THEN 320 ELSE 310
320 _IMPOSE (1)
330 LOCATE 0,1,0
340 PRINT" PLEASE SELECT YOUR CHAPTER OR FRAME#"
350 PRINT" BY USING CSEARCH OR FSEARCH KEYS"
360 'COLOR ,,0
370 TIME=0
380 IF TIME<350 THEN 380 ELSE 390
390 CLS:KEY ON
400 LOCATE 0,1,0
410 PRINT"(FOR OTHER FUNCTIONS PUSH SPACE BAR)"
420 TIME=0
430 IF TIME <250 THEN 430 ELSE 440
440 CLS:KEY ON
450 GOTO 450
460 BEEP
470 _REMOTE(R,"PW")
480 RETURN
490 BEEP
500 FOR I=1 TO 5
510 _REMOTE(R,"F-")
520 NEXT I
530 RETURN
540 BEEP
550 FOR I=1 TO 5
560 _REMOTE(R,"F")
570 NEXT I
580 RETURN
590 BEEP
600 _REMOTE(R,"S-")
610 RETURN
620 BEEP
630 _REMOTE(R,"S")
640 RETURN
650 BEEP
660 IF R=1 THEN GOSUB 1270
670 _REMOTE(R,"D")
680 RETURN
690 BEEP
700 R=R+1:IF R=2 THEN R=0
710 IF R=1 THEN 730
720 KEY2," 700":RETURN
730 KEY2," 1100":RETURN
740 BEEP
750 L=L+1:IF L=5 THEN L=1
760 IF L=1 THEN _REMOTE(R,"L"):RETURN
770 IF L=2 THEN _REMOTE(R,"L-"):RETURN
780 IF L=3 THEN _REMOTE(R,"L-"): _REMOTE(1,"L"):RETURN
790 IF L=4 THEN _REMOTE(R,"L-"):RETURN
800 BEEP
810 ON ERROR GOTO 1170
820 IF R=0 THEN GOSUB 1330
830 LOCATE 15,21
840 INPUT"ENTER CHAP#";C%

```

The "-" symbol in the programme is an abbreviation for "CALL". Although keys F6 & F7 refer to Scan, the programme actually displays Search on screen and could do with modification to correct this.

The programme works with both the LD1100 and LD700 - key F2 asks the user to select type. However, as Chris developed the programme on an LD1100, which has a different method of Stereo/L & R switching, it will be necessary to modify it slightly to incorporate the "L@" mode for LD700 use.

```

850 IF C%<0 THEN ERROR 99
860 _IMPOSE(0)
870 _SEARCH (R,C,C%)
880 CLS:KEY ON
890 _IMPOSE(1)
900 RETURN
910 BEEP
920 ON ERROR GOTO 1220
930 IF R=0 THEN GOSUB 1420
940 LOCATE 15,21
950 INPUT"ENTER FRAME#";F%
960 IF F%<0 THEN ERROR 100
970 IF F%>54000! THEN ERROR 100
980 _IMPOSE(0)
990 _SEARCH (R,F,F%)
1000 CLS:KEY ON
1010 _IMPOSE(1)
1020 RETURN
1030 STRIG(0) OFF:KEY ON:BEEP
1040 ON KEY GOSUB 650,690,470,800,910
1050 KEY(1)ON:KEY(2)ON:KEY(3)ON:KEY(4)ON:KEY(5)ON
1060 ON STRIG GOSUB 1080
1070 STRIG(0) ON:RETURN
1080 STRIG(0) OFF:KEY OFF:BEEP
1090 ON KEY GOSUB 490,540,740,590,620
1100 KEY(6)ON:KEY(7)ON:KEY(8)ON:KEY(9)ON:KEY(10)ON
1110 LOCATE 0,23,0
1120 PRINT N$(6);" ";N$(7);" ";N$(8);" ";N$(9);" ";N$(10);
1130 ON STRIG GOSUB 1030
1140 STRIG(0) ON:RETURN
1150 'R$ DATA
1160 DATA C#/F#,PLAYER,PLAY,CSEARCH,FSEARCH,SEARCH.,
SEARCH/,AUDIO,STILL<,STILL>
1170 IF ERR=99 THEN LOCATE 28,21:PRINT "ERROR";
1180 TIME=0
1190 IF TIME<50 THEN 1190 ELSE 1200
1200 LOCATE 28,21:PRINT " ";
1210 RESUME 820
1220 IF ERR=100 THEN LOCATE 26,21:PRINT " ERROR";
1230 TIME=0
1240 IF TIME<50 THEN 1240 ELSE 1250
1250 LOCATE 28,21:PRINT " ";
1260 RESUME 930
1270 D=D+1:IF D=5 THEN D=1
1280 IF D=1 THEN _REMOTE(R,"D-"):GOTO 1320
1290 IF D=2 THEN _REMOTE(R,"D"):GOTO 1320
1300 IF D=3 THEN _REMOTE(R,"D-"):GOTO 1320
1310 IF D=4 THEN _REMOTE(R,"D"): _REMOTE(1,"D-"):GOTO 1320
1320 RETURN 680
1330 ON ERROR GOTO 1170
1340 LOCATE 15,21
1350 INPUT"ENTER CHAP#";C%
1360 IF C%<0 THEN ERROR 99
1370 _IMPOSE(0)
1380 _SEARCH (R,C,C%)
1390 CLS:KEY ON
1400 _IMPOSE(1)
1410 RETURN 900
1420 ON ERROR GOTO 1220
1430 LOCATE 0,21
1440 INPUT"ENTER START,END FRAME#'S";F%,E%
1450 IF F%<0 THEN ERROR 100
1460 IF E%<0 THEN ERROR 100
1470 IF F%>54000! THEN ERROR 100
1480 IF E%>54000! THEN ERROR 100
1485 ON ERROR GOTO 0
1490 LOCATE 0,21:PRINT SPC(39);LOCATE 0,21
1500 INPUT"REPEAT SECTION (ENTER Y/N)";Q$
1510 IF Q$="Y" THEN 1530 ELSE 1520
1520 IF Q$="N" THEN GOSUB 1670 ELSE 1490
1530 _IMPOSE(0)
1540 _SEARCH (R,F,F%)
1550 CLS:KEY ON
1560 _IMPOSE(1)
1570 _REMOTE(R,"P")
1580 _FRAME(E%,GOSUB 1610)
1590 RETURN 1020
1600 _FRAME OFF
1610 _IMPOSE(0)
1620 _SEARCH (R,F,F%)
1630 CLS:KEY ON
1640 _IMPOSE(1)
1650 _REMOTE(R,"P")
1660 RETURN
1670 _IMPOSE(0)
1680 _SEARCH (R,F,F%)
1690 CLS:KEY ON
1700 _IMPOSE(1)
1710 _REMOTE(R,"P")
1720 _FRAME(E%,GOSUB 1600)
1730 RETURN 1590

```

IF IT'S ON LASERDISC IT'S AT

RECORDS & TAPES VIDEO FILMS
HOME COMPUTER SOFTWARE
LASERVISION DISCS COME
TELEPHONES MUSIC VIDEO
ACCESSORIES BOOK
COMPACT DISCS HOME
COMPUTER HARDWARE

Lightning

COMPUTER HARDWARE & SOFTWARE
ACCESSORIES COMPUTER HARDWARE
RECORDS & TAPES VIDEO FILMS
HOME COMPUTER SOFTWARE
LASERVISION DISCS
S RECORDS & TAPES
WARE MUSIC VIDEOS

108 HIGH STREET, RUISLIP

MIDDLESEX, HA4 8LS TEL: 71-35507

THE BEST RANGE OF LASERDISC THERE IS
PHONE FOR OUR MAIL ORDER
CATALOGUE NOW

THAMES VALLEY LASER



LaserVision

MAIL ORDER SPECIALIST

HUNTERCOMBE
BANBURY ROAD
BICESTER
OXON OX6 7NL.

TEL: (0869) 242078

SEND FOR LIST OF TITLES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

- ★ FACT SHEET COVERING SURROUND SOUND DISCS
MAGNETIC SOUNDTRACKS ON DISC AND FILM STOCK
GENERATIONS ETC. SENT WITH EACH LIST
- ★ QUANTITY DISCOUNTS AND SPECIAL OFFER REDUCTIONS
ON CERTAIN TITLES
- ★ REDUCED PRICE DISCS IN STOCK

The PIONEER LD707

A first look at a new NTSC player with Seconds Search and a DS upgrade option

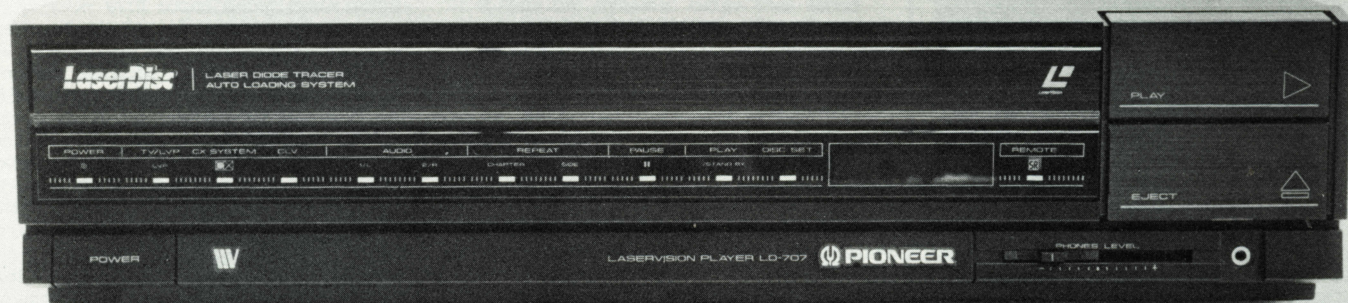
The LD707 is an LV player that shows welcome refinements over the first generation solid-state LD700. Known as the LD7100 in Japan (that would usually have resulted in it being the LD710 in other territories) it is one of a range of three players there. There is a non-programmable, play CAVs as CLVs, LD5100 and an LD8100 - like the the 7100 but designed with karaoke use in mind.

The most significant external difference is the reduced height and depth and a substantial reduction in weight. The literature claims only one-fifth the number of components of the previous player and this is the first PIONEER unit we've seen that doesn't have a transit screw. The reduced depth, down to 385mm is, a great convenience for shelf mounting while the diminution in height is more of

CX discs you forget about till after you have settled back into your chair. The TV/LVP switch is similarly relocated. The review of the LD700 made a few criticisms about the layout of that models remote and the design of the 707's appears to have answered them all. Most obviously, the sliding cover has gone. The SCAN button is now the next one down from PLAY, changing places with the STILL/STEP. With this model you also get an added facility common to CD players, a CHAP/SKIP button that allows you to jump to the start of the next chapter without going through the disc using SCAN.

Many of the other control buttons are dramatically enhanced by one of the LD707's more exciting innovations - the ability to access CLV discs down to

The LD707 has a 10 chapter programming mode operated in conjunction with the PGRM button. Programming can be done in random sequence and can be short-circuited once in play by the use of the CHAP/SKIP control. One thing we nearly missed in the instructions is the ability to carry out a search-related command from the non-engaged mode. If the disc has finished play and has rejected you can key in a frame/time/chapter search without having to restart play. When you press the search button the player starts up and goes straight to the desired point without having to go through the usual start-up procedure. The only other point of comment on the remote would be to make reference to a certain sponginess on the four rocker-type controls (PLAY/SCAN etc) that made their



cosmetic importance - the player looks much smaller than the 20mm height reduction would imply (down to 100mm). Like the CLD900, this player also sports a variable output headphone socket as well as being able to be controlled from PIONEER's A/V system remote. The rear of the machine contains an additional 5-pin DIN socket for connection to the DA-1 Digital Sound adaptor for playing LV discs with Digital Sound tracks.

Drawer opening appears similar to the LD700, except what looks like the front of it is in fact a dust-flap which folds down just before the very slim drawer itself, more of a tray really, pushes out. You still have to pull it fully out - and push it back after dropping the disc on - but you do find that when it is nearing home the player activates and tugs the tray fully in, shutting the flap behind it. It even engages play automatically, but in spite of this automation the player was not noticeably speedier when it came to side changing mid-way through a film.

The remote is a variation of a design that has already made a showing in the UK on some other PIONEER products. You'll notice the CX button has been moved from the player itself - a great convenience for all those older non auto-switching

seconds rather than just minutes. That means when you press the DISPLAY button you get a four-digit readout on CLV, and NTSC discs going back a couple of years have this seconds timing capability in them. (This is unfortunately not the case with PAL discs.) Using the A-B REPEAT



facility (when a little star appears in the top right-hand corner of the screen) allows one to isolate a desired short sequence with almost CAV accuracy. Unrelated to the seconds aspect, the 'B' button on the REPEAT now allows chapter repeat (one push) or whole side repeat (two pushes). The previous continuous repeat facility of the 700 is absent on the new player.

operation a little imprecise at times. They didn't always respond to the apparent same amount of pressure, although the smaller buttons always seemed surefooted in use.

We didn't have the DA-1 processor to try out but a photograph of the box shows it to have but a POWER and a DIGITAL/ANALOG switch.

The instruction booklet was uninformative about technical improvements in the machine but some Japanese sales literature manifested a few recognisable numerals and abbreviations that suggested an improvement in resolution from 350 lines previously to 370 here; not dramatic in itself and possibly only noticeable on sharper discs (many NTSC discs do not fully realise the resolution potential of the format). Using some of the ones that do showed a bunch of subtle improvements in picture quality over the previous player. Whereas before there was always a need to roll off the monitor's colour control a tad to prevent the colour going bitty, the LD707 allowed discs to be played without such reduction. Colour saturation was improved on every disc and a generally brighter picture was found to be obtainable - with an extended tonal response too. The player also managed to track an old laser-locked

[Continued on page 17, column 3]

The PIONEER CLD 900 LV/CD Player

Can we have a PAL version, please?....



The advantage of having just one player for both LaserVision and Compact Discs (and any other format that may come along) seems so obvious it makes one wonder why PHILIPS chose to define the parameters of each format so unsympathetically. In issue 3 we went in to the many problems PIONEER had to contend with in order to put things right in re-uniting the two technologies. First hand experience of the player, the CLD900, shows it to be a job well done.

