

*The hot electronic components
of the 1950s are today's vintage buys!*

Where Has All The Good Stuff Gone?



This McIntosh C22 Preamplifier can fetch as much as \$2500.

GARY McCLELLAN

Since the early 1980s, a sub rosa clandestine electronics marketplace developed and grew. Old tube-type audio and communication equipment, even specialized parts, has been methodically picked out of circulation and sent overseas by aggressive entrepreneurs. Once that equipment reaches foreign shores, it is sold to wealthy buyers or held for speculation. This article describes how choice electronic Americana equipment makes its way overseas, who buys it, and what they are looking for.

To many American and Canadian consumers this "equipment drain" may be a non-issue because they prefer the latest high-tech gear, and that's fine for them. For others, there is cause for concern because most of the vintage equipment has left our shores forever. That means there is less stereo and radio equipment here for "antique" lovers to enjoy. Worse, the leftovers on our shores tend to be in fair-to-poor condition, and their prices rise steeply with demand.

To understand the current interest in vintage electronic equipment, consider this: I have a *perfectly* restored 1955 jukebox. When kids visit, they are enthralled by its appearance and enjoy watching it play records. That is because they haven't seen a jukebox before; most jukeboxes were trashed or sold to European buyers long before these kids were born. Adult visitors often tell stories about dancing to the music, how they met their spouses

over one, and so on. In short, the jukeboxes attract attention because they are rare and unique, and people buy them for those reasons. The same is true for the other types of vintage equipment described in this article.

Overseas they will go. The demand for vintage American-made electronic equipment is strong and increasing, particularly in Asia. That is reflected in equipment prices and availability in North America. For example, one of the finest tube-type stereo power amplifiers is the McIntosh MC275. It sold new for \$488 back in 1968; in those days you could buy a four-door sedan for about \$3300. Today, a used, unrestored MC-275 in good condition sells for about \$4000 (U.S.) in Japan! Even more amazing is that McIntosh Laboratory, Inc. re-issued the amplifier with a \$4000 price tag, and those units sold like hotcakes. When McIntosh followed up with the companion C22 preamplifier for \$2000, it also sold well. My local McIntosh dealer told me that the equipment was re-issued to satisfy the red-hot demand in Asia, and that the first production runs of each model were sold out.

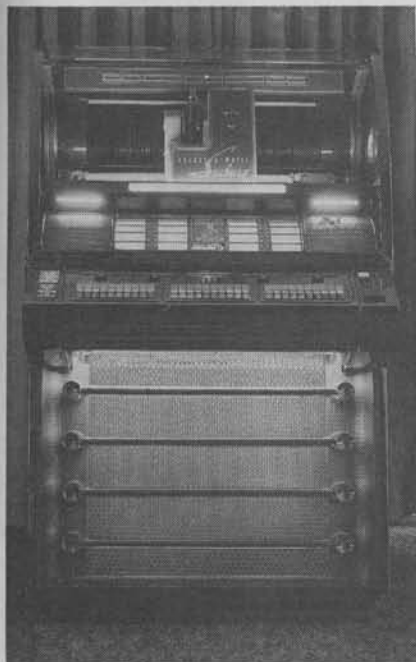
Asian pipeline. Over the years, I have become acquainted with many West coast vintage buyers and their purchasing methods. Then, on a vacation in Asia several years ago, I met a dealer who introduced me to the other side of the vintage-equipment

market. Both sides of the story are very interesting, to say the least!

The stateside group of vintage equipment buyers known to me uncovers audio and radio equipment by using a wide range of shopping techniques. Reading newspaper want ads, attending yard sales, and visiting flea markets are mandatory. In fact, one individual waits in line at 7 AM on Thursdays to pick up the weekly classified-advertising newspaper. (There must be hundreds of local and regional newspapers like it in North America.) Many buyers attend estate sales and auctions, occasionally with spectacular results. For example, a local aerospace firm recently auctioned a dispatcher's console for \$100. It contained three MC-275 amplifiers in pristine condition!

Several buyers visit old-time electronics stores and TV service centers, particularly those in small towns. A friend who owns an electronics store (since 1956) reports that one customer methodically cleaned him out of certain receiving tubes for years. I even met a clever individual who called all of the septuagenarian and octogenarian hams in the area and asked if they had equipment or parts for sale. That led to several purchases of prime communications gear and hard-to-find parts at great bargain prices.

