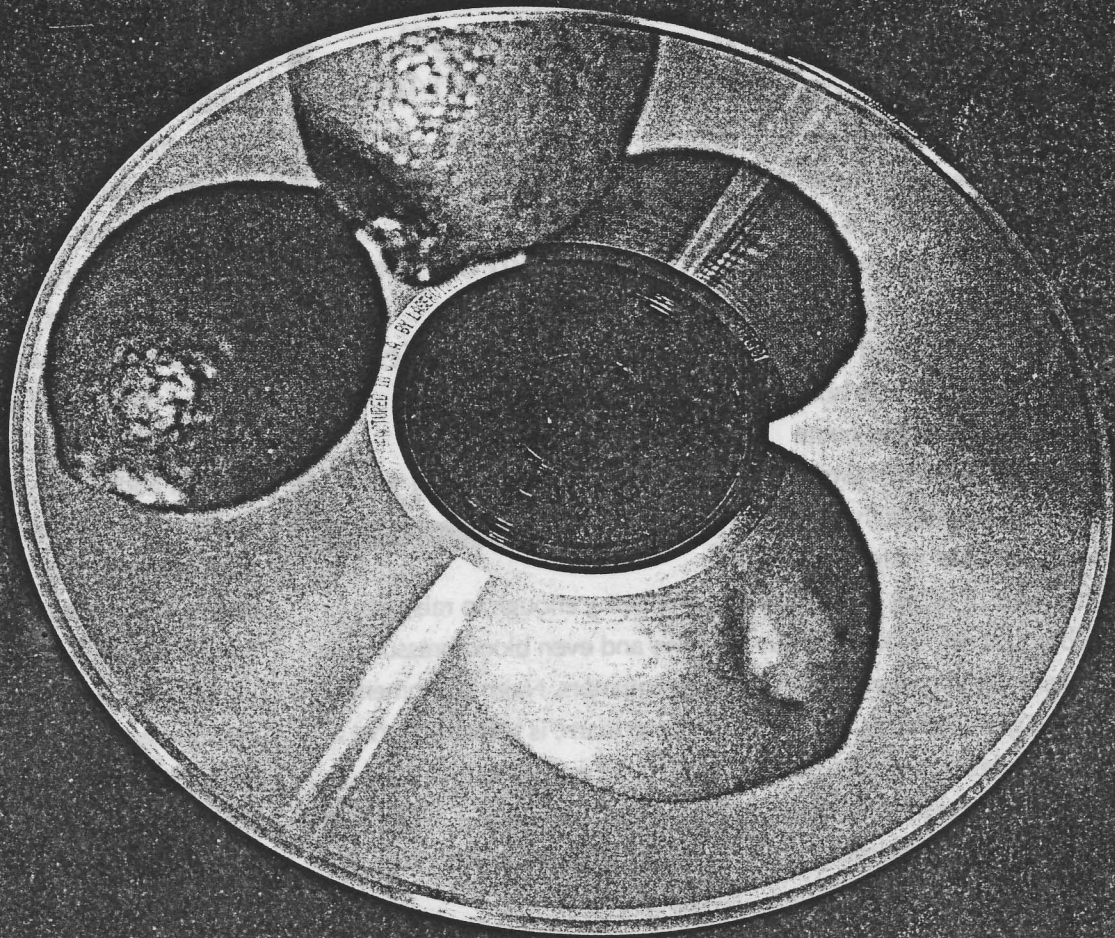


Hifi Heretic

number nine

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which is the fact that it's not as easy as it
looks
COMPACT DISC:
the music



LEMON OR SUBLIME?

NAIM

NAC62 / NAP140

They do millions of dollars worth of business every year throughout Europe and North America. They've won a Queen's Award for extraordinary performance as a British exporting manufacturer. They're arguably the first perfectionist audio company to make a full commitment to both computer-aided design and advanced robotics applications in their design and production departments. And along with one-time business allies Linn Products Ltd. they have been instrumental in changing, for the better, the ways in which quality audio products are evaluated, marketed, and demonstrated to the consumer in many parts of the world. Given all this, plus the fact they've been in business for over 15 years, how come you don't, er, know their Naim?