There is no denying the fact - the CLD900 is a mighty beast. Weighing in at a hefty 15.6Kg it has a solidity to its construction quite out of keeping with the general run of LV players. The unit gives the distinct impression of having grown out of the LD700, and is similar in style of operation (just look at the remote). Anyone familiar with the LD700 would need virtually no extra briefing to get it up and running. The function lights have been condensed from the 700's neat row layout into a more conc-

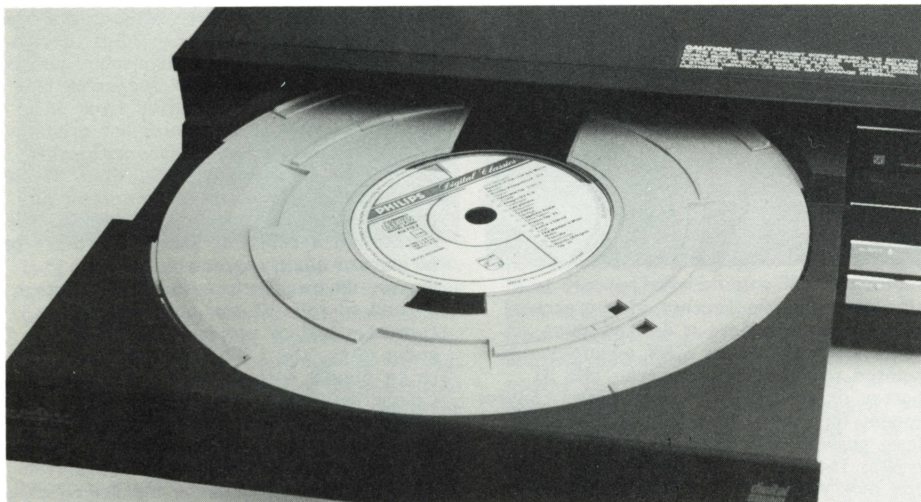
entrated configuration. A nice touch is the large Chapter(LV)/Track(CD) indicator (clearly legible from a distance without being distracting). In addition, the 900 has a large 'DIGITAL' light that comes on whenever the appropriate software is inserted. An extra operational feature is a headphone socket with its own slider volume control. In case you're wondering, the AUTO DIGITAL switch allows the choice of whether to listen to the analogue or digital soundtrack on a Digital Sound LV disc. Left in the AUTO mode, the machine automatically selects the DS track on any so encoded disc. Even with this switch being present, PIONEER have still seen fit to put separate analogue and digital outputs on the rear of the machine. Anyone wishing to introduce some true 4-channel software could do so.

In comparison with the LD 700, the 900's drawer slides open with great precision and has none of the looseness of the previous model (not that the LD700

ever appeared unsatisfactory in any way). As you can see from the photograph, the drawer invites software of three different sizes - 20 & 30cm LV discs and CDs. The bulk of the machine tends to exaggerate the modest dimensions of the latter. When you have selected something from your library of laser discs, slipped it in and closed the drawer, there is little else to do but engage the PLAY control and sit back. While the design of the internal workings may have had PIONEER's boffins burning the midnight oil - the operation of the CLD900 is undemanding and straightforward. Readers already some way down the CD road may find the the CD control options a little basic as far as programmability is concerned, and it may be that something was sacrificed here to facilitate operational compatibility.

Some of the remote buttons have been overwritten specifically to suit CD terminology. The CHAPTER button becomes INDEX, the FRAME/TIME becomes TRACK, and STILL/STEP functions as a skip search control (also labelled as TRACK). Some LV buttons cease to have any function with CDs - MULTI-SPEED, FAST and unfortunately also the STEREO L & R buttons (no double-length mono CDs!).

When you have the TV on while playing CDs (which is not necessary) you can achieve an on-screen display of the disc information. Automatically the player will display the track number being played, the index number, and elapsed time in minutes and seconds. Pressing the DISPLAY button adds the time remaining information - and pressing DISPLAY again adds the total number of tracks on the CD and its total playing time. Pressing DISPLAY a third time returns you to the basic display you started off with. During search and repeat play operation the screen will also show the word 'Search' as well. LV disc control is the same as with the the LD700.



In operation the CLD900 tended to be marginally noisier than the 700, but of course, we are dealing with noise levels that bear no relation to those endured with the older tube-laser players. The picture quality matched that exactly of the NTSC LD700 we have been using till now and there appeared to be no impairment caused by the additional complexity of the decoded signal on DS LV discs. That inevitably brings us to the differences in the sound quality.

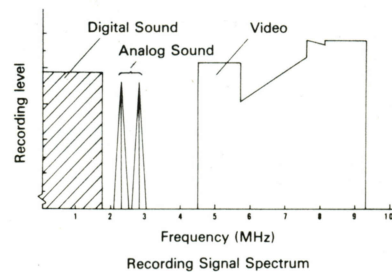
The most noticeable difference on Digital Sound was the clarity. As we've mentioned before, the analogue sound on many modern CX-encoded NTSC discs is already excellent but the extra clarity on digital added that extra dimension every time it was switched in. The two music discs available for audition, the *King Crimson-Three Of A Perfect Pair & Kool & The Gang-Live*, due to them both being live concert recordings, were maybe not the best choices for showing the reduction in background noise achievable with digital recording. It was the film of *Star Trek III* that showed the most immediate improvement. Everything came over just that bit clearer - to the extent that you started noticing faders being pushed up and down and differences in tonal quality on people's voices where, presumably, post-production adjustments had been made. That's not to say you couldn't hear these characteristics on analogue track - it's just that it took digital track to reveal them initially. Many of the sound effects on *Star Trek III* came over more vividly - the snake scene with the Klingon commander, the wind noises on Genesis, doors opening etc. The stereo positioning also seemed more precise with sound being more accurately located left, right, and centre. Even though film soundtracks are still essentially analogue originated they are obviously still capable of more than present disc audio can reproduce. (It should be noted that most of the CX soundtracks on modern NTSC film discs

Digital Sound on PAL

This diagram of the frequency spectrum of NTSC LaserVision shows the 2.0MHz gap where the additional audio track has been inserted. On PAL the existing analogue channels are at a different spot, 0.68MHz & 1.07MHz, and the video signal comes further down towards 2.5MHz, thereby excluding any similar slotting in of the digital audio into an available gap.

Unless PHILIPS comes up with some ingenious way round the problem, a future PAL Digital Sound disc will probably have to dispense with the existing anal-

ogue track, but future players will still be able to play both types of disc by automatically switching to the appropriate decoding circuitry.



have none of the hiss we are used to on PAL discs.) Later additions to the audition list, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Gremlins*, and *Ladyhawke* showed the latter to benefit the most on the digital soundtrack. *Ladyhawke* is a sword and sorcery epic with all the obvious sound effects - swordfights, spooky night animal noises etc - and these come out of the speakers with vastly improved clarity and greatly added to the suspense aspect of the movie. There appear only two disadvantages to Digital Sound - the dynamic range is going to have you playing discs at volumes likely to prove unpopular with your near neighbours as well as making one dissatisfied with the restrictive dimensions of even the largest domestic TV. You keep looking past the edges of the picture expecting to see something going on. Projection TV sales are bound to benefit from Digital Sound LV.

It was the dynamic range that stood out on the handful of CDs tried on the player. Here it was easier to find an all-digital disc where no hiss or disc noise was audible in quiet passages and between tracks. That same revealing quality showed many modern multi-track recordings to fall short of the potential of the disc, with their high noise levels and artificially compressed sound. It was not surprising to find the sound impressive on the DDD (all-digital) PHILIPS *Digital Classics* sampler (all bar a rather distantly recorded and hence 'hissy' solo guitar piece). It was surprising to put on a compilation of near 30 year old Bill Haley recordings and find, with the exception of some mild tape hiss, a level of sound quality that puts many modern recordings to shame. The CD, like the LV disc, possesses the ability to reveal all manner of inadequacies in the production and mastering stages.

The ability of the CLD900 to play both kinds of discs results in the player being used considerably more than a machine dedicated to either LV or CD. It also means that the dust gets shaken off the wallet with greater regularity as in weeks when there is no new LV release of interest there is almost certain to be a new CD you would want. If we could get this player in a PAL version it would no doubt stimulate the LV market in the way it has done in Japan and the USA. We still have no indication of when the PAL digital format will be decided - one just hopes it will be soon. If you can't wait for a combination player and don't mind having to import your NTSC LV discs direct from the US (with CDs there is no problem as these are a world standard), you can obtain the CLD900 to special order in 240v version for £899 from Stereo Regent Street in London (Tel: 01-491 7922) or Mid-Sussex Electronics in Burgess Hill (Tel: 04446-42336). Don't forget, though, you will need a multi-standard monitor too.

[Continued from page 15]



disc that had always previously refused to play past a certain troublesome spot. How any of these improvements in picture quality might affect a PAL version of the player is matter for speculation but a visible improvement would seem more than likely.

As regards assessing its performance as an NTSC machine, it would probably not count as significant an improvement to make you rush out and trade in your LD700, but coupled with its operational improvements it does make for a very desirable piece of equipment. It's not just a new model for the sake of it. Manhandling the machine shows it to be quite unlike any other player - its light, simple appearance suggests some encouraging electronic advances that all future LV players are likely to embody.

This player lists for ¥ 149,800 in Japan, which is about 75% of the LD700's price, but the recent burst of activity in combined LV/CD players (see Japanese Report) leaves the price precariously close to that of the February launched CLD-7, the replacement for the CLD900, that lists at ¥ 158,000 (just over £500).



[Above: The CLD900 remote with sliding cover removed.]

Letter From America

Dwight R. Decker

Space Discs

You hear a lot about "high tech" in the United States these days. And what could be higher technology than LaserVision? Using an exotic laser beam that decodes a spiral of pits on a rapidly spinning silver platter to produce sound and a moving picture -- this is the stuff of science fiction, all right.

The irony of it struck me not too long ago when I took a look at *Goldfinger*. You'll recall that at one point, Goldfinger had James Bond strapped down on a metal slab, legs spread, and a laser-beam generator about the size of a small anti-aircraft gun was switched on. Beginning at the lower end of the slab, the beam was powerful enough to slice through the metal, and the generator was slowly swiveling so the beam inexorably approached Bond's tender spots. Bond was understandably a little nervous about the prospect of being sawed in half lengthwise, and had to talk fast to convince Goldfinger he was worth more in one piece. The irony? The weapon of destruction in a 1964 movie was being used to *play* the same movie twenty years later. (And let's hear it for miniaturization. A discplayer with a laser the size of Goldfinger's would take up most of your living room and probably run up your electric bill to boot.)

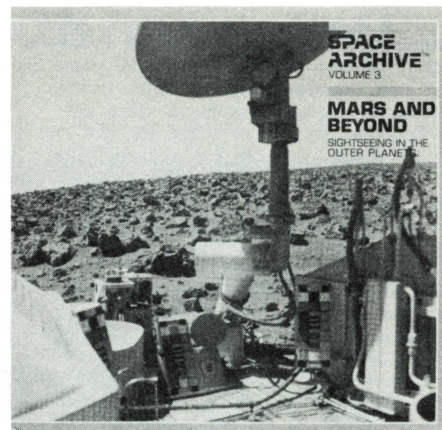
Another area of high tech is of course space travel, and at least in the NTSC countries, space buffs have been well-served by LV programs that in their own way demonstrate the laser videodisc's enormous potential for information storage as well as entertainment.

The first NTSC space disc appeared in the late '70s, during the early days of MCA DiscoVision. At the time, DiscoVision was just launching the LV format and besides the usual movies was releasing a wide variety of often odd documen-

has become vanishingly scarce even among DiscoVision collectors. Whether it's worth the \$100 one laser buff trying to find it advertised he was willing to pay is another matter; I've seen enough films in this genre to suspect it's little more than a pair of filmed astronomy lectures possibly seasoned with occasional graphics and perhaps even some limited animation. An added attraction would of course be the fact that like the other early DiscoVision discs, it's probably CAV.

The second NTSC space disc to come along in the consumer market was Vestron Video's *The Greatest Adventure* (\$29.95) in 1983. Not being a major studio with its own product to sell, Vestron had a policy of buying the home-video rights to a lot of independently-produced material; some of it was first-rate, some of it was downright off-the-wall oddball stuff now showing up at often substantial mark-downs in the bargain bins. Somewhere in the middle was *The Greatest Adventure*, a made-for-TV documentary about the American space program from the beginning through the end of the Apollo moon missions. Much of the archival film footage is excellent, and the on-camera interviews with Tom Wolfe (author of *The Right Stuff*) and some of the astronauts (including, briefly, Neil Armstrong) are particularly valuable. Where the program falls down is in the contrived hokiness of its presentation: pretentious music, an overly dramatic narration by Orson Welles, and occasional dramatic falsification (the real howler is a scene of the sun rising over the launch pad at the Kennedy Space Center -- it was lifted from a Russian documentary showing dawn at the Soviet launch site). The program's running time is well under an hour and could have easily been a two-sided CAV disc, but no such luck: it was pressed as a one-sided CLV. Still and all, it makes a good introduction to the subject, especially for younger viewers who may not have even been born when it all happened.

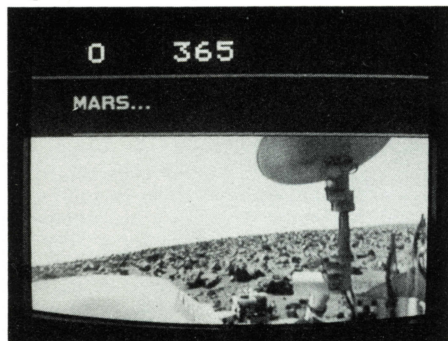
The Greatest Adventure also works well as a companion piece for Warner Home Video's *The Right Stuff* (\$39.95), a lightly fictionalized docu-drama (based on the Tom Wolfe book) that covers much the same territory. Some of the scenes recreated in *The Right Stuff*, such as the press conference that introduced the original seven American astronauts and John Glenn's orbital crisis, are presented in their original form in *The Greatest Adventure* and it's fascinating to compare them. Most intriguing is how *The Right Stuff* took actual black-and-white documentary film footage of President Kennedy presenting astronaut Alan Shepard with a medal and intercut new footage of Scott Glenn, the actor playing Shepard, with wholly believable results (even if at one point insertion of the bobbing foreground head of a spectator had to be resorted to in order to block out the real Shepard while



leaving Kennedy in frame). Kennedy, by the way, *dropped* the medal while giving it to Shepard but recovered from the gaffe with a grace and ease that are a delight to watch. *The Greatest Adventure* includes that scene undoctored and again, comparison is fascinating. Incidentally, the movie *The Right Stuff* owes almost as much to the original seven astronauts' ghostwritten book *We Seven* (1962) for source material as it does to the book whose title it bears.

On the Japanese side of the NTSC waters, a CAV documentary disc covering rockets in general was released, with unusually strong coverage of many aspects of the Soviet space program seldom seen in the West. However, the disc's Japanese packaging and narration, and its high import price (about \$45), limited its appeal to all but the most determined American space buffs who could get something out of the pictures alone.