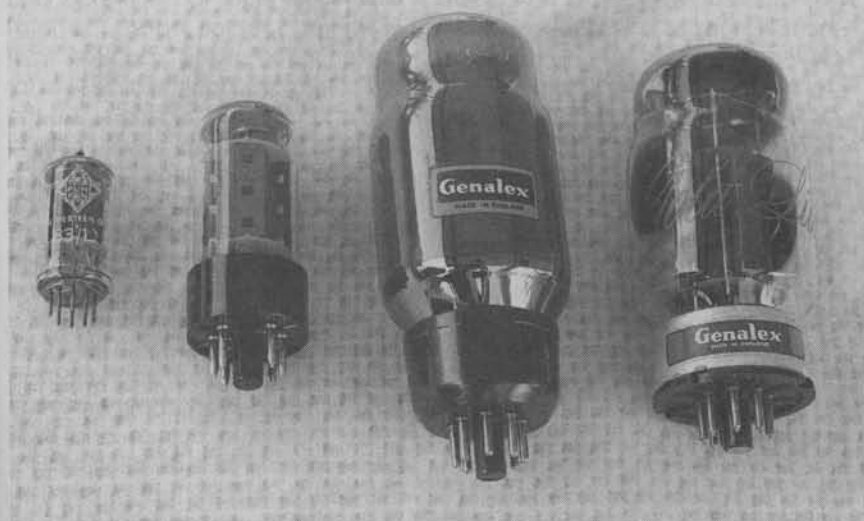
Vintage equipment makes its way overseas through several channels. Some North American buyers offer their equipment to individuals who represent overseas buyers. Their ads appear in newspaper classified advertisements, as well as in audio and



This 1955 Seeburg Jukebox sells for \$4000-6000 when in prime condition.



A hot item in the 1960s, this "mini" Fisher 500C stereo receiver can be bought for \$175.



Vacuum tubes like the 12AX7, 7591, KT-66, and KT-88 are desirable golden oldies.

antique-radio magazines. They are easy to spot by their "We pay top \$\$ for brand A, B, C" messages. Other buyers ship equipment directly to relatives overseas, who in turn resell to local individuals and trading companies. The relatives often hold equipment for speculation and use. They sell it directly to the end users at a premium price when the timing is right. Trading companies found in many Asian countries are basically retail distributors with import capabilities. They have their technicians refurbish the equipment before offering it for sale in their showrooms.

One stateside buyer I know performs a novel variation of that process. First, he "test markets" his acquisitions at local flea markets. Then he sells the leftovers to the highest bidding trading company. The advantages of that process are that we get the first chance to buy his equipment, while he saves the cost of ship-

ping and dealing with Customs. However, he warned me that the demand for US-made tuners, preamplifiers, amplifiers, and speakers has pushed prices to levels that few local buyers are willing to pay. As a result, he must export increasing quantities of these kinds of equipment to aggressive Asian buyers to turn an acceptable profit.

In general, the stories I hear imply that most end users are wealthy individuals who have the time and living space to indulge in owning vintage equipment. That makes sense when you think about it. For example, in Japan, a typical salaried employee earns a modest income and lives in a 425-square-foot apartment. He is unlikely to invest in a vintage stereo system that costs a third of his annual salary and takes up most of the space in his living quarters.

Nevertheless, Japan is the largest marketplace for vintage equipment. Although information about this market is limited by the language barrier and other factors, I was amazed to learn that, according to published reports, Japan has approximately 55,000 antique-audio enthusiasts. Their interests in equipment range from state-of-the-art to 1930s vintage. A sizable number of Japanese enthusiasts build their equipment from scratch, mainly for cost savings and personal satisfaction (shades of the old Heathkit equipment). There are groups of over-enthusiastic users who aggressively seek out Altec-Lansing, Collins Radio, Marantz, McIntosh, and Western Electric equipment. As a result, certain models of equipment from those manufacturers fetch astounding prices when they are available.

During a vacation trip in Singapore, I spent an enjoyable afternoon visiting with a local high-end audio dealer. He told me that his customers were mostly bankers who referred him to other bankers and clients as buyers of new and vintage audio equipment. He also said that ownership of vintage US and British-made equipment carries status in Singapore as well as in Japan. That attracts a more exclusive clientele. Among other interesting tidbits, I learned that interest in vintage equipment is strong and increasing in Hong Kong, Korea, and mainland China.

Singing sales. Vintage audio equipment is especially *hot* in Asia. That includes jukeboxes, amplifiers, preamplifiers, tuners, and speakers. Here are some examples: Prize jukeboxes include the Wurlitzer 1015 from 1946, and 1950s models like the Seeburg V200. Restored units fetch impressive prices—\$15,000 to \$20,000 for the Wurlitzer and \$6000 to \$8000 for the Seeburg. Yes, the shipping charges and duties are also impressive!