A fair question. And one that, in my case at least, isn't just rhetorical. Because after years of being in the dark on this subject myself — hearing but not understanding occasional references to *Hi-Caps*, *Six-Packs*, and *BNC jacks* — I decided to take the plunge and learn about Naim Audio the way any curious consumer would: step-by-step, from the

beginning. And you get to come along for the ride.

It's been an interesting trip, too, for a lot of reasons — not the least of which is the fact that Naim are easily among the most controversial makers of audio gear in the free world, the very mention of their

Prices:
\$795 (NAC62),
\$1145 (NAP140)

Contact:

**Naim Audio of North
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Chicago, IL
60614
(312) 944-0217

name being enough to raise eyebrows and even blood pressures in some quarters. Naim equipment, I've come to learn, is something that a majority of people in hi-fi have strong feelings about — whether or not they've heard it (and sadly, it's usually "not").

Now a lot of that is no doubt due to Naim's long-standing (and recently severed) association with Linn. While you might be sick of hearing it, I don't think the point can be stressed too strongly that Linn's original philosophies, manifested in both words and products, were (and to some, still are) nothing short of revolutionary. Imagine: Here was a small band of people — *from Scotland, of all places!* — telling us the turntable was the single most influential component in a record-playing system, that there was a logical and practically irrefutable hierarchy of importance regarding components in an audio system, that a hi-fi should be evaluated strictly in musical terms...and numerous other ideas, equally heretical and equally correct. Such is the stuff of controversy, to put it mildly; but thanks to their perseverance, the excellence of their products, and (to a large extent) the offbeat charisma of their Managing Director, Linn were able to turn their image as rabble-rousing iconoclasts to their (often humorous) advantage.

...And Naim Audio Ltd. have been right in there all along, saying and

doing things that some people regarded as equally goofy, if not more so. I mean, how many amplifier manufacturers have you found who will actually come out and say the products they design and build do not necessarily represent the most important hi-fi purchase you can make — going so far as to actually discourage the purchase of their high-ticket items in instances where the component immediately preceding it isn't up to the task! Pretty loony, huh?!

Yet for whatever reasons, it would seem that Naim have been less suc-

no mistake, they have had good financial success in this country, and Naim electronics continue to sell well (remember that export award?). Still and all, it's safe to say that, among audiophiles in the U.S., Naim equipment is the object of a fair amount of misunderstanding.

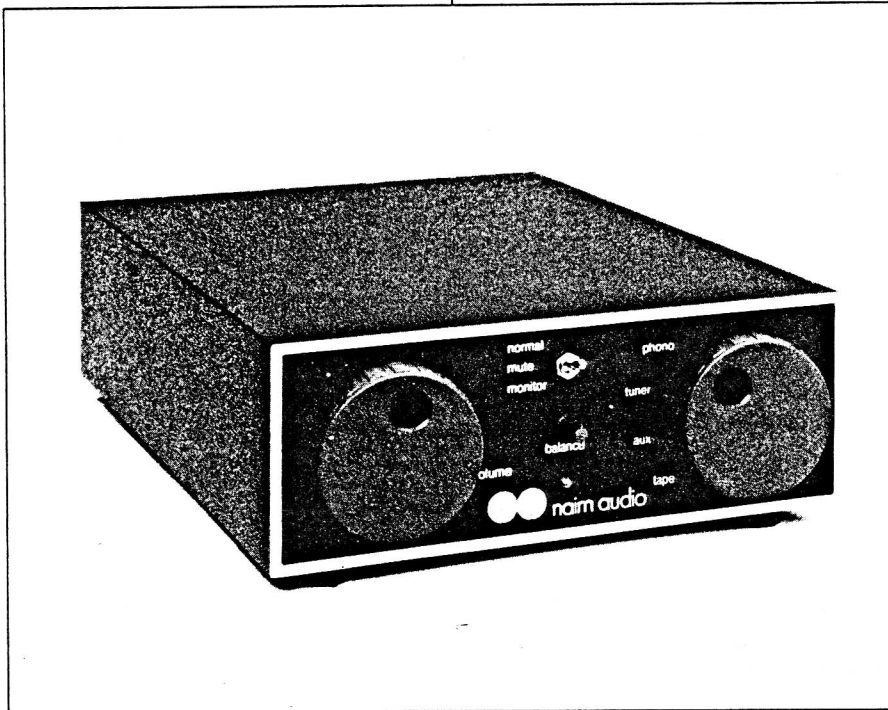
But if I'm correct in that observation, I should also add that the situation seems poised on the brink of a change for the better. As a consequence of Naim's split with Linn (and subsequent decision by U.S. distributor Audiophile Systems Ltd. to cease representation of the