Getting away from rockets and space travel, the Japanese buyer with an interest in astronomy plain and simple was appealed to with a title called *Space Watch*. Based on a program produced for British television, it's a collection of short lectures amply illustrated by graphics, animation, and film footage covering just about everything in basic astronomy. Experimentation with it at my local astronomy club garnered rave reviews for *Space Watch* as the ideal introduction to the stars and constellations for new members, both adults and children. The disc is not only CAV but bilingual in the original English as well as Japanese, and with the Japanese track turned off, the only hint of its alien manufacture is the occasional addition of Japanese characters to on-screen captions. At least for us Americans, the narrator's British accent adds quite a bit to the appeal. As I discovered some years ago in London when I attended the sky show at the planetarium next to Madame Tussaud's, even the dullest, driest, dustiest astronomical topics can be made thrilling when described in the King's English. Again, the disc's import price of about \$45 was somewhat daunting for American buyers, but for those with a strong interest in astronomy, the



tary and informational programs on disc, evidently hoping to expand the market beyond just casual movie-watchers. (Samples: *VD: The Hidden Epidemic*. *Smoking: How to Stop*. *Archaeological Dating*. *Skateboard Safety*.) Some of them seem to have originally been 16mm films made for the educational trade, and one such title was *The Solar System/The Universe*. Not much is known about it and so few copies were manufactured that in recent years it

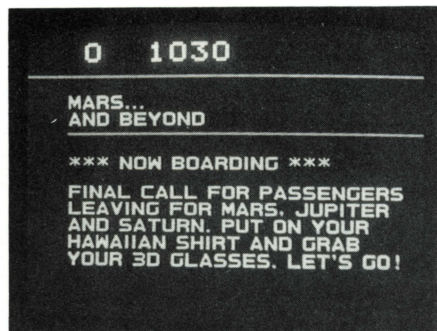
chance to own what amounted to a home planetarium made it well worth the money.

Meanwhile, in the early '80s, a small independent American company called Video Vision was testing the waters of the educational market with the first space discs since *The Solar System/The Universe*. These discs were produced under an arrangement with NASA and were quite frankly aimed at schools, museums, and similar institutions instead of at consumers. At \$320 per disc, they were rather beyond the average individual's pocketbook. My own first look at a laserdisc was in the fall of 1982 at a display set up for the tourists at Chicago's Adler Planetarium; visitors could select still pictures of Jupiter and Saturn to appear on a monitor and I realize now it must have been Video Vision's *Voyager* disc on the discreetly hidden player. (A little ominously for the future of high tech, some of the people I saw trying to get results out of the display couldn't seem to grasp the operation of keying in five digits on a remote-control pad.)

The reader may be wondering what could possibly be on these discs to make them worth \$320 apiece. The ad copy for *Voyager* promises more than 2,600 color and B&W still frames, 38 computer-generated animations and video clips, and an accompanying 60-page directory. The *Apollo* disc covering all the lunar landings ups the ante with 9,800 still frames, 117 movie and video clips, and a 158-page directory. Obviously, somebody has to sit down and edit, format, and catalog all this material before a disc can be pressed, which is hardly necessary for a more linear program like a movie, so the schools and museums are presumably being soaked for the enormous labor costs.

Besides the *Voyager* and *Apollo* discs, other titles in the series covered the Space Shuttle, the Sun, and general astronomy. That last one went for a whopping \$400, including as it did more than 10,000 still frames of solar system bodies, star charts, and deep space objects (galaxies, nebulae, etc.).

As this is being written, Starship Industries of Virginia, one of the USA's major mail-order laserdisc retailers, has arranged with Video Vision to sell the *Voyager*, *Apollo*, and *Shuttle* discs to consumers for just \$99 apiece for a limited



time. That's better than \$320 but still a little pricey.

However, Video Vision had hardly been ignoring the consumer market before this. In late 1983, it inaugurated a line of similar discs under the *Space Archive* rubric at the vastly more affordable price of \$39.95 apiece, all pressed CAV by 3M. Five have appeared so far: two on various missions of the Shuttle, one on Apollo 17, one covering satellite surveys of the outer planets, and one fea-

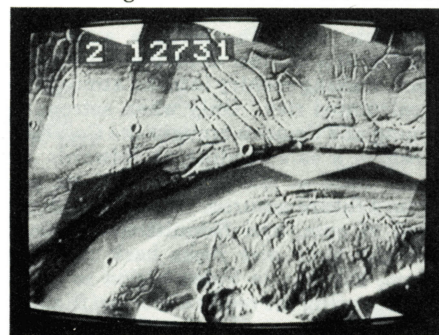
turing views of Earth from space. The company's literature has mentioned a disc taking a look at California's Mt. Palomar Observatory as a possible future release (along with coverage of the observatory's history and workings, it would hopefully include plenty of astronomical photographs taken through the 200-inch telescope), but so far there has been no definite announcement. The *Space Archive* discs are more limited in scope than the school-and-museum discs but cover much the same ground, and my guess is that the quite reasonable price was managed only because most of the heavy production work had already been done for the high-priced line.

The first *Space Archive* release was the *Space Shuttle Mission Report*, featuring the fifth, sixth, and seventh flights of the Shuttle. The first four flights had been essentially tests of the system and these were the first "operational" missions. The film clips include terrific launch and landing shots, but the real stunner is footage of the reusable solid-fuel booster rockets as they drop away from the main fuel tank and fall back towards Earth: the camera, mounted on one rocket, steadily follows the other rocket all the way down. Activities aboard the Shuttle are covered as well, including satellite launches and manual labor in spacesuits out in the opened cargo bay. The British viewer may notice that astronaut Sally Ride seems to be unduly emphasized, but surely local pride is pardonable as she was the first American woman to go into space and received a great deal of media attention at the time as a result. There are also more still pictures than anyone will ever have time to look at.

A little later, Video Vision released *Apollo 17*, an in-depth look at the last manned flight to the Moon in the American Apollo program. One of the visual attractions here is that the flight began with a night launch with gorgeous light and color effects that translate well to the home screen. Astronauts Harrison Schmitt and Eugene Cernan raise the American flag, drive their lunar dune-buggy across the landscape, take rock samples, and offer laconic comments via voiceover. As for what they *felt* about what they were doing, you have to turn to *The Greatest Adventure* for Cernan's remarks about the wonder of it all. (Schmitt later became a United States Senator but subsequently failed of reelection.) The disc also contains the usual truckload of still photographs; unfortunately, the Moon's bleak powder-grey scenery gets old fast.

The second Shuttle disc, *Shuttle Downlink*, was technically the third *Space Archives* title but the company considered it a special release and not part of the regular numbered series. It features more Space Shuttle missions, in particular the recovery, repair, and relaunch of the ailing Solar Max satellite. The disc's collection of still pictures includes numerous finely detailed orbital views of Europe and some of the Soviet Union (including a couple showing secret military bases). Here, too, the sheer number of still pictures on the disc is little short of overwhelming. Taken together, the two Shuttle discs suffer from a distinct sameness and unless especially interested in the subject, most viewers would probably do best by buying one or the other but not both.

After that came *Mars and Beyond*, with Viking Lander views of the Martian



surface and Voyager flyby photos of Jupiter, Saturn, and their respective moons, fleshed out with computer animation simulating Voyager's approaches to the various planets including the upcoming Uranus and Neptune passes. Some of the Mars scenes are in 3-D and while two pairs of cardboard glasses come with the disc, I haven't been able to get the 3-D effect to work at all well yet. The instructions recommend using a monitor, so it may just be that my standard civilian model TV just isn't up to the job. All this is on Side I, by the way. Side II offers a NASA film about the Voyager program; though interesting and helpful for a fuller understanding, one senses filler here. Still, for variety, interest, and value as a permanent reference (these are close-up photos of places that not many years ago were just points of light in an astronomer's eyepiece), this is the best disc of the lot and perhaps the one to get, though the Uranus material will be out of date by the time you read this.

Finally, the latest disc in the series is *Greetings From Earth*: 3,000 still photos and 40 video clips, with the emphasis on views of our planet from space. One of the highlights is a detailed "atlas" of the entire United States with Landsat photos; the same intensive treatment is also given to orbital views of Japan, which suggests that the Video Vision people know full well who else uses NTSC and how to sell the product. Musical background is provided by Tangerine Dream and additional space is given to recent Shuttle mission reportage and supercomputer animation and image processing. This disc is only one-sided but the price remains \$39.95.

Looking at the *Space Archives* series as a whole, I have to wonder about some of the choices of topics and material. Why, for instance, the last lunar landing instead of the first? And why start the Shuttle coverage with the *fifth* mission? The first Shuttle launch had all the drama: although the Apollo equipment



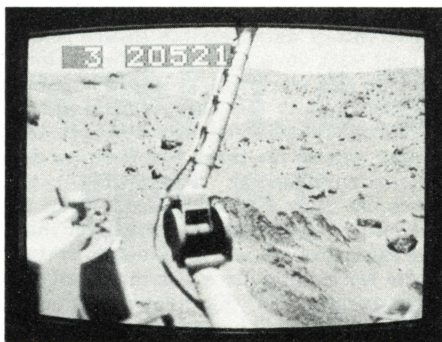
had been thoroughly tested on previous flights before it finally landed on the Moon, including two trial runs that went as far as lunar orbit, the Shuttle, thanks to political, financial, and developmental

constraints, could be fully tested only by just getting in and flying the bird to see what broke. Then there were some tense moments when the Shuttle arrived in orbit with a number of its insulating tiles gone, making reentry into the atmosphere a calculated risk. Only when astronauts Young and Crippen brought the *Columbia* down to a safe landing at Edwards Air Force Base at last was the Shuttle program's future assured. Hey, Sally Ride's kind of cute, and Schmitt and Cernan brought some nice rocks back from the Moon, but why is Video Vision so pointedly ignoring the really *historical* flights?

More generally, the sheer mass of material on each disc is almost too much for the viewer to deal with. It's all organized roughly, with chapter stops for the video clips and frame numbers for the still pictures listed in the accompanying printed directory, but there isn't a systematic plan for any of the discs such as a reference book or a linear documentary would have. Perhaps the best term for one of these discs would be an "image resource." Video Vision gives you the material and a list of it, and it's up to you to figure out what to do with it. They also sell computer interfaces for your disc-player, so in theory you could work up a program that would present the clips and still frames in some sort of order, but that's an application useful mainly for teachers. For the average viewer, there's just so *much* on these discs....

On the other hand, that embarrassment of riches points up one of the laser-disc's sterling qualities: enough room on one disc to store just about anything. Take that *Greetings From Earth* disc, for instance. Even one-sided, it contains

3,000 still pictures along with a substantial amount of other odds and ends. Leav-



ing out the video clips for the moment, would it be possible to produce a book of 3,000 full-color photographs, each with a diagonal measurement of 19 inches (the size of my TV set), and sell it at a profit for about \$40? In its quarter-century history, the exploration of space has already resulted in vast numbers of spectacular photographs, far more than could be printed in a whole library of books, and laserdiscs are about the only things big enough to put very many of them on. Besides, when you consider how many billions of dollars it cost NASA (and thus the American taxpayer) to get those pictures, \$40 a disc doesn't seem bad at all.

That's the laser for you. A crude experimental device twenty-odd years ago useful mainly for slicing and dicing secret agents, now it brings you the universe.

It also brought you this review. The text was typeset on a Xerox Star office word processor and printed out on a laser printer. High tech goes marching on!

--DRD

All the illustrations for this article were taken from the *VIDEOVISION Mars And Beyond* disc. The suppliers mentioned are:

STARSHIP INDUSTRIES

605 Utterback Store Road, Great Falls, VA 22066, USA.

THE INSTANT REPLAY

479 Winter Street, Waltham, MA 02154-1216, USA.

The topic of NTSC discs and how to play them was covered in LDR 5 and reference to this issue is recommended as a first step to anyone interested in pursuing this aspect of LaserVision.

[Continued from page 10]

The US publication, *The Laser Disc Newsletter's* recent readers' poll indicated a 50% preference for more wide-screen presentations and a quite overwhelming 95% willingness to pay more for an improvement in the quality of masters and pressings. *Fantasia* and *ET* came out as their top disc wants - but then they've got most everything else of note already! +++++ The MCA Encore Edition series continues with *The Bank Dick*, *This Island Earth*, *The Mummy*, and *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein* - all with side two in CAV and some with trailers and stills.

THE LASER DISC NEWSLETTER

Covers American and Japanese NTSC releases.

The popular monthly publication is now in its second year, bringing video disc owners timely news and reviews of laser video discs.

We cover both American releases and Japanese releases, and rare or unusual discs. You don't want to miss what we have to say!

A sample issue is \$1 and a year's subscription of 12 issues is \$30 outside of North America. Write:

The Laser Disc Newsletter

Suite 428, 496 Hudson Street, NY, NY 10014, USA

The Original Record and Tape Discount Store

20 Chadwell, Hertford Road
Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9JY

Telephone: Ware (0920) 61339

For all your Audio and Video needs, why not contact me for my **FREE SAMPLE SHEETS** of my 1986 Audio and Video Catalogues, which includes all the latest Records, Tapes Compact Discs, LaserVideo Discs and other items.

Send an 18p Stamp and see what Special Offers that are just waiting for you.

7" Singles	£1.35
7" EP's and Picture Disc Singles.	From £1.45
12" Singles	From £2.45
Albums and Tape Cassettes	From £1.95
Double Albums and Tape Cassettes.	From £2.55
Compact Discs	From £5.95
LaserVideo Discs (Discount)	From £3.90
LaserVideo Discs (Full Price)	From £8.95
Betamax/VHS/V2000 Blank Tapes	From £3.85

REVIEWS

Some thought has been given to how the grading system could be improved. Initially it was unclear as to where the blame for the erratic nature of picture and sound quality lay - with the masters film and video companies supplied or with the quality of disc mastering and pressing by PHILIPS and the other disc manufacturers. While there is still room for improvement in disc pressing (mainly in respect of spots and blemishes) it is apparent that most of the trouble lies with the variable quality of supplied masters. The grading system is being defeated by the endless number of variations the film companies can come up with - who is to say whether one defect is 'better' than another?

The apparent recent change by CIC to using NTSC conversions is a good case in point. Both *Star Trek III* and *Beverly Hills Cop* have rather grainy and diffused picture quality and are below what LV is capable of extracting from 35mm originated material. But both these titles exhibit a quite pleasant tonal quality that is sadly lacking in another recent CIC title, *Trading Places*, which **does** have the sharpness and detail one expects to see on disc - but without the excessive contrast and blocked shadows that go along with it. What is required is a PAL quality transfer done to such a standard as to preserve the filmic qualities of the original. The combination of the better characteristics of both types of transfer is something we rarely seem to achieve.