When supplies of McIntosh MC-275 amplifiers dried up, Asian buyers shifted their attention to other models like the MC-240 and MC-225. Today, a clean MC-240 brings \$1500 to \$2000, while the MC-225 is worth \$600 to \$1,000. Another desirable amplifier is the Marantz 8B; good ones fetch \$2000 or more. Incidentally, McIntosh products are in heavy demand because they are well made, sound good, and look impressive.

Preamplifiers in demand include the Marantz Model 7 and the McIntosh C-22, which is pictured. Both units were top-of-the-line products during the mid-1960s, and mint examples go for \$2000 to \$2500.

Since McIntosh and Marantz amplifiers and preamps are now scarce, buyers have turned their attention to still-plentiful Fisher Radio products. The Fisher 400C, 500C, and 800C stereo receivers from the mid-1960s are especially sought after. They sell for \$100 to \$175, depending upon condition.

By far the most desirable tuner is the Marantz 10B FM tuner. That "monster" sports 26 tubes and an oscilloscope for easier tuning. Although it originally sold for \$700 in 1965, a unit in mint condition goes for \$3000 today. Another FM tuner in high demand is the McIntosh MR-78. That is the only piece of solid-state equipment that will be mentioned in this article. Nice ones go for \$500 to \$800. It's only a matter of time before all the vacuum-tube equipment is snatched up and quality solid-state units get big tickets.

In general, there is strong overseas interest in any speaker from Altec-Lansing and JBL. The gray Altec A-7 "Voice of the Theater" speakers are in heavy demand in Japan, followed by raw (replacement) speakers like the model 604. Popular raw speakers from JBL include the LE8T 8-inch woofer. Speaker prices fluctuate constantly, and there is a definite "we'll



This Peerless output transformer, vintage 1950s, was a hot item in top-quality 20-watt audio amplifiers. Prices then were from \$2 to \$5; they are now valued from \$75 to \$150.

pay whatever it takes to get it" buyer's mentality.

Communications gear. There is some interest in 1950s vintage Collins, Hammarlund, and Hallicrafters equipment. The Collins 75A4 receiver is popular, followed by the matching transmitter and linear amplifier. Prices for 75A4s in good condition start at \$500. Like the 75A4, the Hammarlund SP-600 receiver was popular with military and commercial users during the late 1950s. Clean examples go for \$400 and up. Hallicrafters turned out vast quantities of low-priced equipment like the S38 and SX100 series receivers, which go for \$30 or more, depending upon condition. (Expect those prices to escalate over time.) Hallicrafters receivers are popular with end users who are not wealthy but want a piece of Americana.

Hot parts. Although interest is higher in vintage equipment, there is a hot market for certain electronic parts. Overseas buyers want new old stock (NOS) tubes, capacitors, and audio-output transformers. Ironically, tubes imported into the United States are in far greater demand than domestic tubes. US made capacitors and output transformers, on the other hand, are highly prized.

Desirable NOS tubes include the Western Electric 300B, Genelex KT66, Genelex KT88, Mullard EL34, and Telefunken 12AX7. In fact, Western Electric resumed production of the 300B during the fall of 1994 in order to satisfy worldwide demand. Originally introduced in the early 1930s for use in theater sound equipment, the 300B now sells for \$350 apiece! The Genelex and Mullard tubes were imported from Great Britain. They are arguably the finest audio-output tubes available, and their sale prices reflect that. NOS KT88s sell for \$125-\$300, KT66s for \$100-\$150, and EL34s for \$30-\$65 each. The Telefunken 12AX7s were imported from West Germany, and new ones sell for \$45 and up when available. Like the Genelex tubes, they are considered among the world's finest.

NOS vacuum tubes in demand from domestic suppliers include the Tung-Sol 5881, Tung-Sol 6550, and any brand of 7591. Tung-Sol developed the 5881 and 6550 tubes in the early-to-mid 1950s. Many people think they were the best tubes of their kind, and they were once very common. Today those tubes are scarce and their prices reflect that. New 6550s sell for \$45-\$80, and 5881s go for \$10-\$25. The 7591 tube was made originally by

Continued on page 81

GOOD STUFF

(Continued from page 52)

Westinghouse, and it was widely used in Fisher receivers. Today, most tube sellers consider the 7591 extinct and price it accordingly at \$45-\$150.

Desirable capacitors include electrolytic capacitors of recent manufacture and Sprague Vitamin Q pigtail tubulars.

As you may know, the Mallory Company offers a line of twist-lock, high-voltage electrolytic "cans" for replacement purposes. Unfortunately, the cost of those capacitors has doubled over the past year, so there is renewed interest in equivalent electrolytic types made within the last five years. Desirable values include 4 x 20 μ F at 450 volts and 40/20/20/20 μ F at 500 volts. Sprague Vitamin Q paper-oil capacitors were widely used in 1950s and 1960s military equipment. Some people claim those capacitors make their equipment sound better, and that hype has raised prices to the \$1 to \$22 range. Hot values include 0.047 μ F, 0.1 μ F and 0.22 μ F at 600 volts.