distributor for this country. This new Naim operation is ready to give the company's products the promotion they deserve, in addition to identifying and working with those dealers capable of demonstrating and installing a line demanding of excellence in both regards.

Also making this an important time for Naim is the company's recent spate of new-product introductions, including their SBL (Separate Box Loudspeaker, a smaller version of which is now being released), and a soon-to-be introduced electrostatic loudspeaker that promises to break much new ground — not to mention a new top-of-the-line preamp, a video tuner, a re-worked integrated amplifier, and other goodies. These, then, are especially exciting times for a company whose stock-in-trade has always been to stand apart from the crowd.

□□□□□

The extent to which Naim Audio Ltd. stand out philosophically is also reflected in the appearance of their gear: With only one or two possible exceptions, there isn't anything in the audio marketplace that looks like a Naim preamp or power amp. For one thing, Naim's electronic components seem deliberately built into the smallest housings possible: not so small that things get cramped in there or that cooling is impaired in any way, but certainly no larger than



cessful than Linn at cashing in on the controversy surrounding their hi-fi philosophies — at forging a well-defined and positive image in the minds of American consumers. Make

line here), Naim Audio co-founder and chief designer Julian Vereker has established Naim North America, a wholly-owned subsidiary based in Chicago that will function as the

necessary. For example, the NAC62 preamp and NAP140 power amp each measure a scant 3" x 8" x 11 3/4" ², while the largest Naim amps are still only 3" x 17" x 11 3/4". As regards those amplifiers, needless bulk isn't the only thing that's been excised: Naim electronics aren't rack-mountable! Hey, forget that virtually nobody mounts their home equipment in racks these days (as if they ever did): Where's the extra-wide faceplate? Where're the holes or slots for the rack bolts to pass through? *What happened to the handles?* How can audio gear be serious if it doesn't have handles?!

You should also know how very different Naim's approach is to the ways their components are used together — a difference that affects the make-up of their product line, as well as the ultimate approach one takes when following Naim's upgrade path.

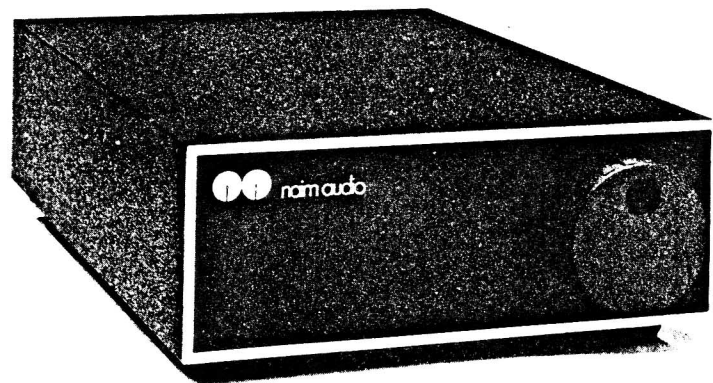
Consider Naim's preamps: The keen-eyed observer will note that both the NAC62 and the NAC32-5 lack AC power cords — there is no apparent way to plug them in. Were you to look inside these units, you'd also notice that both preamps lack transformers, or for that matter any other components associated with power supplies.

So what powers the preamps? Well, you can do this in a number of ways, depending on how much money you wish to spend (among other considerations). First, assuming you're also

buying one of Naim's two smaller power amplifiers (the NAP90 or the NAP140), the simplest and cheapest way to power the preamp is *directly from the amp itself*. Both the NAP90 and NAP140 have internal supplies that can feed a clean 24 DC to your

cable is used by the consumer — and because the 24V is DC and not AC, there's no danger that the electricity from the power supply will interfere with the music signal.