The conflicting priorities dilemma also occurs in comparing *The Empire Strikes Back* with *Rambo-First Blood 2*. The former is a very well scanned transfer from a wide-screen original but is again very NTSC-ish and grainy. *Rambo-First Blood 2* is one of THORN EMI's better transfers and has moments of excellent picture quality that are interrupted by the recurrent pulling in and enlarging of odd portions of the frame that result in sections of the film looking as grainy as if they were originated on 16mm. This style of wide-screen cropping does nothing to aid the transition to the small screen. But, which of the two approaches is preferable? Is it better to see *Empire* done 'properly' (and possibly from a negative rather than a print) and then subsequently degraded in various conversion and copy stages, or to see a proper PAL transfer devalued by a poor, and many would say old-fashioned, approach to the scanning that unavoidably degrades picture quality too.

When we started doing reviews we were impressed by anything that showed good resolution and could not possibly be achieved on a domestic videotape format and accepted certain shortcomings in picture quality as the price to pay for getting a sharp image. We no longer consider this to be the case. Whereas the outstanding definition on *48 Hours* had us making allowances for the excessive contrast and hence darkness, of some scenes, we now believe that both good resolution and an extended tonal range are capable of being transferred to disc. It is possible to get the look of film on to disc, and examples that might

almost lead one to believe were mistakes they're so rare, have made it on occasions. This is something we'll follow up in a future issue.

One recent title that again confused the grading system was *The Killing Fields*. Within minutes of starting to play the disc it was obvious that there was a subdued but distracting patterning intruding on to the picture every time there was a dark scene. It looked like someone had stretched a piece of muslin over the TV, and there were also odd vertical white flecks continually present towards the top of the picture. Forever pointing out defects in titles looks to be a pointless exercise if nothing changes so it seemed worthwhile trying to track down the cause. THORN EMI's initial response was that *Killing Fields* was a "perfect master" and we should take the problem up with Blackburn because it was more than likely a pressing, or even a player, fault. Doing just that we quickly exhausted the various obvious possibilities and, in describing the fault in greater detail, produced the response that these patterning effects did often crop up on film masters and were believed to be down to some faulty noise-reduction processing during the video transfer. Back to THORN EMI, who still seemed unconvinced of the validity of our complaint, but we ended up delivering them our review copy of the disc for them to check against their C-format master. As you can guess the patterning **did** show up on the master and they put the problem down to an equipment malfunction. Their comment "It doesn't show up on VHS" we found a little unnerving, but fortunately they did seem a mite concerned that their product should appear unsatisfactory and promised

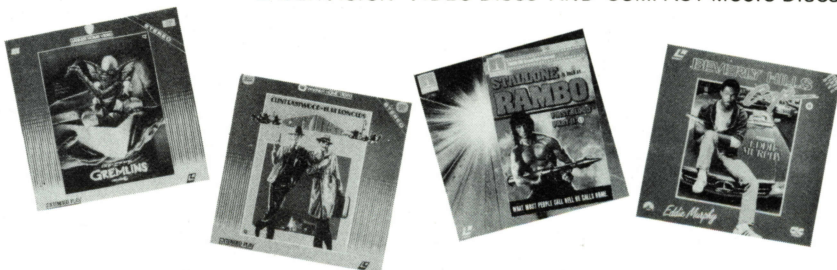
to take steps to ensure it didn't happen again. Many companies have shown considerably less concern than this when faced with being advised of defects in their masters so some encouragement should come from all of this, although it still grates that titles can get all the way through the disc mastering and pressing stages **before** faults are found.

But anyway, back to the grading problem. Thought is being given to introducing some revisions that would give a better summary of picture and sound quality. It would seem as though the present method has served its purpose and some more meaningful system might be devised except, at present, we can't think of one. We could devote a little more space to the description of disc quality in the reviews and dispense with the grading system altogether. Ideas and suggestions would be welcome.

The supply of cheap discs is diminishing but for this issue at least they are still being marked with an asterisk in front of the price. Get 'em while you can! It's also worthwhile trying to pick up any deletions still on your wants list. Some of them (as marked in the Autumn '85 catalogue) have been hard to get for sometime and their appearance as deletions was more of a confirmation of a state of affairs of some long standing. So, while copies of *Blue Hawaii*, *The Blues Brothers*, *Private Lessons*, *The Wild Geese*, *Gallipoli*, and *Conquest Of The Earth* are likely to prove near impossible to find, many of the other titles do still crop up. *The Best Of The Kenny Everett Show Vol.1*, we've been advised, is due for re-pressing, although no specific date was given. It might pay to put an order in if you want it.

Laser discount

LASERVISION VIDEO DISCS AND COMPACT MUSIC DISCS



HUGE DISCOUNTS

on
LaserVision
&
Compact Discs

For FREE Price Lists (UK only)

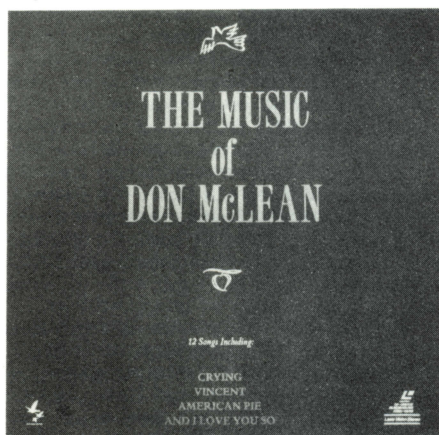
- Telephone CHELMSFORD (0245) 441851
9am-9pm/Seven Days

THE MUSIC OF DON McLEAN

PMI 90 1961 1 * £ 9.99
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO
1980 55mins

Side 1: And I love You So/It's Just The Sun/The Very Thought Of You/Wonderful Baby/Fools Paradise/American Pie/Left For Dead On The Road Of Love/Building My Body/Crying/Dream Lover/Prime Time/Vincent

Sometime around halfway through this 1977 live concert you may find yourself saying "When's he going to do Vincent?" Of all the songs Don McLean has written and performed it is the one that leaves the most lasting impression. He too must realise this as it's teasingly kept back as the last number - but it's chapter 12 if you can't wait.



The concert itself may not be one of McLean's best - the backing group appear a little uptight in contrast to his apparent looseness. One can imagine McLean may not be the easiest of performers to accompany. Naturally a guitar-playing soloist, he has a tendency to alter his songs very slightly - you can sense him feeling around for new harmonies as the mood takes him and the resulting changes in the phrasing are too much for the group. (The show does benefit from the support of small but adequate string section.)

Other than this small criticism, the performance is likely to suit both committed fan and casual viewer alike. What does detract from its appeal are the interruptions to the proceedings brought about by an interview with Paul Gambaccini that do nothing to enhance the disc past a first viewing. It's extremely unsatisfactory to hear part of an interview come crashing into the middle of *The Very Thought of You*, although admittedly, the interruptions are usually confined to filling gaps between songs.

Recorded on video, the picture quality holds up very well and deserves some praise. If anything, the disc looks to have been mastered a little on the pale side and picture quality does improve if the TV is set a little darker. The sound is good and clear if not necessarily rich in texture. The pressing looked good on the review sample, all bar a few white spots that didn't noticeably intrude.

[A- / A-] [B]

RAMBO - FIRST BLOOD II

THORN EMI TLY 90 3524 1 £19.99
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP
1985 93mins Rated 15

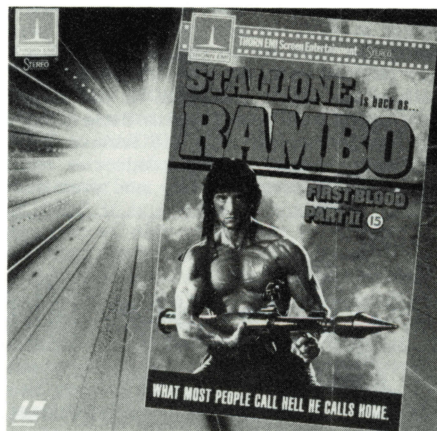
Starring: Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna, Charles Napier, Steven Berkoff
Directed by: George P. Cosmatos

It would be hard to imagine it possible to get just that right blend of ingredients that made *First Blood* work as

it did. The follow-up puts its predecessor to shame in the thrill-a-minute stunts department, but everyone comes across as trying a little too hard to put a meaning to it all. While the debate over the retrieval of the 'lost' US troops still held prisoner in Vietnam may not be a topic as close to the hearts of British viewers as for an American audience, as an action piece it probably does fulfill expectations. (And don't let all that to-do about the supposed gross violence of this or the other film put you off. The '15' certificate is appropriate - though if you're still wary, *First Blood* is the milder of the two.)

Many of Stallone's determined grimaces are beginning to look more than a little unconvincing and continuing the saga to a third instalment would seem unlikely if the Rambo character is to remain the impregnable superman (and, yes, there is supposed to be another one on the way!). Already in this film Rambo finds time for a brief love scene that slows things down for at least 30 seconds! What us action fans are more interested in are the likes of the scene where the two boats collide and blow up. Rambo, courtesy of a skilful change-of-angle edit, appears to defy gravity and jump in an upwards arc as he makes his last minute leap to safety. And what about that wonderful coin-operated Coke machine that nobody puts any money in - they just wrench the front door open and help themselves!

Rambo gets a little speech at the end whose sincerity is diminished somewhat by a wowing on the sound that develops in the latter stages of the film. This humorous interlude is but a brief aberration in an otherwise excellent-to-the-point-of-distraction soundtrack. The picture shows improvement over the earlier disc and has some good crisp moments when the cropping shows the centre screen action.



As a whole though it suffers from erratic definition as various parts of the frame are centred/and or enlarged and pulled in to the TV format. Much of the action goes on in the dark and it is dark on the transfer - a repeat viewing almost becomes mandatory as a result, although one wonders what on earth VHS viewers must be able to discern in these stages of the film. It was these dark scenes that also showed the disc to be pressed with a bit of dropout that it would have been better without. Otherwise it was OK.

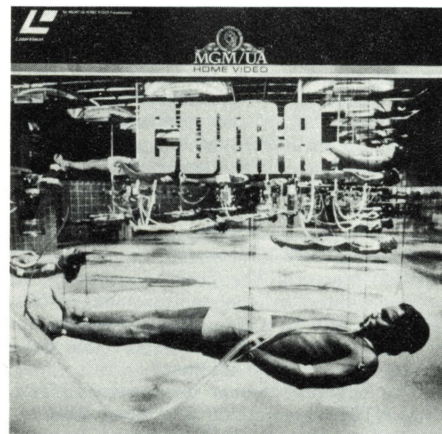
[B- / A] [C+]

COMA

MGM/UA UMLV 10013 * £11.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1978 108mins Rated 15

Starring: Genevieve Bujold, Michael Douglas, Elisabeth Ashley, Rip Torn, Richard Widmark, Lois Chiles, Harry Rhodes
Directed by: Michael Crichton

"What do you think, Susan, there's a conspiracy at the Boston Memorial Hospital involving all the anaesthetists?" says the pathology technician in autopsy to Genevieve Bujold after her best friend has mysteriously died during a simple abortion operation. Susan is standing over the bacon-slicer watching her friend's brain being sectioned for analysis. In a near-credible thriller, it's one of the few moments that gets anywhere near being at all blatantly scary, and indeed, even this scene is only gruesome by implication. Very little is



actually seen by the viewer. Maybe that's what gives *Coma* its strengths.

It is difficult to add too much more to the plot without spoiling it for you, even the first time round. While the script is detailed enough to stand further analysis, knowing the outcome doesn't leave the disc with that much repeat appeal.

Something that does give the film some appeal to the collector are the fleeting appearances of Tom Selleck, Maude Adams, and Ed Harris who hardly get to speak more than a few sentences - well, Maude doesn't get to say anything at all.

Picture quality is extremely pleasant, even though it takes a minute or two to settle in. Apart from a slightly warmish cast to the picture there is otherwise little cause for complaint. LV is capable of more than this, but as an average it is more than acceptable. The soundtrack appears only to be an optical one, but very listenable, and only the slightest hiss would cause any comment. If only more LV releases maintained his general standard of presentation.

[B+ / B] [B]

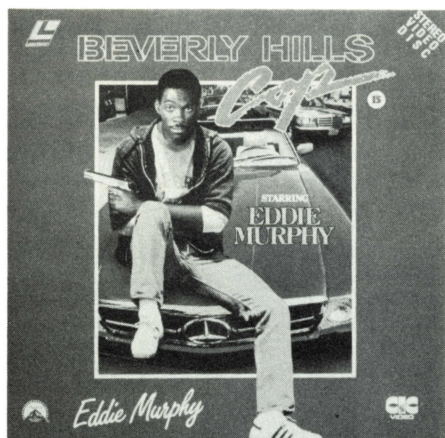
BEVERLY HILLS COP

CIC LVG 2159 £19.99
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP
1984 10/10mins Rated 15

Eddie Murphy, Lisa Eilbacher, Steven Berkoff, Judge Reinhold, Ronny Cox, John Ashton, James Russo, Stephen Elliott, Paul Reiser

Directed by: Martin Brest

As a film, and as a film for Eddie Murphy fans, *Beverly Hills Cop* is not likely to disappoint. Closer to the style of *48 Hours* than *Trading Places*, it's a chance for Murphy to show his stuff without overshadowing a good supporting cast - the key members of which must be Judge Reinhold and John Ashton who come across almost Laurel & Hardy-like as the dynamic-duo detectives of the Beverly Hills Police Department out to keep an eye on the agile star. A throwback to *48 Hours* is Jonathan Banks (who played the unlucky detective who got wasted in the opening scenes of that movie) getting to be a rather nasty villain here, and, even though this is essentially a comedy, bringing a bit of harsh realism to the opening scenes when coolly carrying out the murder of Murphy's friend. It's this



killing that sets Axel Foley (Murphy) off to the West Coast to track him down. The film starts with another variation on the car-chase theme - this time it's a convoy of patrol cars after a massive art car that obliterates all before it, and is just the sort of thing to have you scanning back to the beginning before you put the disc back into the sleeve.

The film is preceded by a ten-minute Eddie Murphy trailer (it's chaptered! - as is the start of the main feature which begins at chapter 2). This contains a clip from *48 Hours* (the C & W bar scene) that has had all the four-letter words skilfully edited out. No such exorcism has befallen *BHC* and sensitive readers should be advised accordingly.

As was the case with *Star Trek 3*, this is another CIC title on which the picture quality is a remarkable match for the NTSC disc - which means that the master has been effectively 'limited' as far as PAL release is concerned. That still leaves the PAL disc slightly crisper, but at the expense of picking up some rather annoying grain that detracts from the image every now and again (and not necessarily in the dark scenes either). The overall picture has a nice 'open' feel to it that makes for pleasant video but overall lacks the desired resolution. The sound is to be judged on a hi-fi level and the music comes over well. Some of the dialogue has some rough edges that may well be down to the original production.

