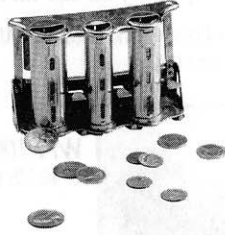


# Marketplace



by Janet Dudley

I'm a terrible liar. That makes me an unlikely candidate for a *Listener* covert operation such as The Marketplace, but marriage to the editor and the opportunity to travel outside of upstate New York got me elected to do this issue's installment.

So thanks to a United Airlines frequent flyer award ticket and an invitation to visit family, November saw me and Baby Girl Dudley in Portland, Oregon for a week.

The City of Roses has changed since I spent my formative years there. Gone is the little secret that used to be Portland—affordable, clean, beautiful, in short a Cascadian paradise. Now urban and suburban sprawl have reached critical mass; the highways are afflicted with widespread gridlock caused by drivers who can't quite yet grasp the concept of "Don't block the box"; and since an anticlear cutting initiative was just voted down, what little remains of the old growth forests continues to be threatened by rape and run lumber concerns. No, you really, really can't go home again.

Some things though—blessedly—have remained unchanged: The native friendliness hasn't (yet?) succumbed to urban angst and hipster attitude; good restaurants and good beer and wine abound; and Powell's Books still reigns supreme.

The same dichotomy applies to the audio end of things in Portland as well. Gone is the high end aspiration of my youth, Hawthorne Stereo, but Wasson's Lafayette Radio still hawks its DIY woofers and tweeters. (Freudian point to ponder: Do you suppose the many childhood hours I spent rummaging around

that store with my dad in any way influenced my future choice of husband?)

But even with that Hawthorne void (created by a move to Seattle), my mission to discover quality purveyors of audio was a success—and at my very first (and, as it turns out, only complete) stop.

The Audio Gallery, located in the southwest suburb of Lake Oswego at 16318 SW Bryant Road, seems an archetype of what an audio shop should be. The space itself is so near perfect, so well decorated, so darn comfortable that you almost can't believe it's for real.

I must confess I was so taken with the shop's interior that I turned my visit into a bit more of a site inspection than perhaps I should have. But the dreamy oriental rugs, the creamy leather furniture, and the custom built bookcases in the shop's three listening rooms and main lobby were no mere Potempkin facade: This place is truly physically stunning.

And if that weren't enough, the folks who run it seem equally as nice. Gary and Cindy Kerr have been in business since 1990, and in this location since 1993. I arrived—sans appointment—in the midst of some disarray as the Kerrs were awaiting a shipment of home theater equipment and a local artist was in the process of hanging some of his work, but our shopkeepers couldn't have been more gracious. Cindy immediately dropped what she was doing to greet me and see how she could help me.

And now, stage left, enters my bad liar act.

I really did have a legitimate quest, albeit a crappy unformed cover story: After reading Andrew Keen's review of the Linn Classik, I

was eager to hear the thing for myself. After gently inquiring after my musical tastes ("Duh, umm, early music and, umm, rock...") and audio intentions ("Duh, umm, gee, I've just started looking around and, umm, I'm not, umm, sure..."), Cindy was kind enough to ensconce me in a comfy chair in front of the Classik and a pair of Keilidh speakers and play me some awfully good guitar music, both classical and electric, and then leave me alone (perhaps to stew in my own disingenuous juices!).

The Classik was, indeed, every bit as good as I'd hoped it would be, and Cindy confirmed they were doing a brisk business with this particular system, including a few as graduation gifts. (!)

Since time was getting on at this point (I'd left my longsuffering parents out in the car with the baby), I asked Cindy if she could give me a quick tour around the store (see above) before I had to "get back." (I think I mumbled something about being on a break.) This she did, while unobtrusively adding observations about the other audio lines they carried, should I be interested in home theater or eventually moving up to a pair of Avalons. She stressed—as she had demonstrated all along—that their's was a "music first" store. Equipment and interior ambience were all well and good, but only inasmuch as they can disappear in favor of letting the music sing out. Hear, hear.

As I was extending my thanks and preparing to leave, I could feel my tenuous charade crumbling. I felt like such a schnook, taking the Kerr's time like this under ultimately benign, but currently false pretenses, that I blurted out my true identity: Assistant Editor of *Listener*. "*Listener!*" Cindy exclaimed.

"Well, then I have to show you my bathroom..." My, how our reputation precedes us. But it was a thing of beauty: black and white and boldly musically wallpapered all over, truly a crapper to be shown (and presumably used) with pride.