From there, preamp performance can be upgraded with the purchase



Naim preamp. A Naim SNAIC (nice-sounding acronym for Super Naim Audio Interconnect Cable) is used to connect four-pin DIN sockets at the backs of the preamp and amp; this cable thus carries both the 24V Dc and the low-level AC signal that is the amplified music from the preamp's output. As the design of Naim's components has been optimized for the use of a specific type and length of signal interconnect, this approach is a handy way for Naim to insure that just such a

of either of two optional, outboard power supplies, both similar in appearance and identical in dimensions to Naim's preamps and smaller power amps. For \$575 you can buy a SNAPS (which stands for Super Naim Audio Power Supply), while \$1095 will get you the top-of-the-line HI-CAP power supply (the name of which derives from its HIgh CA-Pacity). In either case, a special *five-conductor* SNAIC carries both the DC and the music signal between the preamp and power supply, while

the four-conductor SNAIC you (presumably) already own is then used to pick up the signal at the power supply and bring it on to the amp.³

By the way, the two larger Naim amplifiers — the NAP250 and the monoblock NAP135 — both lack provisions for powering the Naim preamps; in installations using either of these amps, an outboard power supply *must* be used to power the preamp (in the case of the NAP135, the power supply *must* be a HI-CAP). This approach seems especially sensible, because it dictates that the Naim owner must upgrade his or her preamp before using it with Naim's very best (hence more revealing) power amplifiers.

Another unique feature of Naim preamps is their use of interchangeable phono "cards" — stereo pairs of small circuit boards that plug onto the main "mother" board — to tailor the overall gain and loading characteristics to whatever type of signal source is connected to the phono inputs. Among the choices available are "S" boards for low-output moving-coil cartridges (with a load impedance of 470 Ohms), and "K" boards, tailored specifically for Linn's Karma and Troika cartridges (with a load impedance of 560 Ohms), as well as boards for moving-magnet and high-output moving-coil models (standard 47,000 Ohm load), and special variable-sensitivity boards for use with high-level sources such as CD players. When

you initially buy a Naim NAC62 preamp, one set of boards (your choice) is included, and you can purchase other sets in the future to keep pace with changes in your (main) source component.

The input jacks that "address" these interchangeable gain stages, by the way, are BNC jacks, a type of con-

"...Naim are easily among the most controversial makers of audio gear in the free world, the very mention of their name being enough to raise eyebrows and even blood pressures in some quarters."

connector often found on high-quality test equipment and in some medical settings. BNC jacks have a number of advantages (they create an extremely secure, "positive" connection, are durable and inherently

well-shielded, and ensure that the "hot" connection is always broken before the "ground" connection when unfastening cables, protecting both your amplifier and speakers), and only one real disadvantage: They're non-standard in the world of hi-fi. Adaptors are available to allow the use of the RCA plugs that are (probably) at the end of your tonearm interconnects, but this approach essentially defeats the purpose of having BNC connectors in the first place, and is thus not recommendable. What you *really* want to do is replace your tonearm cable's RCA plugs with the two BNC plugs included with the NAC62. (Having tried both approaches, I can say with confidence that ditching the RCA plugs in favor of the BNCs really does sound appreciably better.) BNC plugs aren't that tough to install on most types of cable — but in truth, you don't even have to know that, because any Naim dealer will make the changeover for you as a routine matter upon your purchase of a Naim preamp.⁴

Of course, the NAC62 has provisions for source inputs other than those handled by the BNC jacks and the interchangeable circuit cards: You may also select between appropriate inputs for tape, tuner, and auxiliary (high-level) sources, the latter being suited to Compact Disc. Each of these inputs involves the use of a five-pin DIN connector, with suitable cables available from

Naim

Now if any or all of the above has set you to worrying that the installation and use of a Naim system is the least bit tricky...well, don't! First of all, you should keep in mind that an authorized Naim dealer will, whenever possible, install the gear for the customer, thus absolving you of having to know anything other than how to work a volume control, a selector knob, a mute switch, and a couple of on-off switches.