[C+ / A-] [B]

ERIC CLAPTON - ON WHISTLE TEST

BBC VIDEO BBCL 3025 £ 9.99
CLV-Ch COLOUR MONO
1977 59mins



Side 1: Hello Old Friend/Sign Language/ Alberta, Alberta/Tell The Truth/Can't Find My Way Home/Double Trouble/I Shot The Sheriff/Knocking On Heaven's Door/ Further On Up The Road/Badge

From 1977 comes this Shepherds Bush BBC TV Theatre concert recorded for *The Old Grey Whistle Test* as it then was. Although only a fairly recent video release, LV fans had to wait that little bit longer due to a tape fault on the supplied master. At a guess this may have been something to do with a faint oblong shape visible towards the bottom of the picture. For the most part it is only a short white vertical line that is noticeable - and then only for some of the time. Once noticed any distraction it might have caused the viewer rapidly recedes. The age of the recording shows in other ways - the picture does look a little grainy and streaky - but then nine years is quite a long way back in video terms.

The programme, true to its time, shows Eric in more laid-back style and he doesn't get to pick up an electric guitar till the fourth number - though the show may have been edited out-of-sequence. The track listing is good enough indication of what to expect. Yvonne Elliman, who along with Marcy Levy sings back-up vocals throughout, is the featured singer/instrumentalist on *Can't Find My Way Home*.

The sound is in mono (the way it was recorded) and reasonably full-bodied but lacking in treble. Some tweaking of amplifier controls - or better still, a little shaping with an equaliser - restores the missing 'cut' to Eric's Stratocaster that has been significantly dulled in the mix the BBC have cooked up. Providing you accept this is 1977 and not '67, you will probably be more than satisfied with what this disc has to offer.

[B- / B-] [B]

SLAVONIC DANCES Op.46/Op.72.

PIONEER ARTISTS MC037-E £24.95
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO CX
1981 80mins

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Zdenek Kosler, recorded at the Dvorak Hall in the House of Artists, Prague.

Side 1: Op. 46 nos. 1-8
Side 2: Op. 72 nos. 9-16

Discs like this would normally be immediately passed on to one of LDR's more expert reviewers, but such is the accessibility of the contents that its appeal lies outside that of the staunch classical music fan. Most of the pieces (there are sixteen) are quite short and familiar melodies are often discernible. While the orchestra plays in the deserted Dvorak Hall the Japanese camera crew embarks on various forays into the hinterland.

It is in the fourth work, a soursedska, that music and video really gel. Introductory shots of some cut-glass vases lead into several minutes of compelling footage in the glass-factory. Bulging cheeks and muscles working intensely away come close to pushing the music into a background role as the glass ornament takes shape. At times it is difficult to believe that the music wasn't specially commissioned for this accompanying role. A similar blend of skills occurs a couple of tracks on where two generations of luthiers are seen at work. You (and they) know that it is all being observed by the camera but the visual cameo makes good connection between instrument maker and player.

Inspection of the picture during the Hall sequences reveals little in the way of microphones. The method of sound recording appears fairly basic and the resulting sound quality open and realistic. The dynamic range is quite exceptional - at times it is possibly a little too dynamic to remain in harmony with the more modest dimensions of the TV screen.

Although the standard of origination appears high, as is often the case, much has been lost in the standards conversion from NTSC. There are some close-ups of children's faces at a puppet show (on side two) that look really excellent, but for the most part there is an unacceptable blurring of the image with the colour desperately trying to break free from the luminance signal. Many PIONEER discs suffer this fault and the assumption must be that it is difficult to find suitable standards conversion facilities in Japan. The picture quality is good enough to make you want to pay a visit to Czechoslovakia but doesn't stand up to detailed inspection.



ion on repeated viewings - and this aspect is of some significance on a presentation that would indeed invite such prolonged auditioning.

While satisfactory in other respects the pressing of the review copy exhibited a high level of colour speckling - ensure that the copy you may receive is adequately clean.

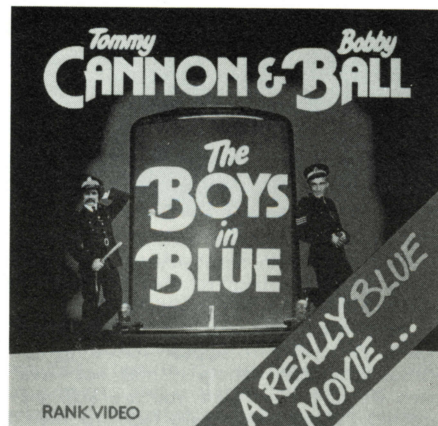
[C- / A] [D]

THE BOYS IN BLUE

RANK VIDEO D1065 £13.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1983 87mins Rated PG

Starring: Tommy Cannon, Bobby Ball, Suzanne Danielle, Roy Kinnear, Eric Sykes, Jack Douglas, Jon Pertwee, Edward Judd
Directed by: Val Guest

If Cannon & Ball had managed to transfer their style of comedy to the big screen they would have broken free from a handicap that has dogged comedians attempting the same from Max Miller on. Performers who can stand on a stage and work an audience or bring a little bit of zip to a half-hour TV sit-com are invariably swamped when attempting the transition to celluloid. However, such consider-



ations have never deterred film companies from cashing in on whichever comedy act happens to be currently in vogue - yet it is difficult to recall any that have ach-

ieved any significant level of artistic success. With that many failures on record you would have thought lessons would have been learnt, but presumably, the mere sight of some star names over the cinema entrance is sufficient to entice the public to hand over their money.

Having said all that any further comment on the film itself might appear superfluous. Tommy and Bobby do their best without the benefit of a script of any substance and look capable of producing a decent film given better material. Roy Kinnear and Eric Sykes are on good form but are similarly wasted. Seeing that it is now a couple of years old and its novelty has passed *The Boys In Blue* only remains as something of a curio of limited appeal.

The disc itself offers fairly typical RANK image quality although in this case the shadow detail is a bit lacking and some of the night scenes are a trifle indistinct. The sound is from an optical track and quite listenable, if a little hissy.

[B - / B-] [B]

THE SEDUCTION

EMBASSY ELV 2055 * £13.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1981 99mins

Starring: Morgan Fairchild, Michael Sarrazin, Vince Edwards, Andrew Stevens, Colleen Camp
Written & Directed by: David Schmoeller

With all the pace and style of a TV movie *The Seduction* takes an awful long time to get to the point. Morgan Fairchild is Jaime Fremont, a TV newscaster the subject of an obsessive and unwelcome pursuit by a perky peeping-tom neighbour - played by Andrew Stevens (remember him as Kirk Douglas' son in *The Fury*). In spite of his committing several witnessed and presumably prosecutable offences, the police, in the shape of Vince Edwards (formerly TV soap doctor-series heart-throb, Ben Casey), refuse to take any action to protect the hapless Jaime. Call Charles Bronson? Well no, not quite, but the suggestion of vigilante tactics promises to inject a shot of adrenalin into the proceedings - but, in fact, nothing much materialises. There is a little bit of nudity



and violence scattered around but *The Seduction's* main notoriety is still most likely to be confined to the fact that the disc presently holds the record for the 'most-delayed' LV release - having taken nearly two years to appear following its initial catalogue listing. It may not have been worth the wait. If you are still interested though, make sure NOT to read the sleeve notes before you watch the disc as they reveal all but the closing minutes of the film.

The disc offers a watchable picture, if only on the level of 'good video' rather

than capturing the look of real film. The sound is a reasonable optical track and the pressing looks to be one of those relatively clean discs we got around the middle of '85 - hardly any spots at all (and in a film with lots of dark scenes).

[C+ / B-] [A-]

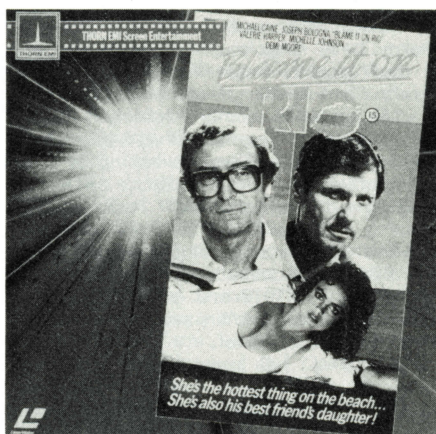
BLAME IT ON RIO

THORN EMI TLY 90 2777 1 £19.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1983 96mins Rated 15

Starring: Michael Caine, Joseph Bologna, Valerie Harper, Michelle Johnson, Demi Moore

Directed & Produced by: Stanley Donen

Fans of vintage movies had best steer clear of this engaging piece of comedy that will have special appeal for married male readers over the age of 40 - or more specifically, married male readers



over the age of forty who are worried by the fact. When the holiday-bound Matthew (Michael Caine) peers out of the jumbo jet his expectation of what is to come materialises in the form of a brief clip from *Flying Down To Rio* - you know, the bit where they're all standing on the wings. In reality Matthew's otherwise straightforward vacation is thrust into chaos when he succumbs to the advances of his best-friend's teenage daughter - her lingering crush on him comes to a head soon after their arrival,

during a nocturnal beach party, and Matthew finds himself spending the rest of the holiday trying to conceal his 'infidelity'.

Such a premise could easily have resulted in a tawdry and exploitative piece of work but Donen's direction and a sharp and economical screenplay from Charlie Peters & Larry Gelbart have resulted in film that is witty to the point of laughing out loud. It would be unkind to single out any particular member of the cast - they all bring something to the production as individuals without overshadowing the contributions of others. The only bits of the film that come close to breaking the spell are some spoken-at-the-camera documentary-style inserts that suffer more from unsympathetic lighting than being mistaken in their conception.

This one aspect of the production may have been exaggerated by the rather indifferent video transfer. The picture starts off more than a little diffused, and while it does improve, the colour remains off-balance throughout. The sound is sourced from an optical track and is hissy and indistinct in places. While the disc is undeniably watchable and listenable, the presentation is below what is needed to make it an essential purchase.

[C / C] [B-]

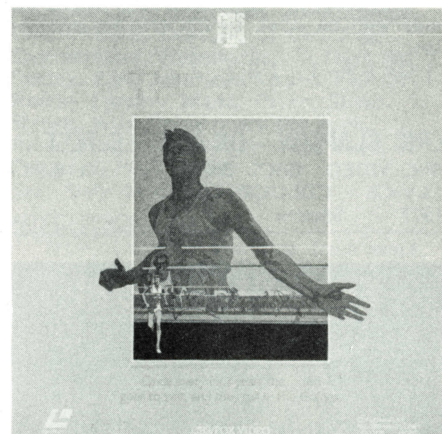
THE GAMES

CBS/FOX 1176-70 * £13.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1969 93mins

Starring: Michael Crawford, Ryan O'Neal, Charles Aznavour, Jeremy Kemp, Elaine Taylor, Stanley Baker, Rafer Johnson, Sam Elliot

Directed by: Michael Winner

Now that the marathon is considered to be an athletic endeavour well within the capabilities of everybody and their dogs, *The Games* comes across as '60s period-piece with a decidedly overblown look about it. Set against a background of the 1960 Rome Olympics, this adaptation of the Hugh Atkinson novel shows how four of the runners make their way to the event. Michael Crawford is the UK entrant, a



chirpy milkman driven on by an embittered former runner turned coach (Stanley Baker characteristically overdoing it) who contrasts nicely with the casual golden-boy from the USA (Ryan O'Neal). To add a bit of political drama, Charles Aznavour is the retired Czech track star pressured back into competition for the sake of promoting the glorious image of Communism, while conflicts of the racial kind are covered by Athol Compton's portrayal of a naive Aborigine plucked from the depths of the outback in order to make a fast buck for a couple of opportunist bookies who, much to their surprise, turns out to be an athlete of world-class ability. Toss in a few references to drug

Pinedene Films
SOUTHAMPTON LTD

MAIL ORDER SPECIALISTS

WE HAVE IN STOCK SEALED COPIES OF MOST OF THE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE LASERVISION DISCS AS WELL AS COPIES OF MANY HARD TO GET ITEMS.

SEND FOR OUR COMPLETE LISTS. WE OFTEN HAVE SECOND-HAND DISCS TO SELL, AND AT PRESENT WE HAVE SOME REDUCED PRICE NEW DISCS TOO.

AS ESTABLISHED DEALERS IN CINE FILMS, WE CAN ACCEPT THESE IN PART-EXCHANGE FOR LASERVISION DISCS.

PINEDENE FILMS
99 HILL LANE
SOUTHAMPTON
HAMPSHIRE
SO1 5AE

PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW TELEPHONE NUMBER FROM MARCH ONWARDS-

SOUTHAMPTON 331680

abuse and some arguments over the timing of the events to fit the TV schedules and the recipe is complete. There's hardly a dull spot anywhere and much of the credit for this tight-paced production must go to Michael Winner whose competent handling of the crowd scenes gives the film a certain authentic ring.

Squeezing the film in order to fit the TV format makes everybody look a bit thinner than you remember them. The picture quality is not that good, but it's watchable and typical of many video transfers of its age. As with *M.A.S.H.*, the gritty image quality unintentionally gives the film a vaguely documentary look. The optical soundtrack is a bit hissy and crackly but listenable at moderate volume. [C- / C-] [B]

PLAYERS

CIC VIDEO LVG 2024 £11.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1979 115mins

Starring: Ali MacGraw, Dean-Paul Martin, Pancho Gonzalez, Guillermo Vilas, Ion Tiriac, Steven Guttenburg, Maximilian Schell

Directed by: Anthony Harvey

If you're in a sporty mood and you put on *Players* after the *The Games* may think you've stumbled across a CLV disc that has magically slipped into slow motion. The opening scene, in which no dialogue occurs, shows the two Wimbledon finalists sitting under a clock waiting out the last five minutes before stepping on to the Centre Court. These silent moments actually take up three minutes of screen time - but it feels more like an hour and a half.

The action heats up when Nicole, 'the mysterious woman' (Ali MacGraw), prangs her Jensen down Mexico way - to be saved from imminent incineration by young, blond-haired tennis hustler Chris (Dean-Paul Martin). Nicole is pretty wealthy and doesn't look too upset at the loss of her sleek roadster. Perhaps the fact that some considerate member of the film crew switched the Jensen for an anonymous-looking saloon of lesser pedigree moments before the conflagration



eased the financial suffering. (Somehow one imagines that we weren't supposed to notice.)

Inevitably the pair become romantically intertwined (Nicole and Chris, that is, not the cars). Somewhere in the background lies the suggestion that Nicole has other irons in the fire. Chris is coached to tennis stardom, initially by Nicole, and then by Pancho Gonzalez (who brings a vigour to the proceedings the real actors seem incapable of). There are many fleeting appearances by tennis celebrities - Ilie Nastase, John McEnroe (who does an out-of-character scene of all of five minutes duration in

which he manages but eight words - "What are you going to do with it?"), Tom Gullikson, John Lloyd, Vijay Amritraj etc. It can be fun picking out celebrities in the Wimbledon crowds (I claim two points for Liv Ullman and Jimmy Connors). For tennis freaks *Players* makes for a wonderful piece of trivia to add to one's disc collection...though if you are a golfer, say, its appeal will be less.