As far as output transformers are concerned, Peerless and Acrosound are the leaders. Typical part numbers sought out by overseas buyers include the Peerless S248Q and Acrosound TO-330. Both transformers were widely used in top-quality 20-watt amplifiers back in the 1950s. Prices for those units range from \$75 to \$150, depending upon appearance.

Tips for sellers. Think twice about selling your vintage equipment. If it is absolutely necessary to do so, why not look for a buyer who is genuinely interested in using it? By doing so, you will probably save yourself some grief and also benefit a person who appreciates vintage equipment.

Let's be frank: Don't think for one instant you can drag out that Truetone stereo amplifier you bought in 1961, sell it, and retire! Of the equipment built during the 1950s and 1960s, only a few items became classics like the ones listed. Therefore, the chances of finding a gold mine in your attic are slim. The keys to success in selling vintage equipment are:

- The equipment is in demand.
- You know current sale prices.

ADDRESSES

Antique Electronic Supply

6221 S. Maple Ave.
Tempe, AZ 85283

Audio Classics, Ltd.

PO Box 176
Walton, NY 13856

- You have access to potential buyers.

The hottest equipment in demand was described previously. For more examples, check the classified advertisements of this magazine. An excellent "one-stop" audio equipment catalog is available from *Audio Classics*. Key reference books on the subject include the *HiFi Spotter's Guides* by Charles Kittleson. That book, and many others, are available from Antique Electronics Supply.

Determining the sale prices of your equipment is tricky. Be careful; most sellers lose out because they guess on prices. In general, the right price depends upon the condition of your equipment and what the local market is willing to pay for it. Some sellers refer to catalogs like the one listed for current prices, and then sell for a multiple of that price (e.g. three-quarters of catalog price). Other sellers "shop" local exporters and flea-market sellers in order to determine the local asking price. Regardless of the method you use, a little time spent on pricing pays off later!

Reaching potential buyers is merely a matter of making your presence known. There are so many people out there chasing a dwindling supply of vintage equipment that they will come to you. You can advertise in a local paper, respond to an exporter's advertisements, or sell at flea markets. But beware! It is not uncommon for a buyer to drive 100 miles in response to your ad, browbeat you into giving a discount, and then try to pay with a check! With flea-market sales, some buyers expect big discounts.

You can eliminate those hassles by arranging a private sale with friends or by specifying disposition of the equipment in your will. These tactics work; I bought most of my audio equipment from people I originally met at flea markets and through a prominent uncle. Why not do the same? □

JAMMIX

(Continued from page 49)

balance can be set to place you essentially anywhere on the stage.

Positioning your guitar opposite the lead instrument often gives rise to stimulating exchanges with the recorded artist. The ability to position the instrument also allows you to master your own recordings. To do this requires two stereo tape recorders. A typical "home-studio mastering" might be done as the following scenario suggests:

Connect a tape recorder to the stereo OUT jack of JamMix. Set the BALANCE control of JamMix to mid-range and record a rhythm track with, say, a guitar. Rewind and remove the tape from the tape recorder (do not disconnect the machine) and install it in a tape player connected to the JamMix stereo IN jack. Position the BALANCE control to the right side and perhaps turn up the GAIN for some distortion. Install a second tape in the tape recorder. Start the tape player with the rhythm track, as well as the tape recorder, and add your lead guitar solos via the INSTRUMENT jack. Rewind and swap the tapes, and move the balance control to the left. This readies you to mix in another instrument such as a bass guitar, keyboards, or perhaps vocals. Of course, it might be easier to simply mix yourself into a recording of Johnny B Goode, or perhaps your favorite blues number. Plug into JamMix and you become a member of the band!

Your guitar's audio signal can be adjusted to the same position and levels of the lead artist, which is useful for memorizing note-for-note passages. Of course, the JamMix can be jacked into your home stereo with excellent results, where the guitar is played through the stereo. This helps to ensure that your instrument is appropriately mixed with the band with which you are "jamming." □

SINGERS! REMOVE VOCALS
Unlimited, Low Cost, Instantly Available
Background Music from Original Standard
Recordings! Does Everything Karaoke
does... Better, and gives you the
Thompson Vocal Eliminator!
Free Brochure & Demo Tape
LT Sound Dept. RL-1
7980 LT Parkway, Lithonia, GA 30058
Internet: <http://itsound.com>
24 Hour Demo/Info Request Line (770)482-2485-Ext 72
When You Want Something Better Than Karaoke!