The next stop on our Portland Marketplace mission was, unfortunately, a victim of bad timing. We went back into town and over to 26th and N.E. Broadway, home block of Stereotypes. I was already on borrowed (baby nap) time, and adult lunchtime was long overdue, so I should have known better than to attempt another visit. But attempt I did.

As I entered the store, music was playing but no one seemed to be about, so I poked around. (*Hmmm*, Naim in this front listening room, casual home theater environment set up back here—*Hello!*—music for sale upstairs, tastefully done teal bathroom with vintage equipment ads—*Anyone here!*—for visual interest tucked away in back...) When a salesperson emerged from a third listening room, he very politely asked if he could help me. By this point though, I could sense Julia waking and my parents' carbound audio tolerance beginning to wear thin, so I declined his offer of assistance. Besides he did already have a legitimate customer in the store, and my own capacity for another round of retail deception was drained.

So apologies to you, Stereotypes—we'll be back next year when Artie drives us cross-country for my high school reunion. And thanks and kudos to the Kerrs at The Audio Gallery. Of course, since I've just blown my cover, we may be sending little Julia in our stead, Raffi CD in clutched in her plump little hand.



"Hello, Audio Gallery? I'd like to make an appointment to hear the Linn CD12 CD player. Hello? Hello? No, I am not just calling you from the Jeep in your parking lot. Honest."

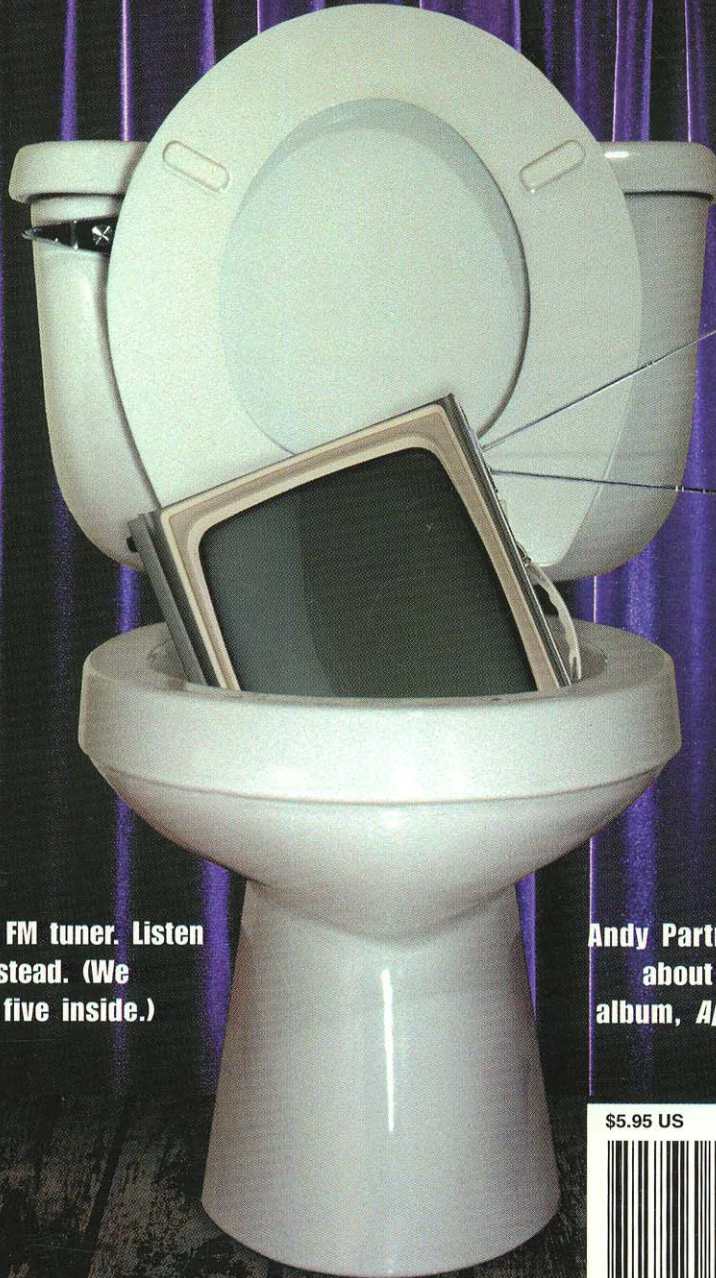


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