There is a possibility of cuts having been made in the film. Melissa Prophet is given prominence in the closing credits but appears only very briefly in the film itself (blink and you've missed her). Also, the significance of Nicole's secret 'muppet room' is never explained. Should anyone be prepared to admit to having seen his film in the cinema they could possibly enlighten us as to what we have missed.

As a disc *Players* is very watchable. The definition is a little soft most of the time, a shortcoming that grew in significance on a second viewing. The sound is OK - a little hissy but generally adequate. Someone might complain if we gave it B- grades so to be on the safe side and not disappoint anybody.... [C+ / C+] [B-]

TRADING PLACES

CIC VIDEO LVG 2101 £19.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1983 112mins Rated 15

Dan Aykroyd, Eddie Murphy, Don Ameche, Ralph Bellamy, Denholm Elliott, Jamie Lee Curtis

Directed by: John Landis

Fans of *Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers* will appreciate more from director John Landis, but someone **must** have done this story before.



Eddie Murphy is Billy Ray Valentine, an opportunist man of the streets and a far cry from Dan Aykroyd's Lewis Winthorpe III character - an up-and-coming executive type whose comfortable and protected lifestyle puts him in the 'them' rather than 'us' category. A dollar bet between the millionaire Duke brothers (Winthorpe's employers - played by Ameche and Bellamy), out to prove an argument - whether breeding or environment makes the man - sees the two having their lifestyles swapped round. Winthorpe is deprived of his job and tossed out into the real world to make it on his own. Billy Ray has never had it so good. Seeing who makes out the best gives the Dukes some idle amusement, but immersed in the novelty of their wager, neither anticipates the turn of events whereby their meagre bet evolves into a major catastrophe.

The picture quality of the disc looks crisp, but in common with several recent CIC titles, is a little contrasty and occasionally dark. The opening credits

are deceptive and some careful adjustment is necessary to get the best out of the disc. There is a slight rise in brightness early on side two and some scenes on this side are quite impressive. Unfortunately the sound remains hissy and dull throughout, often accompanied by a slight hum that definitely diminishes the appeal on what one would have thought to have been a prestigious release worthy of some special attention.

[B- / C] [B-]

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE AT THE MET

ARTS INT 05 AI 038 £19.99
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO
1984 100mins

The disc is a compilation from a mixed bill performance given by the ABT at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York on 11th June 1984 and recently shown on Channel 4's *Dance On Four* programme. The disc comprises four items: two complete ballets, *Les Sylphides* and *Triad*, and two extracts.

Les Sylphides - The ballet was originally derived from a simple series of balletic scenes for the girl students of the Imperial Ballet School in St Petersburg. As a contrast to the full-length ballets of Marius Petipa, Mikhail Fokine took the ballet scenes which were danced to Chopin's music (hence the original title, *Chopiniana*) and made a one-act ballet out of them. The result was a Romantic ballet for the girl pupils with one male soloist (Mikhail Baryshnikov in this recording), which Serge Diaghilev presented in his Ballets Russes season in Paris in June 1909. This performance is the version that Fokine produced for the ABT's opening performance in 1940.

The curtain rises on a moonlit glade beside a ruined abbey and proceeds through a nocturne, waltz, mazurka, male solo, prelude, pas de deux and final waltz. Although there is no plot one can imagine the male dancer as the poet in his reverie being surrounded in his creative world by the spirits of the air. *Les Sylphides* is a prime example of the Romantic ballet for its lyrical and graceful movements. It lasts 30 minutes and is a well-danced and impressive performance.

Sylvia - Pas De Deux - *Sylvia* is a ballet in the symphonic style by Leo Delibes and followed on from his successful 1870 work, *Coppelia*. This excerpt is danced by Martine van Hamel as Sylvia and Patrick Bissell as her escort. It comprises - entree, male variation, Sylvia variation and coda - in the staging by Andre Eglevsky. Both dancers obviously enjoy themselves in this performance and show athletic strength and poise. Martine van Hamel dances with great precision and elegance and Patrick Bissell with great verve and elevation in his leaps and confidence in his spins. The music probably comes from Act 3 of the ballet (the sleeve notes are minimal) and the piece lasts for 15 minutes.

Triad - This short ballet, to Prokofiev's music, tells of the affection of two brothers which is destroyed when a girl intrudes and forms a relationship with one of them. The cast comprises six dancers.

The scene remains the same for the duration of the ballet. The lighting gives off sombre magenta-tinged luminosity against a plain background. The two boys' costumes are plain full-length leotards in magenta and dark purple and the girl is in a pale magenta/pink. There is not a lot of contrast between the dancers and the background.

The plot shows Kenneth MacMillan's

interest in the psychological analysis of character, a favoured subject of his as is shown in his other rather macabre ballet *My Brother, My Sisters* which is about a brother and five sisters inhabiting an unreal world where the creepy awareness of death is ever present.

Many of the movements in *Triad* are difficult to achieve smoothly as a number of actions start by the dancer lying or sitting on the floor. Overall the work is well danced and lasts for 25 minutes.

Paquita - The Grand Pas - The original ballet was in two acts and three scenes with music by Ernest Deldevez and choreography by Joseph Mazilier. It was first presented in Paris in 1846. In 1881 Marius Petipa produced a revised version in which he inserted the grand pas with music by Ludwig Minkus.

The main problem in presenting the grand pas is the very high standard required from the dancers. The casting demands a ballerina and premier danseur - a male lead, six first soloists and eight second soloists and very few companies can muster such an impressive group. The grand pas comprises ten main sections. All are danced in Spanish-type costumes with much vivacity and bravura to Minkus' catchy tunes. The whole Company enjoys itself immensely and the overall standard is high. The grand pas makes a colourful and fitting end to the programme.

- Overall the items on this disc are well danced and they make a satisfactory compilation album. Personally, I find programmes made up of a number of extracts rather unsatisfactory, whether they are opera, ballet, or musical. The presentation of an item divorced from its context is irritating and, no matter how well planned, the tendency is for the programme to degenerate into "Ballet's Greatest Hits" or "The Opera Greats" etc. However, this disc is certainly worth having for *Les Sylphides* and *Paquita*.



Sylvia is one of the irritators because I keep wanting to see van Hamel and Bissell in the rest of it. *Triad*, with its ominous unhappy outcome, is an excellent foil for the brash and colourful *Paquita*.

Video quality on the disc is variable. The dark blue backgrounds on side one show some smearing and busyness with occasional white spotting. Video noise is apparent in *Triad* on side two, no doubt due to the very low light levels. Generally the picture is slightly soft - it looked the same on the broadcast - and must inevitably be due to the NTSC/PAL conversion. The sound has suffered no such impairment in its travel across the Atlantic and has one of the best examples of orchestral recording in the ARTS INT catalogue. While these ballet discs are always likely to make extra demands on the quality of the pressings by virtue of their many dark plain backdrops, neither of the two samples checked in the review could really be considered as clean as

they should be. The blue spots on the first copy proved distracting. The second sample proved cleaner and with variations such as this it would be advisable to check the copy you receive at the earliest opportunity. [TONY WELLS]

[C / A] [C]

MISSION GALACTICA - THE CYLON ATTACK

CIC VIDEO LVG 1020 £11.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1980 102mins

Lorne Green, Lloyd Bridges, Richard Hatch, Dirk Benedict, Herbert Jefferson Jr
Directors: Vince Edwards, Christian I. Nyby II

Following the success of *Star Wars* Glen A. Larson approached UNIVERSAL to create his own space epic. He wanted to do a TV series to allow more time for developing characters, and when the studio gave the go-ahead he was off on the intergalactic dog-fight bandwagon. The studio liked the pilot programme and decided to string two episodes together for a cinema release. The special-effects boys processed the film with a SENSURROUND soundtrack and *Battlestar Galactica* was born. The TV series did not receive a tremendous welcome from American audiences so it was scrapped and just two sequels for cinema release were made.

In *Battlestar Galactica* (not on PAL LV) Larson's characters are fleeing from the Cylons, a bunch of chromium-plated villains intent on destroying all human life in the Universe. After a terrible defeat the remnants of the twelve colonies band together to seek the legendary thirteenth colony - our Earth.



On to *The Cylon Attack* - the fleet and the Battlestar Galactica are virtually stranded as fuel stocks have been depleted. Commander Adama (Lorne Green) is pondering the problem when the famous Comander Cain (Lloyd Bridges) and his Battlestar Pegasus appear on the scene. Cain suggests a daring attack on the Cylons to capture fuel - a ploy which Adama initially resists but is won round. Things don't quite work out and as the Galactica burns up during attack all hands set to in order to save it (watch out for the duplicated footage from *Operation Crossbow* - the explosion in the Galactica's weapon store).

Of the three titles reviewed, *Mission Galactica: The Cylon Attack* is probably the best all round from a disc quality point of view. It's reasonably crisp in definition and the sound quite listenable. You may find the pressing to show a few spots.

[B - / B -] [C]

CONQUEST OF THE EARTH

CIC VIDEO LVG 1054 £11.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1981 94mins

Lorne Green, Kent McCord, Barry Van Dyke, Robyn Douglass
Directors: Sidney Hayers, Sigmund Neufeld Jr, Barry Crane

Here the Galactica and its fleet have reached Earth and must somehow summon up support in order to help defeat the Cylons. A computer simulation shows what would happen if the Cylons were to attack Earth (again we have duplicated footage - this time from the film *Earthquake*). It is decided to make contact with Earth on an individual basis and two warriors,



Kent McCord and Barry Van Dyke, are sent to America to contact a certain Dr Mortason (Robert Reed). The duo have difficulty adapting to Earth ways, but the viewer is treated to a display of flying motorcycles and other gadgetry which all go to help sustain interest.

Again, a typical TV-type saga that will please any audience, especially the youngsters. Picture quality is a mite better here but the optical soundtrack comes over as being horribly distorted and crackly. Seeing as this disc is particularly obscure the poor quality of the audio is a good enough reason not to pay over the odds for a copy unless you are a particularly dedicated fan.

[B / D+] [C+]

BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25th CENTURY

CIC VIDEO LVG 1015 £11.99
CLV COLOUR STEREO
1979 89mins

Gil Gerard, Pamela Hensley, Erin Gray, Tim O'Conner, Henry Silva, Joseph Wiseman
Director: Daniel Haller

After *Battlestar Galactica* Larson and UNIVERSAL, with an eye on the success of *Superman* and *Flash Gordon*, acquired the rights to *Buck Rogers*. A similar marketing approach was adopted - a pilot for cinema release followed by a TV series, but all done on a tighter budget than the previous more lavish productions. Even so, *Buck Rogers* achieved greater financial success than its predecessor.

NASA launches America's last deep-space probe (looking remarkably like the present space shuttle). On board - Captain William Buck Rogers. He experiences a galactic snowstorm which freezes everything - including himself. Five hundred years later the Drakonians capture the ship and wake Buck from his frozen slumbers. Enter the scantily-clad princess and

Steve Fielding takes a look at
a trio of related space films from UNIVERSAL studios.....

Buck can't believe his luck. It seems that the Drakonians are on the way to Earth on a peace mission but, true to form, all is not as it seems as the Drakonians are intent on conquering the planet. Buck ends up under suspicion as a spy by both sides.

The disc itself is from one of those notorious early CIC/DISCOVISION masters that result in near unwatchable stilted movements everytime anyone or anything travels across the screen. While some of the early NTSC DISCOVISION discs exhibit excellent image quality it was achieved at the expense of transferring all 24 fps to the video master. These early masters only have give 1440 frames each minute when it should be 1800 in order to synchronise with the US 60Hz mains frequency. While these 'missing' frames produce surprisingly little impairment on the US discs, when transferred to PAL 50Hz video the effect is grossly exaggerated and in many cases the result becomes nearly unwatchable. Interestingly some readers report the effect to be less troublesome than others but purchasers of this disc should



at least be advised what to expect. *The Blues Brothers* and *Animal House* are two other CIC discs that suffer this problem.

Returning to the disc in hand - the sound, while supposedly stereo, sounds to be electronically re-processed and not that wonderful. Just to round things out - there is a good chance that the pressing might be a bit spotty, but if you've persevered this far you'd probably not be too bothered about such trivialities.

[D / C] [C+]

ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA

THORN EMI 90 2778 1 £29.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1984 219mins Rated 18

Robert De Niro, James Woods, Elizabeth McGovern, Joe Pesci, Burt Young, Tuesday Weld, Treat Williams

Directed by: Sergio Leone

It is difficult not to compare this gargantuan gangster melodrama with that other large-scale cinematic hymn to crime and violence, *The Godfather*. But, in fact, the similarities are no more than surface ones in that both films deal with the rise to power of a group of organised criminals in the New York of the '20s, '30s and '40s. But there, the similarities end for *Once Upon A Time In America* is also an examination of personal failure - not in the classic physical sense of being mowed down by the bullets of the police or an opposing mob - but by one's own intellectual and mental shortcomings.

When I first saw this highly-touted film the year before last in Los Angeles, the distributors had slashed a full 88 minutes out of it. What was left was a confusion of strange beginnings and abrupt endings to scenes that left me wondering why they had been put in in the first place. Characters entered and dep-

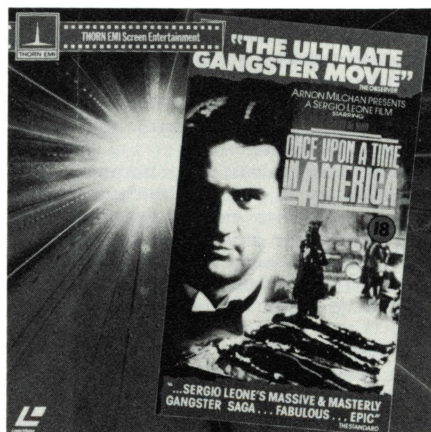
arted for no explainable reason. Little wonder then that director Sergio Leone had expressed such anger at the American distributors for their treatment of his film. Later, I managed to see the full version and, while it is not without flaws of its own, it is a very much better film and an unquestionable masterpiece of moviemaking. This disc release, thanks to THORN EMI, gives us that complete version more or less as Leone intended it.

It would be easy to say this is not as good as *The Godfather*. Certainly the script is not as good - but how could it be with six writers credited? Yet the story, to my mind, is better. It's a romance, it's a cops & robbers opus, it's a political drama, it's a love story and, most surprisingly, it's a mystery. In fact, it is this latter element that gives the film its most satisfying thread and I defy anyone to guess the ending.