But even if that weren't the case, I'm convinced that just about any of you could sail through without a hitch; the Naim approach may be different, but it isn't inscrutable.⁵ In preparing for this review I found installation and set-up to be simple, straightforward, and in many cases, downright fun. (I confess to an increasingly strong affection for audio gear I can lift by myself, and further confess to an appreciation for having my cable choices made for me, ahead of time.) Just follow a few reasonable (and perhaps familiar) guidelines: Keep the preamp and the amp at least a foot apart, so that the former won't be troubled by the transformer radiation of the latter; treat these components as you would a turntable, CD player, or other source, and site them on the lowest mass (yet still rigid) structures possible, so as to isolate them from the vibrations lurking in their (more massive) surroundings; and do, definitely, keep them switched on all

the time, except during thunderstorms or prolonged absences. Regarding this latter point, I found that the preamp runs cool as a cucumber at all times, and the amp never becomes more than moderately warm to the touch.⁶



To prepare you for the sound of the NAC62/NAP140 combination, there isn't anything in particular I have to ask you to bear in mind. There are, however, a few things I'd like to ask you to forget.

Please forget everything you know

"How can audio gear be serious if it doesn't have handles?!"

about hi-fi, if only for a little while. I know, I know — you've put in a lot of time reading all sorts of magazines and talking to all sorts of audiophiles, absorbing all this information about colors and textures and yin and yang and soundstage and air and on and on and on. And that's okay — a lot of that's real and legit, and I've experienced it and talked

about it, too, and I'm not going to ask you to totally throw away an approach you may be comfortable with. But do me a favor and just set it all aside for now (we may actually come back to some of it later): Set it aside because, when you think about it, none of that stuff really has anything to do with *music*.

So what are we going to listen for? Well, right now, let's not listen *for* anything — that'd be missing the forest for the trees, if you'll pardon the cliché. Let's just listen *to* the music, the way you would under the best of any other circumstances (meaning, pretty much, *live*).

I like the Joni Mitchell song "California" (from the *Blue* album) quite a lot, so I'm comfortable using that as an example. The first time I listened to this song using the Naim preamp and amp, I was struck by a somewhat peculiar realization for a hi-fi experience: I couldn't help but notice how very much in *control* of the song Mitchell was. Her voice, for all its well-documented eccentricities, was absolutely spot-on in terms of pitch. And yet she was all over the place (in a good sense!), singing the living daylights out of this deceptively simple little song, without resorting to either preciousness or melodrama, or grandstanding it in a Streisandesque production-number way.

And strong though this vocal performance was, I found it impossible to ignore what was going on instru-

mentally — the way the pedal steel insinuates its way into the backing from time to time, or the nicely balanced interplay between the two acoustic guitars (is one of them a Dobro being played without a slide, maybe?).

But no matter what specifics I focused upon, the point seemed to be: I was *drawn into* the song to a great and unusual extent: Something that typically happens quite rarely, and only under the best of hi-fi listening circumstances, now seemed to happen easily, automatically.

Okay, here's a different example: I went to listen to Rossini's Overture to "La Gazza Ladra" (from the Reiner/CSO *Rossini Overtures* collection, RCA LSC-2318), mostly with the intention of noting certain hi-fi performance aspects — you know, things like the imaging placement of the woodwinds, or the decay of the opening drum rolls. However — not "unfortunately", just "however", it took me a few listens to get that far, because my attention kept getting hijacked by other things. For instance, the way the first main melody goes from Em to Emaj for its second run-through: Have you ever found yourself really hearing and (coming closer to) *understanding* that sort of thing for the first time? Well, the Naim gear seemed to be focusing my attention on fundamentals of the actual music such as that, as if for the first time (at home). I mean, of course I'd heard it before,

but I'd never really *heard* it, if you know what I'm getting at.

...And on the "We're Not Going to Take It" finale from the Who's *Tommy*, elements of the music itself — and not just hi-fi artifacts — began to gel like never before. Keith Moon's wonderful galloping drum

"Please forget everything you know about hi-fi, if only for a little while."

lines seemed to propel the song in a way I'd never quite appreciated before — as opposed to just bashing (albeit capably) away. And the bass guitar seemed more *accurate* — more *in tune* — than I'd perceived before.

...And on the haunting, almost exquisitely pretty "Fires Which Burnt Brightly" from Procol Harum's *Grand Hotel*, the Swingle-esque vocal solo by Christianne LeGrand came off in a much more positive, forceful way. It no longer sounded like an aimless "scat" with only vague connections to the main melody, but rather seemed more purposeful, and more emotive.

Okay, okay — I'll spare you a con-

tinuing litany of such generalities as emotion, musical intent, and the like. These are, after all, a bit tough to pin down and verify, right? So in effort to be more specific, and to isolate some cause behind the empirical results, let's back up and listen to that last cut again.

...Which is exactly what I did, comparing my reference set-up to the Naim preamp and power amp, mentally filtering out everything but that vocal, concentrating on just that. Amidst all the subtle differences that of course enter into this sort of comparison? — you know, slight shifts in timber, little differences in stereo image placement and depth, etc. — one difference seemed especially significant: The Naim was truer to the actual *notes*. Pitches were more distinct, more seemingly accurate, and the way the musical lines took their shape in the movement from one note to the next was simply more natural and easy, more like what I associate with the live performance.

Notes — that's all. Discrete bits of sound with distinct pitches, identifiable to just about anyone, regardless of their training or the inherent acuity of their hearing. Just plain notes — and they were coming through noticeably more *right* with the Naim gear. Not that my reference components were making a real mess of things — they weren't. But the Naim stuff did a better job of letting the musical line pass through

unscathed.

Who would've guessed? I mean, we've spent all this time dreaming up and chasing down all these arcane performance parameters by which to praise or blame a piece of gear whose job it is to play music — and we've forgotten about the music. And if the music itself isn't coming through, who gives a damn about anything else? Soundstage depth? The degree to which you can "hear the back wall of the recording site"? Freedom from "Haagen-Daz colorations"? That's all very nice. But if these things typify a piece of gear that doesn't allow you to hear through to the most fundamental aspect of music, then what good is it?

I guess you could see this as being related to what the Linn people have been saying all along about "humming the tune". That is, if the tune, as reproduced by a hi-fi system, is comprised of notes that are ambiguous, unclear, and muddled in terms of pitch, then it will be harder to mentally follow (and hence sing or hum along with) than with a system where those notes have been more well-served. But take my word, you don't have to hum — at least not out loud. For God's sake, just relax and listen — listen the way you do when you're listening for just the sheer emotional kick of it, under the best of other situations. You'll be able to tell what's going on without the aid of any catch phrases — if, that is,

you're willing to set aside your hi-fi ideas, like I urged a few paragraphs back.

So back to the Naim equipment: I'm convinced that, in terms of its trueness to the actual music (pitch and all) that's being sent through it, the Naim NAC62 and the NAP140 represent a breakthrough in my experience. I've never heard any-

"...elements of the music itself — and not just hi-fi artifacts — began to gel like never before."

thing quite so superior in this regard. Okay, so now, how about those other performance parameters? How deep *is* the Naim's soundstage?

Not bad at all, actually. In fact, I had more or less prepared myself for undistinguished stereo imaging performance from these components, given the extent to which the Naim people themselves de-emphasize this area as an evaluation criterion. But I was very pleasantly surprised. In terms of a sense of "wholeness" to the images and an illusion of extraordinary depth in the imaginary stage, the Naim gear does not equal the

best I've heard (such as the Conrad-Johnson tubed gear, for example, or even the Audible Illusions preamp I reviewed last issue). But it doesn't fall terrifically short. That is: Yes, there is depth. And its accuracy of placement of individual images (and ability to delineate them from one another) is nonetheless quite marvelous. In all, I found the Naim gear's stereo imaging performance to be very satisfying.

In terms of overall tonal balance, top to bottom, and the ability to accurately reproduce realistic timbres or colors of voices and instruments, the Naim components are all but impossible to fault. Instruments sound as they should — an oboe is an oboe, a sax, a sax — and can be cleanly and easily be identified. If I had to point to any such shortcomings, I would say that there is an ever-so-slight lack of sparkle and (forgive me) "air" at the very top end, noticeable especially on some simply-miked classical recordings (Everests, Mercurys, old RCAs). This effect does not seem to dull or diminish the overtones of any instruments or to otherwise interfere with elements of any fundamental musical significance, but rather results in a slight lack of what's often described as "room sound" or "hall sound".