Visually, this film is vastly superior to *The Godfather*. The art direction and the sets are positively ravishing, the photography superbly executed and the editing near-perfect. Previously known for his spaghetti Westerns (*A Fistful of Dollars*, *The Good The Bad & The Ugly*), Leone's sluggish, eccentric directorial style never appealed to me. But on this occasion he seems to control his former eccentricities because he is clearly in love with his subject. His respect for the great gangster films of the '30s is evidenced in every camera angle of each lovingly-created scene. So much so that in many ways the film is a tug-of-war between brutish vulgarity and sweeping romanticism, with the latter emerging as the eventual winner.

One particularly subtle touch is the sight of the adolescent hoodlum reading Jack London's *Adventures of Martin Eden* in the toilet thus revealing a romantic and even literate side to the boy's otherwise repulsive nature. The central acting performance by Robert De Niro is quite magnificent. To see him age from a cocky young criminal in his mid-twenties to a tired old mobster in his sixties is as much a tribute to his acting ability as it is to the excellent make-up.

And if Ennio Morricone's score seems over-lush at times it is at least faithful to director Leone's intent. And even Morricone's music is strikingly upstaged



by that lovely old tune *Amapola* which is used to underscore the lifelong romance between De Niro and dancer/actress Elizabeth McGovern. It even acts as a romantic prelude to a particularly repulsive rape scene. And this brings me to one of the film's less subtle moments when everything descends into clumsy (and unnecessary) prurience. The bank robbery rape and its subsequent 'identification parade' with white handkerchiefs and openly fly fronts are scenes which are ludicrously off-key and do not convince - even

as the cheapest of cheap fiction.

But for all its faults, this is a riveting and very long film. It sustains the interest throughout - and occasionally it grips the attention like a vice. Whether your taste runs to gangster films or to the film as an art form *Once Upon A Time In America* is worthy of attention. I urge you to get to see it.

[KEN BARNES]

Disc Quality: The opportunity to compare this version with the US disc shows the UK disc to be sourced from the same transfer. As a result the UK release has turned out a bit grainy and the definition and tonal range are not particularly good. A reader has already complained about the lack of colour on the disc but this is not quite the reality of the situation. There is supposed to be something of a sepia hue to the picture but this too has unfortunately been degraded in the conversion. The soundtrack has some clearly defined effects and is quite listenable if possessing an element of background noise now and then.

[C / B] [B]

ELO

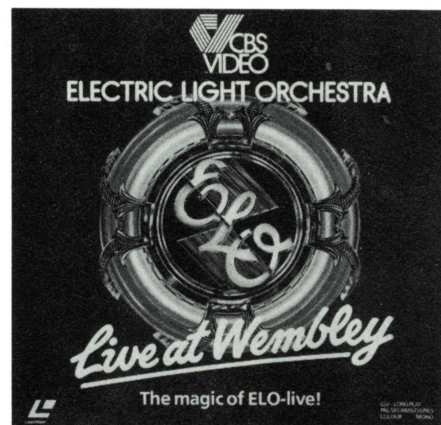
LIVE AT WEMBLEY

CBS/FOX 7021-70 £ 9.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1978 56mins

Side 1: Concerto For A Rainy Day/Standin' In The Rain/Night In The City/Turn To Stone/Tightrope/Telephone Line/Rockaria/Wild West Hero/Showdown

Side 2: Sweet Talkin' Woman/Mr Blue Sky/Do Ya/Livin' Thing/Roll Over Beethoven

Although it's only 56 minutes long, this 1978 Electric Light Orchestra concert is spread over two sides of a CLV disc. May be they planned to do it in CAV - or maybe, being an early LV release lease, 56 minutes was considered a bit



risky for a single side. Who knows? Certainly neither picture or sound quality is that remarkable.

Originated on video there is plentiful evidence of horizontal interference lines caused by the video cameras becoming microphonic during recording. The picture is none too vivid, although again, being an early pressing, it is difficult to tell whether to lay this fault on the disc or the master. While mono sound can be acceptable if nothing else exists, here, even this is a little undynamic and runs very close to peak distortion at times. It won't affect the desirability of the disc to fans but many of ELO's numbers could well appeal to a broader audience - a potential which this disc doesn't really fulfil. One is even suspicious that some heavy post-production has been employed in order fill out the sound and supplement the video in the earlier sections of the show - the latter part of the concert

definitely appears more authentic, and hence enjoyable. Even the sleeve's promise of "dazzling" stage sets does not coincide with what you actually get to see coming off the disc. Without doing any more than describing the contents, this disc looks to be a video that may have been good in its time but has not stood the test of time too well and will be of only specialist appeal. The press has been downgraded due to an element of dropout on the review copy.
[C+ / C+] [C]

SILVER DREAM RACER

RANK VIDEO 725 0052 0 £13.99
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP
1980 107mins Rated AA

David Essex, Cristina Raines, Beau Bridges
Written & Directed by David Wickes

The most striking thing about a first viewing of *Silver Dream Racer* is the separation between the left and right hand channels and the movie would probably sound very stereo on even a smallish TV where the speakers may be positioned closely together. That's one reason for non-David Essex fans to take an interest in the disc.

The film opens in extreme wide-screen for the credits and contains some realistic bike racing footage before starting in on the story of small-time racer, Nick Freeman's (Essex) inheriting a brother-in-law's experimental (and up to now unseen by the world) superbike. Adding dramatic appeal is visiting American race star, McBride (Beau Bridges - plausible and pleasantly cocky) whose American girlfriend, Julie (Cristina Raines - just right and attractive with it) falls for the struggling Nick. In this pursuit of trans-Atlantic appeal the casting is flawed by Nick's workmate and mechanic, Cider Jones (Clarke Peters) whose Cockney accent and mannerisms ring no truer than the bells he obviously wasn't born within the sound of.



Given that reservation, *Silver Dream Racer* still comes across as a chirpy little British film that you'll have probably have already have had ample opportunity to check out on a TV showing sometime. Harry H. Corbett, Diane Keen and Lee Montague get to play some of the smaller roles.

Fitting the film to the TV format results in a loss of definition to below what one would normally expect on a RANK title, but it is fairly consistently soft throughout and does not alternate between sharp and unsharp scenes. One day this cropping problem will no doubt be resolved more satisfactorily than this, but in the meantime, readers who are sensitive to this tight cropping will at least know what to expect on this disc.
[B- / B+] [B-]

THE CHALLENGE

CBS/FOX 7137-70 * £13.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1982 108mins

Scott Glenn, Toshiro Mifune, Donna Kei Benz

Directed by: John Frankenheimer

The Challenge shows every sign of being an averagely well put together film and yet what appears to be a moment of unscripted improvisation provides one of its more memorable highlights. In a fight to the death the hero crashes around a luxurious modern office-suite trading blows with his adversary and finds himself pinned down to a desk-top facing imminent execution. Grabbing a close-at-hand stapler and doing a bit of neat binding work on the opponent's eyebrows might not be the course of action that would occur to us caught in similar predicament, but it lightens what might otherwise have been a clumsy and deliberately violent movie.



Rick Murphy (Scott Glenn, a rather rugged and unlikely lead - recently the star of Western *Silverado* and previously in *The Right Stuff*) is a handy-with-his-fists drifter signed up to deliver a precious Samurai sword who finds himself caught up in a centuries old battle between rival Japanese families. It is the clash of cultures - Old vs. New and West vs. East that makes the film as intriguing as it is. Most of the action takes place in Japan. You get to see a lot of raw fish being eaten - including a few live specimens - which prepares the viewer for Rick's eventual warrior test, buried up to his ears for several days and resorting to gulping a large crusty beetle that carelessly strays too close to the, by now, starving hero. *Endurance* fans will like this.

It is a rare pleasure to be able to take a liking to all of a film's characters - both goodies and baddies - and this must presumably indicate perfect escapism. Toshiro Mifune, who often stands around looking bored in Hollywood productions appears in his element and there is nice Western-sexy heroine played by Donna Kei Benz. You'll have to tolerate a little voice dubbing now and again but *The Challenge* makes for an interesting look a Japanese culture amidst an admittedly far-fetched but nevertheless entertaining story.

While the sound shows good clarity the picture has found its way on to disc via NTSC conversion and is a bit soft and tending towards showing movement defects, although in this last respect it is nowhere as bad as some of the early CIC jerkies. Some of the close-ups are very pleasant to look at but overall picture quality is below LV standard and has been graded accordingly. It's quite watchable though.
[D+ / B-] [B-]

GUYS & DOLLS

CBS/FOX 7039-70 * £15.99
CLV COLOUR STEREO
1955 149mins (3)

Jean Simmons, Vivian Blaine, Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra, Stubby Kaye

Directed by: Joseph L. Mankiewicz
Music & Lyrics: Frank Loesser

Featured songs include: Luck Be A Lady Tonight/Sit Down You're Rockin' The Boat/Your Eyes Are The Eyes Of A Woman In Love/If I Were A Bell

The recent West End staging of the National Theatre's production of *Guys & Dolls* proves the longevity of this entertaining musical. The original stage show first hit Broadway in 1950, followed five years later by this film version. With a depth of wisdom fathomable only by themselves the film producers have replaced several of the original musical numbers with new ones. Fortunately this doesn't detract from the finished result. Indeed the addition of *Your Eyes Are The Eyes Of A Woman In Love* is a definite plus. *I've Never Been In Love Before* disappointingly appears only as an off-stage dance tune. Overall then, I find the musical score no better or worse than the original - just slightly different.

The plot, featuring those wonderful Damon Runyon characters, centres around a bet made by gambler Sky Masterson (Brando) with floating crap-game proprietor Nathan Detroit (Sinatra). Detroit's challenge is that Masterson must take any woman that he (Detroit) chooses, to Havana for dinner. On acceptance of the bet, Detroit elects Sarah Brown (Jean Simmons), a member of the local Save-a-Soul Mission. Masterson inveigles Sarah into accepting, and during the trip they fall in love. The secondary love interest concerns the efforts of Adelaide (a night-club chanteuse) to drag Detroit, her erstwhile fiancé of 14 years standing, to the altar. In the beautiful finale both happy couples are united in an open-air wedding ceremony attended by gamblers, hoods, police, and chorus-girl bridesmaids.



Prior to the film both Stubby Kaye and Vivian Blaine (Adelaide) played their respective roles on stage and this is reflected in their wonderfully assured performances. Stubby Kaye in particular has made the role of Nicely Johnson his own. Sinatra gives his usual laid-back rendering and makes a major contribution to the success of the film.

Frank Loesser composed *Guys & Dolls* in an era which demanded real singers for the main roles in musicals. Whilst giving excellent portrayals as the romantic leads Simmons unfortunately just scrapes through with her singing and Brando fails miserably with his toneless and sometimes off-key renditions. I understand that Gene Kelly was the first choice for Sky

Masterson and, whilst even he may not have been ideal, perhaps he would have given a more convincing overall portrayal. Likewise I can picture Shirley Jones as a terrific Sarah Brown.

The choreography by Michael Kidd, especially in the opening sequence and the sewer crap game is first rate.

The transfer of the sound to LV is excellent with a good lively stereo image. We have to bear in mind that the film is over 30 years old and the picture quality may not be up to today's standards. I noticed that the picture was less than sharp with poor colour rendition, coupled with occasional scratches on the print.

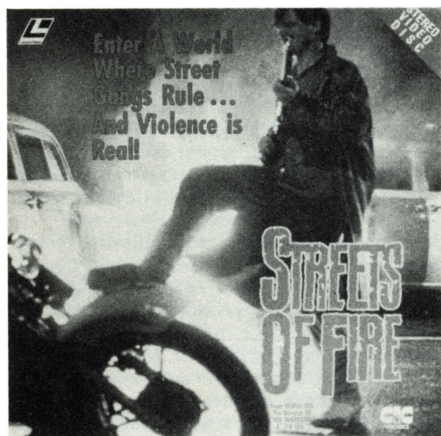
Other than my misgivings about the vocal abilities of the romantic leads and the aged print quality I consider that lovers of musical films will derive lasting pleasure from this tuneful and impressive double album. [KEITH ARNOLD]
[C- / B] [B]

STREETS OF FIRE

CIC VIDEO LVG 1136 £19.99
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP
1984 90mins Rated 15

Michael Pare, Diane Lane, Deborah Van Valkenburgh, Amy Madigan
Director: Walter Hill

Streets Of Fire is *The Wild One* out of *Blade Runner* out of *Meatloaf*. It's a breathtaking whirlwind of a movie that leaves even *48 Hours*, Hill's most successful vehicle, looking sluggish. Taciturn hero Tom Cody (Michael Pare) returns to the old home town only to learn that his stunning ex, Ellen Aim (Diane Lane), has been kidnapped by demented gang-leader Raven (William Dafoe). One knows Raven is demented as he spends a great deal of the film dressed only in plastic fishing waders. Understandably outraged, tough hero Cody sets out with butch girl side-kick McCoy (Amy Madigan) and Ellen's oily manager Billy Fish (Rick Moranis) to steal her back.



These plot details though are only of minimal importance. The movie itself is really about style. The whole thing looks extraordinary. The police cruise the streets in Studebakers, neon replaces daylight, and Raven's bike-gang are classic Brando. The music however (and there's a lot of it) is very contemporary. Ry Cooder, Dan Hartman, The Blasters, Stevie Nicks and Jim Steinman all combine to produce an electric soundtrack. Although something of a cinematic flop, I'd argue that *Streets* is Walter Hill's finest movie to date. It's considerably more inventive than *Warriors* and a great deal tougher than *48 Hours*. Of its kind, perfect disc material.

CIC have come up with a sharp print, although it does have the odd grainy dark scene. The stereo soundtrack is rich and

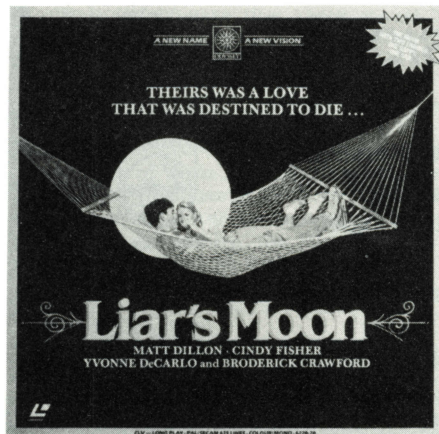
clear and well up to musical demands of the content. [STEVE KEATON]

[B / A-] [B]

LIAR'S MOON

ODYSSEY 6220-70 * £13.99
CLV COLOUR MONO
1981 108mins

Starring: Matt Dillon, Cindy Fisher, Christopher Connelly, Hoyt Axton, Susan Tyrell, Yvonne DeCarlo, Maggie Blye, Broderick Crawford
Director: David Fisher



If you found Hoyt Axton (C & W singer/composer and son of Mae Bora Axton, co-writer of Elvis' *Heartbreak Hotel*) came over as a likeable character as the failed inventor/father in *Gremlins*, you'll find he brings a similarly pleasing touch to *Liar's Moon*. He's Jack Duncan's (Matt Dillon) dad but only makes it through the opening scenes before losing an argument with a trailer-full of drilling pipes. The movie holds out for a little longer - but not much.