But when the music that's taking place *in* that room or hall is served so singularly well as with the Naim gear, such considerations, though

perhaps not totally without merit, do pale in significance. Because it all does come back to this: The Naim NAC62/NAP140 combination is unique in my experience as equipment that cuts through to the essence of what you're really listening for in the first place: It lets the fundamentals of music — and hence the intentions and feelings that motivated their existence — come through with a degree of clarity and directness that is, in the truest sense of the word, breathtaking.

Two more points regarding the performance of this system: First, Naim North America also sent along a HI-CAP power supply to try with the NAC62 preamp — something I elected to do only after spending a significant amount of time listening without it. The difference this device effects is actually quite stunning (as it should be for the price, which, don't forget, is more than that of the preamp itself!), and as impressed as I was by the sound of the NAC62 without it, I was (and still am) reluctant to remove the HI-CAP after hearing what it can do. Though this may sound unlikely, I found that the improvements wrought by this heavy-duty power supply are actually similar to the sorts of improvements I associate with tightening the mounting bolts that hold a phono cartridge to the tonearm — only to a much greater degree in this case. Instruments in the bass register were definitely more

full-bodied and powerful (though without becoming "slow" or bloated-sounding), and notes in this region were even more clear and unambi-

"...we've spent all this time dreaming up and chasing down all these arcane performance parameters by which to praise or blame a piece of gear whose job it is to play music — and we've forgotten about the music."

guous, pitch-wise. Overall dynamic range, and the clarity with which gradations within that range were portrayed, also improved significantly — though it should be noted that the stand-alone NAC62/NAP140 set-up is already no slouch in this department. Even imaging (yes,

imaging!) seemed to tighten up with the addition of the HI-CAP. In all, I'd say it's worth it.⁸

The second point: After I'd lived with the Naim gear for a while, some folks from (Naim dealer) Ears Nova of Great Neck, New York were kind enough to drop by to check out the system and ensure that everything was functioning properly. But they didn't come empty-handed: They brought with them a Naim NAP250 amplifier (all of \$2795's worth!) and, after warming it up for an hour, treated me to an album or so's worth of music through it. And believe me, "treated" is the word. Everything the NAP140 does so uniquely well, this thing does even better. Plus — believe it or not — here was stereo imaging performance *at least* the equal of anything I'd heard in my home before, depth included! And on top of all that, there's...well, I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's save this one for another (fondly anticipated) time.

□ □ □ □ □

So what makes this stuff so unique, so *good*? Darned if I know. I could point out that, for one thing, these components are extraordinarily well-built. The NAC62, for example, has a circuit layout that gives new meaning to the word "clean", and it would seem special emphasis has been placed upon the symmetry of circuit traces, as well as the very

intelligent and careful spacing and dressing of all lead wires. (By the way, it's interesting to note that this preamp's circuit is based on a "star ground" system, whereby the negative or "return" leads of individual components are all led back to a central point, rather than dumping the grounds on one big strip at the edge of the board.) And there are many other deliberate and thoughtful design elements: the careful tailoring of bandwidths, especially relating to how the different units are called upon to work with one another; the absolute lack of slew rate ("speed") limiting of any kind within the audible range; the clever use of the amplifier's aluminum case extrusion as a heat sink for the output devices...

But I'm reluctant to really focus on these sorts of things too much — not only because my understanding of such matters is less than heroically deep, but also because I have an impression that Naim's electronics are really the sum of these and many, many other design aspects. The sonic reputation of this gear seems not to hang by just one or two clever ideas, but is rather the product of a fair amount of thought, a whole lot of listening, more than a little dissatisfaction (as consumers, and as music lovers) with what's gone down before, and several years' experience trying to build amplification devices that pass music better than anything else.

How well have Julian and Naim succeeded? Well, the only people who can really say are those who collect and enjoy records, and invest in hi-fi gear out of a simple love for music, and a desire to get that much closer to it at home. As for me, I've listened to the NAC62 and NAP140

"It lets the fundamentals of music — and hence the intentions and feelings that motivated their existence — come through with a degree of clarity and directness that is, in the truest sense of the word, breathtaking."

for a while now, and I'm buying them, simple as that. I consider the prices to be quite reasonable — even noting the fact that we in the States

pay a bit of a premium, given the costs of importing them. They're enjoyable to use, they've been totally problem-free, and, in the fundamental ways that are the most important to me, they play music with a level of realism that is unequalled. For now, that just about says it all.