It's 1949 in Noble, Texas and Jack, only a poor farmer's son, falls for the local rich girl - and if by this time you haven't had the misfortune to read the sleeve-notes you may actually be able to guess the skeleton in Ginny Peterson's father's cupboard that means the two teenagers cannot wed.

But the film never really sustains its initial promise and the producers must have realised this, taking to preparing

two alternate endings as a way out of their dilemma. Unfortunately, in one of LaserVision's missed opportunities, no-one thought to put a few chapter stops on side two of the disc to make it possible to jump to the alternate endings. There are several minutes of duplicated footage that annoyingly still do not have minute changes that would substitute for the missing chapters that could function with one of the PIONEER players able to do time searches.

However, if you do have either an LD700 or 1100 and want to see the happy ending, key in 0.42 as your search time. When the disc reaches 0.35 and Jack rushes through the front door and shouts "Ginny" press the Search button immediately. This gives a perfectly accurate changeover point and only takes a second or two on the LD700. With a bit of trial and error you may be able to come up with a more convenient changeover point. If you want the sad ending you can go back to 0.35 and let the disc run through uninterrupted.

Other than this novelty aspect *Liar's Moon* doesn't have a lot going for it. It comes over as a well-conceived screenplay that just didn't work out. There are some nice period touches and Asleep At The Wheel turn in some good music on the soundtrack that sets the mood of the time well.

Picture quality starts off quite promising but suffers during darker scenes with some loss of definition. The sound is listenable but has a modest level of hiss and a few whistles that intrude now and again. The pressing looked OK generally but had a bit of noticeable dropout in the darker moments of the film.

[C / C+] [C]

THE COMPANY OF WOLVES

VESTRON VL 15079 £19.99
CLV COLOUR STEREO MP
1984 93mins Rated 18

Angela Lansbury, David Warner, Michael Bergese, Graham Crowden, Brian Glover, Kathryn Pogson, Stephen Rae, Tusse Silberg, Sarah Patterson
Director: Neil Jordan

The Company Of Wolves is based upon a book of the same name, written by Angela Carter. The central character is a pubescent girl named Rosalee (Sarah Patterson) who lays in a restless sleep in a dark room at the top of a large rambling house and dreams of another existence in a huge enchanted forest. A major influence in her life is her Grandmother who tells her many strange stories whilst knitting a red shawl. It is these stories, and the events that occur in the forest, that steadily lead us into the familiar Little Red Riding Hood Story.

Imagery is all-important in the film, particularly that which relates to Rosalee's dormant sexuality, and much reference is made to man's animal instincts which lie just beneath the surface ("All men are hairy on the inside" says Granny). The overall atmosphere is dark and eerie but there are touches of humour along with the drama and horror.

There is a fine cast of British talent, including David Warner and Brian Glover. Angela Lansbury is the highlight, however, as the Grandmother - forever spouting old wives' tales ("Don't trust a man whose eyebrows meet") whilst trying her best to steer Rosalee along a delicate path with many hidden dangers. Visually the film is a triumph. Production values are obviously high and every frame is carefully composed with great attention to detail. The splendid forest sets deserve special mention as they easily match

LEGEND VIDEO



MAIL ORDER

ALL CURRENTLY AVAILABLE LASER DISCS SUPPLIED

- A QUICK DELIVERY WITH PROMPT PERSONAL SERVICE
- TELEPHONE AFTER 6.00pm TO CHECK TITLE AVAILABILITY
- FREE DELIVERY OF ALL REGULAR PRICED DISCS, SENT IN CARDBOARD CONTAINERS

- SEND CHEQUES/POs TO
LEGEND VIDEO
153 FRANKLYN GARDENS
EDGWARE
MIDDLESEX
HA8 8SB

TEL: 01-958 4326

Square Deal TV and Video

SALES — RENTALS — REPAIRS

NORTH-WEST LANCASHIRE'S MAIN STOCKIST OF LASER DISCS
OVER 500 DISCS IN STOCK



LASERVISION CENTRE

MAIL ORDER SERVICE AVAILABLE



Telephone 0253-27590



Main Agent

OPEN 10.00 - 7.00 MONDAY - SATURDAY

126 CAUNCE STREET, BLACKPOOL, FY1 3NE

the forest that Ridley Scott spent millions creating for his latest film *Legend*.

Christopher Tucker's make-up is also very good and the special effects are done well for the budget involved although the transformation scenes are obviously not up to the standard set by, say, *An American Werewolf In London*. However, this in no way detracts from one's enjoyment of the film as it is definitely not an 'effects movie'. Rather, it is an unusual, bold and rather Grimm (pun intended) film that defies accurate categorisation, whose only fault is that it tends to rely on style over content. For this reason, I suspect that it will not be everybody's cup of tea, but Neil Jordan's assured direction means that you are never bored by what is going on and the film is certainly memorable as the only movie I can think of that manages to accurately create that bizarre, slightly unhinged world of the imagination that is fed into all our heads as children via the classic fairy tale.



Picture quality is good, if a little on the dark side. (The transfer looks to be a bit contrasty - it's presumably from a cinema grade print. The well-lit scenes show excellent definition and clarity - but detail is a bit lacking in the darker scenes.) Interestingly the film is in semi-widescreen with small borders top and bottom of the screen. Sound quality was also acceptable, with good range and a particularly punchy bass

(although not at the sacrifice of a clear treble). The film soundtrack has some low level spitting on it and this intruded slightly during quiet passages, especially on side one. Good surround sound for those who are suitably equipped. The pressing on the viewed copy was clean. [B / B-] [B] [PETER MOVERLEY]

ROMEO & JULIET

ARTS INT 05 AI 036 £23.99
CLV-Ch COLOUR STEREO
1984 128mins (3)

Featuring: Alessandra Ferri & Wayne Eagling

Conductor: Ashley Lawrence

Music: Serge Prokofiev

Choreography: Kenneth MacMillan

From a performance at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden on 8th August, 1984

The original production of this three-act ballet, choreographed by Kenneth MacMillan and based on Shakespeare's play, was given at Covent Garden in February 1965. The ballet was conceived for Lynn Seymour and Christopher Gable, but the ROH wanted two big names to premiere the work and Margot Fonteyn and Rudolph Nureyev were chosen instead - unfortunately both them were 'wrong' for the youthful lover roles.

Prokofiev probably completed the music - Opus 64 - in 1935 but there were many false starts and arguments with Sergey Radlov and Adrian Piotrovsky whose original idea the ballet was, and in 1936 the production was planned for 1938 to tie in with Leningrad Ballet bicentenary. However, it finally went into production in 1940 at the Kirov with choreography by Leonid Lavrovsky. This version transferred to Moscow in 1946 and stayed in the Bolshoi's repertory until Lavrovsky's death in 1967. Frederick Ashton produced a version with Prokofiev's music for the Royal Danish Ballet in 1955 which enjoyed great success. This version is no longer performed but was the first Western version to be seen as Lavrovsky's was not seen in the West till 1956. In this 1984 performance the casting has reverted to the choreographer's conception of it. The ballet is set in the city of Verona in Renaissance Italy and deals with a long-

running quarrel between two families in which the two lovers are embroiled and the ballet ends with their unnecessary deaths in the Capulet family vault - the Shakespeare play takes the action on to deal with the families' reconciliation.

The costumes are based on 15th century Italian designs and match the sets well - Nicholas Georgiadis designed both. The predominant colour theme is of antique reds, browns and golds.

Ashley Lawrence and the ROH orchestra show full sympathy for the dramatic stage action. When Prokofiev returned to Russia in 1934 he began to simplify and broaden his style in contrast to the rather austere and spikey nature of his previous work. His two ballets of this period *Romeo & Juliet* and *Cinderella* (1944) are more relaxed and warmer than his earlier work like *Love For Three Oranges*.



Alessandra Ferri dances with poise and strength and is an excellent choice for the naive but intense adolescent Juliet. Wayne Eagling is convincing as the ill-fated Romeo. He has danced other MacMillan roles as a tragic lover in both *Manon* and *Mayerling* and seems well suited to the type of part. He is a fast, supple dancer and good in pas de deux but not quite as expressive an actor as Ferri. David Drew, as Tybalt, is good as the quarrelsome hothead who needs no excuse to start a fight. The sword fights come off well even if some of the swordsmen only parry and lunge on the right-hand side of the body. The general standard of dancing and acting is good and the performance can certainly be recommended.

The joint direction of Colin Nears and Kenneth MacMillan works very well. Changes from shot to shot follow the relevant action closely with no erratic or uncomfortable changes of angle or focus. The entire work is an accomplished performance.

Although the details of the ballet given on the sleeve are adequate it would be nice to have a more comprehensive leaflet or folder with some history of the work and details of the dancers. A quick check in my gramophone record shelf reveals discs with accompanying brochures of anything up to 24 pages - something this long is not always entirely appropriate, but at least let's have something additional to the LaserVision sleeve notes!

The general disc quality is quite satisfactory with bright, sharp colours and clean dark backgrounds - the recording was originated on video. The sound quality was also good, if maybe not up to that of the *American Ballet Theatre At The Met* recording. I would rate the overall disc quality as good as, if not better than, *Spartacus* - the disc is certainly a good advertisement for LaserVision, an aspect enhanced by the very clean pressing of the review copy.

[TONY WELLS]

LASER LIBRARY

Join the

LASER LIBRARY

Specialist APPROVAL Service for the FULL RANGE
of Silver Discs

OVER 1000 Albums usually in stock

ALL UK and Pioneer Titles Available

Frequent Special Offers to Library Members

Price Lists constantly updated with availability details

Send for Library Membership details

The LASER LIBRARY, Richmond House,
Richmond Road, Ipswich IPI4DL

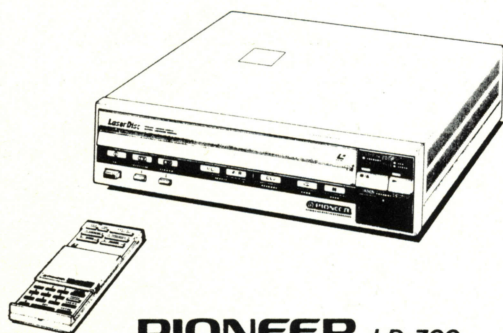


The Laser Library Limited · Richmond House · Richmond Road · Ipswich IP1 4DL

DH AUDIO VISUAL

16 LOCHRIN BUILDINGS
EDINBURGH EH3 9NB
Telephone: 031-229 5960

THE LASER CENTRE



PIONEER LD 700 £499-00

PHILIPS VLP 700 £189-95

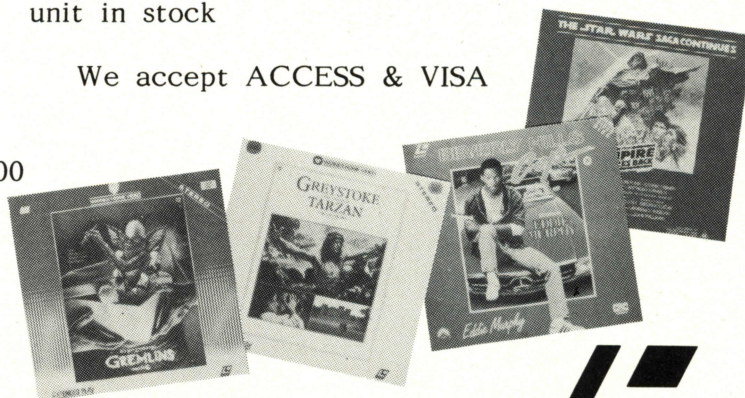
We have over 300 TITLES in stock. Send
for list and mail-order information

We now have the MARANTZ Surround Sound
unit in stock

We accept ACCESS & VISA

NEW TITLES

RAMBO - RETURN OF THE JEDI - BREWSTER'S MILLIONS
GREMLINS - OCTOPUSSY - BLADERUNNER - WAR GAMES



THE LASER CALENDAR

Previously announced titles, now available

RAMBO FIRST BLOOD 2, BEVERLY HILLS COP,
FALLING IN LOVE, U2/UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY

New releases, now available

MONTY PYTHON 3, MONTY PYTHON 4 (BBC)
SAMMY DAVIS Jr/THE GOLDEN YEARS (AR-TEL 0016.07113 £9.99)
TOM JONES & THE OSMONDS SPECIAL (AR-TEL 0005.07141 £9.99)

New releases, due March onwards

ARTS INT - CARMEN, THE NUTCRACKER
CIC - BREWSTER'S MILLIONS [S], MASK, WITNESS [S]
THORN EMI- A PASSAGE TO INDIA [S], CAT'S EYES [S]
CBS/FOX - RETURN OF THE JEDI [S], A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET
VESTRON - CARE BEARS-THE MOVIE
WARNER - POLICE ACADEMY, POLICE ACADEMY II, CASABLANCA,
GREMLINS [S], CITY HEAT [S], GREYSTOKE [S],
MAD MAX [S], MAD MAX-THE ROAD WARRIOR [S],
THE NEVER ENDING STORY [S], SUDDEN IMPACT
TIGHTROPE, WAR GAMES [S], BLADE RUNNER [S],
ROCKY [S], ROCKY II [S], ROCKY III [S],
NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN [S], A VIEW TO A KILL [S],
OCTOPUSSY [S], PURPLE RAIN [S],
WEST SIDE STORY [S]

Forthcoming, no scheduled date

DOLLY PARTON IN LONDON, THE POLICE/SYNCHRONICITY LIVE,
HALL & OATES/ROCK'N SOUL LIVE (All PIONEER ARTISTS)

Previously announced, possibly cancelled

PARTNERS, THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

LASER
DISC REVIEW

BACK-NUMBERS AVAILABLE

ALL PREVIOUS ISSUES ARE
STILL AVAILABLE FROM THE
BACK-NUMBER DEPARTMENT
Issues 1-4 are £1-00 each
Issues 5 onwards are £1-25
SUBSCRIBERS ARE ENTITLED
TO DISCOUNTS ON THESE
RATES AND CAN PURCHASE
1-4 @ 90p, 5-6 @ £1-00
(Issue 2 is running low and we
have but five copies left of
Issue 3)

IF YOU FEEL LIKE BECOM-
ING A SUBSCRIBER TOO, SEE
PAGE 3 FOR RATES.