— Art Dudley

¹ *Actually, several manufacturers of high-quality loudspeakers dispense advice similar to this, though primarily in reference to the user's amplification, rather than his turntable. — Ed.*

² *Both units use the same extruded aluminum case (in common with a number of other Naim products), a far more cost-effective scheme than the traditional practice of tooling separate chassis for each component in a manufacturer's line. — Ed.*

³ *I should mention that it's perfectly okay to use a Naim preamp to drive a different manufacturer's amplifier, assuming the usual requirements that apply here (compatibility between the preamp's output impedance and the amp's input impedance) are met. In such a case, Naim can supply you a cable fitted with the appropriate connectors. Doing the reverse, however — using another manufacturer's preamp to drive a Naim amplifier — is not a good idea*

at all, for reasons relating to the all-important concept of the hierarchy within a hi-fi system. That is: The performance of any component is determined and limited by the performance of the components that precede it in the audio chain. If, for example, the frequency range (bandwidth) of your preamp is significantly wider or narrower than that of the amplifier, you run the risk of either amplifying a lot of infra- or ultra-sonic garbage, or making the amp work hard to (try and) amplify something that isn't there.

[Editor's Note — I find this explanation unconvincing. The above example relates more to equipment compatibility than it does to the theory of the hi-fi hierarchy, which primarily addresses the question of qualitative differences among components (i.e., don't put a bad turntable in front of a good preamp, as the preamp can sound no better than the signal it receives from the turntable). Given Art's example, neither could one use a Naim preamp with another manufacturer's power amp unless the two possessed similar bandwidth characteristics. In fact, while a wide-bandwidth preamp driving a narrow-bandwidth power amp can cause problems (the amp is receiving signals at frequencies it is not designed to handle, possibly causing overload and/or oscillation), I see no problems in driving a wide-bandwidth power amp with a narrow-bandwidth preamp. As the

Naim preamp is a narrow-bandwidth design, I anticipate no problems in terms of bandwidth-compatibility with other manufacturer's amps.]

⁴ This reminds me of a review of a Mark Levinson preamplifier, wherein the reviewer vociferously criticized the equipment because it used technically superior Camac connectors instead of standard RCA jacks. The reviewer, who acknowledged the superiority of the Camacs, felt it was wrong for Levinson to employ connectors incompatible with other components. (Of course, it would be a simple enough matter for the Levinson owner to have cables made up with Camacs on one end, and RCAs on the other. I doubt anyone spending over \$5000 on a preamp is going to worry too much about the minimal expense involved here.) In short, the reviewer would prefer that the product's performance was compromised, rather than make the owner endure the agony of having new connectors soldered to his interconnect cables. (Why, if I was spending Levinsonian sums of money on hi-fi equipment, I'd have all the connections hard-wired, and eliminate the silly connectors altogether.) Someday I'll understand specialist audio, I swear I will. — Ed.

⁵ It's worth noting here that the owner's manual, included with all of Naim's electronic components, is damn near peerless in its quality.

⁶ This is probably a consequence of Naim's decision to design their power amplifiers as Class B (an inherently cool-running configuration), rather than the much more common Class AB or Class A. Theoretically, Class B amplifiers should suffer from horrendous amounts of distortion as the output devices turn on and off. That Naim amplifiers sound so superb is indicative of the incomplete understanding of amplifier design that pervades the audio industry. — Ed.

⁷ An interesting coincidence: The Naim NAP140, at 45 watts per channel into an 8 Ohm load, is identical in output power to my reference amp. I know at least two Julians who'll smile at that, though for different reasons.

⁸ These improvements result from isolating the preamp's power supply from the heavy current draws that regularly occur in the power amp's power supply, particularly when the program material contains high-level bass information. Parenthetically, it's thought-provoking to observe that Naim have long advocated using tightly regulated power supplies, a design philosophy that is currently (pun intended) in vogue. It wasn't so long ago, though, that Naim was the odd man out, back in the days of loosely regulated supplies and great dynamic headroom specs. — Ed.